

11-13-2013

# The Book Thief

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## Recommended Citation

Mason Smith, Maggie, "The Book Thief" (2013). *Publications*. 72.

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Zusak, Markus. *The Book Thief*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.

PZ7.Z837 Boo 2006

“I wanted to tell the book thief many things, about beauty and brutality. But what could I tell her about those things that she didn’t already know? I wanted to explain that I am constantly overestimating and underestimating the human race – that rarely do I ever simply *estimate* it. I wanted to ask her how the same thing could be so ugly and so glorious, and its words and stories so damning and brilliant.” – page 550

Death tries not to get involved. He persistently performs his job of gathering souls while carefully immersing himself in the colors of the world. The colors are a distraction from the survivors, from the humans left behind when a loved one dies. For Death, the colors are a kind of vacation. They are a purposeful attempt to avoid one unpleasant situation after another. But the colors are not always enough. Sometimes, Death cannot help but watch as a story unfolds. And Liesel Meminger’s story is extraordinary.

Liesel’s life in Molching, Germany in the time leading up to the Second World War consists of a few key things: playing soccer on the street with her best friend Rudy, learning to read late at night, and listening to her foster father play his accordion. But with the war comes significant change: bomb threats, spending long hours in the basement with the Jewish man her family is hiding, and quite a lot of thievery. Language, written, read, and stolen, becomes central to Liesel’s life – it is how she reconciles the dangers both in and outside of her home. Through language, Liesel begins to understand that words hold incredible power, that actions may have far-reaching consequences, and that the difference between right and wrong is rarely clear. For Liesel, the words are crucial, and the words are what will ultimately save her.

In *The Book Thief*, Markus Zusak takes a simple idea – a few years in the life of one girl, living in Nazi Germany during World War II – and creates a complex and beautifully written narrative. Zusak combines the uneasy setting of 1940s Germany, a range of endearing characters, poetic syntax, and Death’s unique point of view into one powerful tale that is as joyous as it is heartbreaking. *The Book Thief* is vivid, it is grim, it is profound; in short, it is unforgettable. Liesel Meminger’s story is that of the whole human race: it is both wonderful and terrible at once.