

# number the stars

Lois Lowry

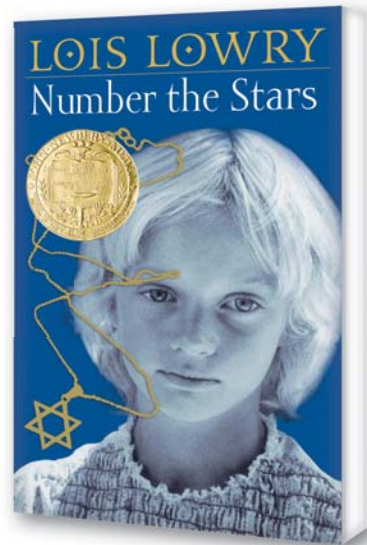
A Newbery  
Medal Winner

Grades 5–9

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

Set in 1943 when the Nazis occupied Denmark, ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen is asked to carry out a heroic deed and aid her uncle in his efforts to smuggle Danish Jews across the sea to Sweden, where they will be safe. She has already lost her older sister, Lise, in the Danish Resistance, and now it appears that her best friend, Ellen Rosen, is in danger. The Johansen's take in Ellen, while her parents are relocated somewhere outside of Copenhagen. When it becomes apparent that the Danish Jews aren't safe, Mrs. Johansen takes her children and Ellen to Uncle Henrik's house on the coast. Until now, Annemarie has accepted the secrets and unusual silence of her parents, but when it falls upon her to deliver a mysterious packet to Uncle Henrik's fishing boat, she conquers her fears and learns the real meaning of courage.

★ “A story of Denmark and the Danish people, whose Resistance was so effective in saving their Jews.”—*School Library Journal*, Starred

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Annemarie and Ellen encounter Nazi soldiers on their way home from school. Why do the girls think it wise to keep this encounter to themselves? How is their decision related to fear? Mrs. Johansen takes her children and Ellen to Uncle Henrik's house where Ellen is reunited with her family and transported by fishing boat to Sweden. Annemarie feels that there is “less danger, but more fear” for those who are waiting. How does she come face-to-face with danger and fear as she delivers the packet to Uncle Henrik?
2. Ask students to explain the statement, “It is much easier to be brave if you don't know everything.” (p. 76) Debate whether this is why Peter didn't tell Mr. and Mrs. Johansen about Lise's involvement in the Resistance until long after her death. Discuss the relationship between fear and bravery. How is Peter Nielsen fearless and brave? How does King Christian X instill bravery in the Danish people? What does Mrs. Johansen do to help her children conquer their fears and be brave? Discuss how the Johansen's bravery contributes to the courage of the Rosen family.
3. Describe Annemarie's responsibility to herself, her family, and the Rosens. How do Uncle Henrik and Mrs. Johansen communicate their trust in Annemarie and instill in her a sense of responsibility? Discuss how “secrets” and “silence” represent responsible behavior during the time when the Nazi occupied Denmark.
4. How is Annemarie robbed of her youth? What scene most symbolizes her transformation into adulthood? Discuss why her family waits so long to tell her how Lise died. How does the truth about Lise's death contribute to Annemarie's passage into a grown-up world? Ellen must have grown-up during her years in Sweden. How might the girls respond to one another as adults?
5. The Danish people made many sacrifices during the time that the Nazi occupied their country. For example, they made shoes from fish skin rather than leather. Discuss other sacrifices they made. What was their ultimate sacrifice?
6. Ask students to discuss how Ellen's Star of David necklace symbolizes hope. Discuss the significance of Lise's yellow dress as a hiding place for Ellen's necklace. How do the citizens of Denmark offer hope to their Jewish friends and neighbors?
7. Define *patriotism*. The Danish people seemed especially patriotic during the Nazi occupation of their country. Discuss how they demonstrate patriotism. How does Mr. Johansen instill patriotism in his children? Amid the celebration at the end of the war, Annemarie is still grieving Lise's death. Debate whether she eventually accepts Lise's death as a heroic act of patriotism.

Prepared by Pat Scales, Children's Literature Consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.