

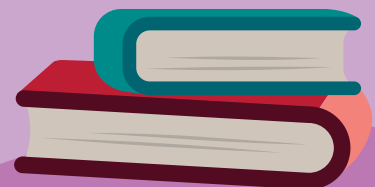
READING BANNED & CHALLENGED BOOKS

WHITE BIRD BY R. J. PALACIO

R. J. Palacio's unforgettable graphic novel debut is a story about the power of kindness and unrelenting courage in a time of war.



- At the beginning of the prologue, there is quote by George Santayana: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." How is this a cautionary quote? The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has recordings of survivors sharing their memories. Why is it important to listen to their stories? Young people of today have no "memory" of this tragic event. How do books like *White Bird* offer them memory?
- Grandmère tells Julian, "Those were dark times, but what has stayed with me the most... is not darkness, but the light." What is the darkest part of Grandmère's story? What is the "light" that she remembers? How has focusing on the "light" given Grandmère hope? What message about kindness and courage is the author trying to convey?
- Sara's father wants to leave France, but her mother thinks they are okay in the free zone. At what point does it become necessary for them to leave? How does Sara's father try to prepare her for their escape? Discuss how and why Sara becomes separated from her family.
- Discuss the significance of Sara's sketchbook. Who is the boy that rescues Sara and her sketchbook? Explain why the other students tease him. Why is Tourteau, the nickname the students give him, an especially cruel name? Why do you think the children are cruel to Julien? Why are humans cruel to those who are different from them? Is Sara's ignoring Julien as bad as bullying him? Why or why not?
- What is anti-Semitism? Discuss Sara's first experience with anti-Semitism. She says she was attacked "not for something I have done, but for something I am." Compare Sara's experience with anti-Semitism and Julien's experience with the bullies.



- At the beginning of the epilogue, the author uses the following quote by Anne Frank: "What is done cannot be undone, but one can prevent it from happening again." Why is this an appropriate quote to end Grandmère's story? Explain the significance of the last illustration in the book.
- Define *propaganda*. Discuss the anti-Jewish propaganda by the Vichy government. Debate whether schools do enough to help students recognize propaganda. Discuss the similarities and differences between propaganda and conspiracy theories? Who promotes each? How do both use selective information to push an agenda? How is the movement to remove books about the Holocaust from school libraries related to propaganda and conspiracy theories?
- A parent asked that *White Bird* be removed from libraries in the Spring Independent School District in Texas because "it's 'biased' and could lead to the 'skewing of a young child's mind'." What is Holocaust denial? What is its purpose? Discuss the benefits and pitfalls of agreeing to one set of historical facts.
- Compare anti-Semitism to racial and ethnic bigotry. Bigotry and hate are acquired behaviors. Explain why censors are afraid of books that expose bigotry. How does reading books like *White Bird* promote empathy and understanding?
- How would you defend *White Bird* against would-be book banners? Why is learning about difficult history important?

Guide written by Pat Scales, children's literature consultant.

Check out bit.ly/3Jj5OPG
or scan the QR code for more
information about book bans
and how you can take action.

