

Rena's Promise by Kornreich Gelissen with Heather Dune Macadam

(Published in 1995)

Approved for use in English IV: Holocaust Literature

Summary of the Work:

This autobiographical story is narrated by Rena, a nineteen-year-old whose life centers around her Orthodox Jewish family and her friends. Rena's innocence is destroyed in 1939 when Nazi Germany invades her Polish village of Tylicz. Rena and her sister Danka are among the first deportees sent to Auschwitz. Miraculously, they survive over three years in the Nazi death camps, taking the reader through their experiences--deportation, daily camp survival, selection, and death marches--right up to the day of liberation. Inspired by the spiritual presence of her mother, Rena becomes a source of strength for her sister Danka and others around her.

Rationale:

Rena's Promise presents the narrator's gradual recognition of what was happening to the Jewish people during World War II. The book allows a study of this time era with references to historical topics including daily life in the Nazi death camps while promoting the discussion of difficult thematic issues, especially the theme of survival.

Students are able to analyze character development, theme, and descriptive writing skills.

The book includes helpful historical notes and an epilogue giving closure to the work by summarizing the characters' lives after the war.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

Publishers Weekly, 4 Sept. 1995

Women's Review of Books, Oct. 1996

Kirkus Reviews, 1 Sept. 1996

Books for the Teen Age, 1 March 1997

Library Journal, 15 Sept. 1996

"How they escaped starvation, beatings, the crematorium, the medical experiments of the notorious Josef Mengele and survived the end of the war is all recounted here in this spirited survivor's testament." *Publishers Weekly*, 4 Sept. 1995

* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Noted Distinction:

- National Book Award nominee
- Jewish American Award

Readability:

- Lexile Score: Not available at this time
- Readability Level: Not available at this time

Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: ([link](#))

Approval:

Submitted to Committee: May 2005

Approved for Adoption: September 2005

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

This memoir presents a view of the brutality of camp officials at Auschwitz with vivid descriptions of beatings, medical experimentation, and the effects of starvation. The story is told from the point of view of a young woman who deals openly with feminine health issues. The references to feminine health and violence can be handled easily by mature readers.

The allusions to people and events of the Holocaust along with the additional notes allow an in-depth study of a time period still impacting us today

Connection to the Curriculum:

Rena's Promise is an integral text in English IV: Holocaust Literature, allowing an historical and literary study of the topic.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)