



Journey to America

Sonia Levitin

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It was 1938, and something terrible was happening in Germany. Suddenly, there were more and more restrictions for the Jews: yellow stars they had to wear, schools they could not attend, things they were forbidden to do. The Nazis were in power. And Lisa Platt was scared.

Her father knew they had to escape, and he left for America in the middle of the night. He promised to send for Lisa, her mother, and her two sisters when there was enough money. Until then, they were to live in Switzerland. And so they did, waiting, in hardship none of them could ever have imagined.

Journey to America Details

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Angelina says

This is still one of my favorite books. I loved the characters in this book, and how real it all felt. I think that this book deals with a lot of things which many of the Holocaust books don't in terms of refugees, such as their living conditions and what it took for them to reach their destination.

Josiah says

This story for children tells of a Jewish-German family living in Berlin in 1938. As sisters Ruth, Lisa, and Annie watch the city change around them, they find out who their true friends are. As the situation becomes more tense, their father leaves the country on "business," and then urges the girls and their mother to go to Switzerland for "vacation." In Zurich, they struggle to get by day-to-day until some kind families help them out.

This is an appropriate introduction for younger children to learn about the roots of WWII and what happened to the Jewish people in Germany.

Plot: A

Writing: B+

Level: Easy

Vocabulary: Easy

Rating: G

Nicola Mansfield says

Reason for Reading: read aloud to the 10yo as part of our history curriculum.

This is a gentle, quiet story that is suitable for younger children (as a read aloud) since it deals with the very early days of Hitler's Germany, making one aware of the need for escape in those early days and how fortunate were those who did manage to leave Germany before the atrocities began. The story is told from Lisa's point of view, the second oldest girl of three, perhaps 11 years old. Their father has decided that they will leave for America, so he goes first in order to get a job, a place to live and earn enough money for the tickets for boat passage for the others. Lisa, Ruth (the older sister), little Annie and mother must now fend for themselves until the time comes.

The reader learns what it was like in Germany for the Jews in those early days as their rights were slowly being taken from them. Then father tells them they must go to Switzerland for safety immediately and here the majority of the book takes place as the three girls and the mother are separated from each other as they are looked after by different refugee helper families. They don't lose contact though and life goes on through this tough and emotional time for them until finally just after hearing devastating news from Berlin, Father sends the boat tickets for them to join him.

An interesting story, full more of personal drama set against the background of a turbulent time rather than outside drama of the era since we are only at the very beginnings of Hitler's Germany here. A tale that tells the pressure of leaving one's home and becoming refugee status in another country, accepting help but really unable to do much for oneself, the waiting for the future to come and the worry for the loved ones left behind. A nice story, ds and I both enjoyed it well.

The art on the otherhand leaves something to be desired. I'll admit I've never been fond of Charles Robinson. His pictures are too hazy and blended together for my tastes; besides the main image, the other details are not meant to be focused on and it's just not my thing. This book is actually the first in a trilogy, which I did not know previously. I would be interested in following up with the other two books at some time.

Tristan says

This book was a great book about a family moving during world war 2. Their father went ahead and the children faced many hardships getting there. This is because they needed money shelter and food. Eventually they got that by living with a kind family. This is a truly amazing book.

Carlos Romero says

I really enjoyed this book because of the fact that it focuses on the lives and the struggles of people in refugee camps. A topic that seldom gets acknowledged and often overlooked. This book deserves 3 stars though, because it could have done a better job at staying consistent with historical events.

Munkhbat says

I learned about how hard it was in the past to live for jewish people. All the suffer and pain. In actual fact they are beginning their journey to America but they cannot let anyone know because that time was so dangerous.

Hilary says

A mother and her daughters flee Nazi Germany for Switzerland, hoping to get to America to be reunited with the father, but to avoid detection and detention they're limited in what they can take. Travelling with children is never easy, and personality clashes, problems and illness cause all sorts of difficulties.

It has a little of the feel of the Silver Sword, in that it's written from a child's perspective and understanding, but as an adult you can read between the lines to see a mother's heartbreak and a father's worry while the family is separated, and really appreciate the struggles they have in a side of the war that may not be as familiar as others.

Mary L. says

Very realistic story of what it was like to escape from Germany before things really got bad (they were bad enough at this point). Especially liked the last line which states "Home, I thought, home was a feeling more than a place."

Patrick Long says

Personal Response: I enjoyed this book because it talks about history and what life was like being Jewish during that time. It speaks of a lot of hardships and troubles. Though all of them were overcome. But I wish this book would have an epilogue to explain their lives were going fine after they all got to America.

Plot Summary: This book is about Lisa Platt a Jewish girl that is about 12 years old during the terror of Hitler. She lives in Germany when everything is going badly. Jewish children can no longer go to school and they have to wear yellow stars. Lisa is working on her studies when her father is getting upset that her older sister is not home at 4:00 in the evening. When her sister Ruth comes home her father gives both of them a gold ring with their birthstone and says "Keep these to remember me by, but if your mother tells you to sell them you have to sell them." Then he leaves and goes of to America. "I will send enough money for all of you to go to America soon but until then go to switzerland." Then Lisa, her mother and her two sisters (Ruth and Annie) go to Switzerland and await to go to America.

Recommendation: I would recommend this book to anyone that likes history and would like to know what Jewish lives were like in Germany during the terror of Hitler.

Mckala says

I read this book in third grade and absolutely love it. Now 16, I've reread it and while it isn't as mind-blowing my amazing as it was then, the story is just as I remember it.

I'd recommend to elementary and middle school kids, and even for high school students for some light, enjoyable reading.

Teri says

I read this to Cayna but at different times all three other kids got interested in the plot. This was a pretty well-written piece of kids' historical fiction. The main character's Jewish family is fleeing Germany as things are getting terrible. I think the author did a good job of conveying the awfulness of the Nazis without totally traumatizing a young reader. We were in tears once and several times on the edge of our seats. Cayna only heard of Hitler and the Holocaust for the first time this year and this book was a good introduction to what went on, in a way I think she will remember. She isn't required to read the remaining two books of the series but I think we will buy them anyway.

Janie R. says

A story of courage, family loyalty and love as they struggle to escape Jewish persecution in Berlin, Germany to America. A story that depicts the terrible treatment of people of Jewish descent by the Nazis and it made me sad how these people who fled their country, had to experience so much loss.

Karen says

From Berlin, Germany in 1938 Lisa Platt leaves everything behind and goes to Zurich, Switzerland with her mother and sisters Annie & Ruth. From there they wait and watch as the war unfolds and their father, who left for America, earns money and completes all the documents necessary for them to join him. Good Ages 10 and up.

Adrienne says

Lisa and her family are just like any other family but with some other special qualities. They are Jews and they have to leave Berlin to go to America in order to be safe from the Nazis. Lisa's dad leaves to America first, alone, to settle in and find a place to live and then have the rest of the family come and live with him. A little while after papa leaves the rest of the family leaves. Mama and her daughters Ruth, Lisa, and Annie are having some trouble with money so the oldest girls Ruth and Lisa temperately moved to a refugee place and then a lived with a family in the house. Once they got enough money, mamma, Lisa, Annie, and Ruth met up and got a letter from papa that they can come to America. When they are about to leave Annie goes missing. Will they find Annie and will they make it to America?

Journey to America is an adventurous, breathtaking, intense, novel. This book is recommended for boys and girls from ages 10-13. It is al little bit about the holocaust so knowing about the Holocaust will come in handy. This book is a fantastic book that will keep the reader on their toes. Overall, this book is phenomenal and is highly recommended.

Angelica M says

This is one of my absolute favorite books from my childhood. Not only was it the first chapter book I read by myself but it was my first learning experience of the Holocaust. (Little did I know back then how very mild the book was compared to the real thing though.) Every now and again I will re-read the book if I have an hour or two to spare. Its books like this that make a person really appreciate their family and relize how lucky they really are.

Janet says

I heard about this book from a reviewer online who said it was a good introduction to younger audiences on what Jewish people endured during Hitler's reign. I'm not sure it ever mentioned the word Holocaust in it (the book takes place during the beginning of the atrocities), but it does give a brief introduction to Hitler and the Nazi regime.

The focus, though, is on Lisa Platt, her two sisters (Ruth and Annie), and her parents. While many of their friends and family were confident that this insanity would soon "blow over," her father decided to summon his courage to get to America and earn enough money to pay the passage at a later date for his wife and daughters to join him, far, far from Germany.

It's an engaging read (and a quick one for teens/adults) and it's hard not to get caught up in rollercoaster ride that Lisa and her family encounter as they leave Germany and wait in Switzerland for word from their Papa that it's time to sail to America.

I think it would be an appropriate read, in general, for first graders and beyond. I look forward to reading the other two books, "Silver Days" and "Annie's Promise."

Nancy says

A good children's chapter book about refugees, immigration, and Germany right before WWII. It is "PG rated" in terms of dealing with these big issues in a non-scary way, written from an 11 year old girl's perspective. The author fictionalized her own true story and made a compelling read for children (although I liked reading it as an adult). Interesting to read the Goodreads reader comments for it.

Wayne says

This was a great book because it greatly described how the struggles of the Jews were like during the time of WW2. Lisa Platt and her family struggles to survive on ten marks after waiting in Switzerland for their father in America to get money to send for them, the rest of the family has a hard time trying to make it all work. They have to face many obstacles like sickness horrible camp counselors and much more. A while after the father sends for them it's a chance for the family to have a better life in America

Brittany Heck says

This book is the fictional story of a Jewish family fleeing Germany in 1938. It is told through the eyes of a young girl whose father has fled to America and her family's attempt to reach him. As noted above, I was able to read this 150 page, paperback in less than a day. It was an easy read and slow day at work. This book was written for children around the age of 9. There are very few illustrations and they are simple, black and white, but with a ton of small details. I think that this book is a great way to introduce children to the

Holocaust. It discusses what was happening at that time in Germany but without the graphic details. In my opinion, this book would get children interested and asking questions. As an adult reading this for a class, I found myself getting choked up at parts, knowing what was to become of those unable to leave Germany. However, a young reader with no prior knowledge would probably not have that reaction. Spoiler alert...this is one of the few Holocaust stories with a happy ending! It has also won the Jewish Book Council National Book Award. I would absolutely recommend this book to any type of young readers. It would also be great for teachers who are entering the subject of the Holocaust. Though it may not be educational, it does provide some insight into Germany at the time and what it was like for those who escaped.

Gale says

GROWING THE COURAGE TO ENDURE SEPARATION

Germany in 1938 was gradually becoming an unpleasant and even dangerous place to live--especially for the Jewish population, as Hitler's Youth Groups roamed the streets taunting and tormenting those who did not represent Nazi views re mankind's best genetics. Realizing the increasing threat to their livelihood, possessions and very lives, the Platt parents made the agonizing decision to emigrate to America via Switzerland. Papa, a tailor, will travel abroad first and send for them later; this dreaded separation will last a year--a time during which will require all the moral resources they have inspired in their children to keep their family values and memory intact.

Related in the first person by Lisa, the middle daughter, this story chronicles not only the trip itself, but a young girl's emotions as she is obliged to leave her beloved city of Berlin and best friend Rosemarie. Lisa must face unknown hardships in neutral Switzerland--keeping in mind the future daunting challenge of learning English in America some day. Barely crossing the border legally Mother is faced with the problems of poverty, unemployment and housing for all 4 of them. They try a boarding house, a charity camp for children, place their hopes in an Agency for Refugees, and finally are welcomed into the homes of compassionate Swiss citizens.

Despite incredible hardship and privation, and Mother's bout with pneumonia, this family remains a cohesive unit even when scattered. Lisa loses her naivete about life and Ruth grows up in one short year, as both girls come to respect human interdependence. It is their family loyalty which provides them with the inner fortitude to endure poverty, persecution and prolonged separation. With its tense but straightforward storyline this book would appeal to girls 12 and up.

(July 11, 2011. I welcome dialogue with teachers.)
