

## **Dry Tears: The Story of a Lost Childhood, by Nechama Tec, New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.**

**Story Summary:** The autobiography of Nechama Tec is a moving account of her childhood in Nazi occupied Poland. Nechama's family is forced to take refuge with Polish Christians to prevent their capture and deportation. As an eleven-year-old, Nechama shares her confusion about the war, her struggles to stay with her family, and her ability to "pass" in Christian society. Tec is able to put into words the feelings of so many like herself who were faced with the challenge of changing their identity, religion, and beliefs in order to survive. Throughout the book Tec shares the sacrifices made by her father to maintain their freedom, her experiences selling goods on the black market, and the threats of being denounced by people she saw as friends. Teachers may find it useful to stop at the conclusion of the book and conduct a discussion with their class prior to reading the epilogue. This true account is an excellent way to present concepts such as the effects of the Nuremberg Laws on Jews, the moral choices made by people under extreme conditions, and the experiences of those who survived outside of concentration camps.

**Objectives:** Students should be able to:

- identify various types of human behavior: positive, negative, and the "neutral" bystander;
- evaluate the role of personal values in making choices and decisions;
- understand and demonstrate the importance of moral responsibility in making choices;
- recognize the creativeness and resourcefulness of people who were victims;
- understand the effects of the Nuremberg Laws on Jews; and
- recognize that not all survivors of the Holocaust were in concentration camps.

### **Suggested Topics for Discussion:**

#### Introductory

- What do you think it would be like if you had to take on a new identity including name, family history, and religious beliefs? What difficulties could you encounter from having to take on this new identity?
- Explain what it would mean to a young child if he or she were told to forget everything he or she believes and has been taught.

#### Content Specific

- How did Nechama react when the Gestapo officers came to get Josef (page 14) and Nechama's mother was going to be taken because he would not come out from his hiding place? What was her father's reaction? What would your reaction have been? Were you surprised the family saved Josef from Majdanek, a concentration camp after his actions?
- What do you think were the reasons the Homars decided to hide Nechama and her family?
- *Teacher's note: This question should be asked prior to reading the epilogue.* What are some of the reasons Tec would choose to end her book the way she did? Explain the reason for your answer.
- Tell why the Homars did not stay in touch after the end of the war.
- If you were Nechama and saw the Homars again years later, what would you say to them?

#### General

- What does it mean to be resourceful?
- In essence, how did Nechama "rise" to her situation? Do you think that was due to her personality, looks, obligation to her family, or a combination of factors?

- How could Nechama's change of identity affect her life in the future?

### **Suggested Activities:**

#### Journaling:

- Keep a "letters to Nechama" journal throughout the reading of the book. After each day of reading, students write to Tec in a letter form. By doing so they can respond to events in the story, comment on quotes, and ask questions about things they disagree with or are unclear about without the pressure of a traditional response journal.
- Keep a character development journal. Trace Nechama's development noting the points at which she develops traits, how language is used in the development, what shapes and changes her, and how these traits relate to the themes of the novel.

#### Pre-reading:

- Brainstorm the following ideas, discuss them as a class, and relate them to the book.
  - \*What kind of emotions might you feel if you were not allowed to go to school anymore because of your religion?
  - \*What things do you need to survive in hiding?
- Review the Nuremberg Laws and keep them in mind while reading.
- Read the picture book, *The Lily Cupboard* by S.L. Oppenheim. (A lesson plan is included in this trunk.)

#### Post-reading:

- Research the Nuremberg Laws and then find examples from the book of the effects of the Laws on citizens.
- Locate the places Nechama Tec mentions on a map of Poland.
- Research the hobbies and interests of children and teenagers prior to WWII. Determine how they are similar to the interests of children and teens today.
- In a paper compare/contrast the actions of those hiding Jews during WWII to those who hid Blacks in the Underground Railroad prior to the Civil War.
- Research the experiences of survivors after liberation. Possible topics for research may include: deportation (DP) camps, emigration to other countries outside of Europe, and the establishment of the Jewish state. Share your findings with the class.
- Write and send letters to Nechama Tec. (See guidelines for working with survivors.)  
 Nechama Tec  
 C/O Oxford University Press  
 198 Madison Avenue  
 New York, NY 10016-4314
- Design a new cover and title for the book along with a rationale for your choice.
- Create a diorama or model of a scene in the book.
- Working with students reading other titles complete a chart which compares and contrasts experiences or lives of the main characters in each book.

- Have a panel discussion for the books read in the class. One student represents each title and gives a synopsis, noting important points and sharing criticisms. The other students can ask questions about books they are unfamiliar with or give additional input.

### **Related Materials:**

- Abells, Chana. (1986). *Children We Remember*. New York: Greenwillow.
- *Children in the Holocaust*. Phoenix Films and Videos Inc. 70 minutes in color and b/w.
- *Courage to Care*. Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. 28 minutes in color.
- Dobroszycki, L and B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. (1977). *Images Before My Eyes*. New York: Schocken.
- Melzer, M. (1988). *Rescue: The Story of How Gentiles Saved Jews in the Holocaust*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Patterson, Charles. (1988). *Anti-Semitism: The Road to the Holocaust and Beyond*. New York: Walker and Company.
- Richter, Hans Peter. (1987). *Friedrich*. Translated by Edite Kroll. New York: Viking Penguin/Puffin Books.
- Rosenberg, M. (1994). *Hiding to Survive: Stories of Jewish Children Rescued from the Holocaust*. New York: Clarion Books.
- Roth-Hano, R. (1988). *Touch wood: A Girlhood in Occupied France*. New York: Four Winds Press.
- Zar, Rose. (1983). *In the Mouth of the Wolf*. New York: Jewish Publication Society of America.
- \* A video of Nechama Tec speaking at the 1998 Eduactors' Institute is available through the Tampa Bay Holocaust Memorial Museum and Educational Center.

