

R. M. ROMERO

THE  
DOLLMAKER  
OF  
KRAKÓW

In the Land of the Dolls, there is magic.  
In the land of humans, there is war.  
EVERYWHERE THERE IS PAIN.  
BUT TOGETHER THERE IS HOPE.



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# THE DOLLMAKER OF KRAKÓW

## EDUCATORS' GUIDE

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Karolina, a living doll, is whisked away from the war-torn Land of the Dolls and finds herself in the toy shop of Cyryl Brzezick, known to the people of Kraków as the Dollmaker. She senses that the man has magical powers, but he is also very sad and lonely. Karolina is warm and outgoing and encourages the Dollmaker to befriend Jozef Trzmiel, a Jewish musician who has hired Cyryl to make a dollhouse for his nine-year-old daughter, Rena. When Nazi soldiers descend upon Poland, the Dollmaker and Karolina realize that their Jewish friends are in grave danger. Jozef begs the Dollmaker to save Rena and other children in the Jewish Ghetto. The Dollmaker isn't sure what he can do, until Karolina convinces him to use his magical powers to aid in the rescue. There are risks, and no one is more aware of them than the Dollmaker. But he learned during his service in World War I that even if he can't help everyone, he can help someone.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

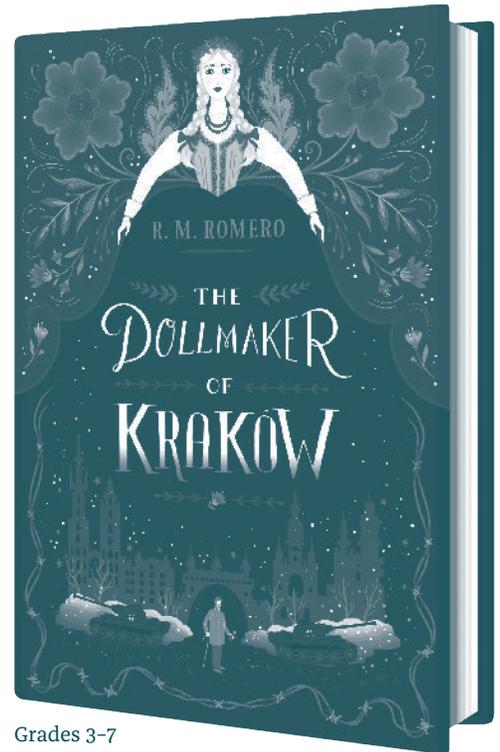
R. M. Romero has an MFA in creative writing from the University of Southern Maine's Stonecoast graduate program and a BA in history and education. A visit to Kraków, Poland, kindled her passion for history and inspired her debut novel, *The Dollmaker of Kraków*. Romero says, "If there is one thing I hope you take away from this book, it's what Karolina told Brandt: 'You always have a choice.' We can choose to participate in hateful acts, to look away from them . . . or to ease the pain we see in the world through bravery and kindness. Please, be kind. Please, be brave. Please, don't let it happen again." You can visit her online at [RMRomero.com](http://RMRomero.com).

### PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Ask students to answer the following questions: What was the Holocaust? Who was Adolf Hitler? Why were there Jewish Ghettos? What was the Final Solution? What was the resistance? What were displaced persons camps?

Distribute copies of the chronology in this guide, and instruct students to write an essay detailing what they think people need to know about the Holocaust.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 5-7.1, SL. 5-7.3; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 5-7.1, L. 5-7.2; Knowledge of Language L. 5-7.3; Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 5-7.2.



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## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- The novel is set during a very dark period in history. What is the purpose of the parallel fantasy world of Karolina? How does it help the reader understand the fear and courage of the people of Kraków during the Holocaust?
- Explain the role of Dogoda, the kind wind. Debate whether Dogoda knows that Cyryl Brzezick, the Dollmaker, needs Karolina. How does Karolina need the Dollmaker? Discuss the loneliness that consumes them. How does Rena recognize that the Dollmaker and Karolina need one another?
- Karolina says that the Dollmaker is different from anyone she has ever met. How might she describe him? Discuss how the following characters view the Dollmaker: Mr. Dombrowski, the baker; Jozef Trzmiel, the Jewish musician, and his daughter, Rena; Juraj Jánošík, the thief; Father Karol, the priest at St. Mary's Basilica; and Erich Brandt, the SS officer.
- Discuss the literary devices of foreshadowing and flashback. Chapter 2 is titled "The Sad Tale of Pierrot." How does the clown's story foreshadow events that will unfold in Poland? Discuss how the Dollmaker's nightmares are a flashback to his days as a soldier in World War I. How do these nightmares contribute to his role in the resistance during the Holocaust?
- Karolina tells the Dollmaker on page 41 that there is a "language for flowers. Red for passion, white for purity, pink for hope and gentleness." Why does the Dollmaker say that Karolina's red dress suits her? At what point in the novel does Karolina wear a pink dress? Why does she feel she should have chosen a fiercer color?
- Explain what Karolina means when she tells Jozef, "The way a person looks doesn't say anything about what sort of person they are, but the way a doll looks says everything." (p. 63)
- Jozef sends the Dollmaker two tickets to the symphony. Why is the Dollmaker so moved by the music? How do Jozef and Rena offer a sense of peace to the Dollmaker?
- Rena calls the Germans "witches." What do you associate with the word *witch*, and why do you think Rena used this word? What changes do the Germans bring to Kraków? What is the purpose of the golden apple that the Lakanica gives to Rena?
- The Dollmaker reflects on his time as a soldier: "Just because I couldn't help everyone doesn't mean I couldn't help *someone*." (p. 111) Who is the person he helped in the Great War? How does Jozef know that the Dollmaker is the person who can save Rena and other children in the Jewish Ghetto? How does he convince the SS officer to allow him into the Ghetto?
- A boy accompanies his mother to the toy shop and says to Rena, "You're vermin. . . you're a Jew." (pp. 142-143) Find other places in the novel where Rena is the victim of such treatment. Explain what the Dollmaker means when he says to Karolina, "They're only repeating what their parents tell them about Jozef and Rena and their people." (p. 163) How does this idea extend to prejudices today? Discuss how the cycle of prejudice might be broken.
- Explain what the Dollmaker means when he tells Erich Brandt, "I carved [Karolina's] body, but I had no part in crafting her soul." (p. 192) How did Karolina acquire her soul?
- It was dangerous for Jewish people to reveal their names in Europe during World War II. Why was there "safety in silence"? (p. 223) How does the Dollmaker gain the trust of the children? Why is it important that he know their names before turning them into dolls?
- Brandt steals Karolina, but Fritz helps her find her way back to the Dollmaker. How does this reunion make her feel a sense of family? The Dollmaker is arrested and taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau. He tells Karolina, "You gave me the courage I needed. . . . You saved me." (p. 290) What is the Dollmaker's most courageous act? How does finding courage save him?
- Why does the wind insist on showing Karolina the Dollmaker's shop at the end of the novel? What does this symbolize?

These questions correlate to Common Core Standards: Key Ideas & Details RL. 5-7.1, RL. 5-7.3; Craft & Structure RL. 5-7.4, RL. 5-7.5, RL. 5-7.6; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 5-7.1, SL. 5-7.3; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 5-7.1; Knowledge of Language L. 5-7.3.

## WRITING ACTIVITIES

Have students explain the following simile: “[The Dollmaker’s] loneliness was laid across his face like an unhealed wound.” (p. 63) Then ask them to write a simile that describes Karolina’s emotions at the end of the novel when she and the Dollmaker part ways.

☉ Correlates to Common Core Standard: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L.5-7.5.

Have students write and illustrate a story that Rena might write for her children titled *My Life as a Doll*.

☉ Correlates to Common Core Standards: Text Types & Purposes W. 5-7.3; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 5-7.1, L. 5-7.2; Knowledge of Language L. 5-7.3.

Have students read about Irena Sendler, a Polish woman who worked for the resistance, on the following website: [Chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article\\_cdo/aid/939081/jewish/Irena-Sendler.htm](http://Chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article_cdo/aid/939081/jewish/Irena-Sendler.htm). Then have them write a paper that draws parallels between Sendler and the Dollmaker and their work to save children in the Jewish Ghetto.

☉ Correlates to Common Core Standards: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 5-7.4; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 5-7.9; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 5-7.1, L. 5-7.2; Knowledge of Language L. 5-7.3.

The Dollmaker says, “No one is ever really lost as long as their story still exists.” (p. 121) Divide the class into three groups. Ask each group to choose five oral histories to read or listen to on the following website: [USHMM.org/wlc/en/media\\_list.php?MediaType=oh](http://USHMM.org/wlc/en/media_list.php?MediaType=oh). (You may have to coordinate to make sure there aren’t too many doubles.) Then have the groups prepare a PowerPoint presentation titled “Never Forget” detailing the stories they chose.

☉ Correlates to Common Core Standards: Text Types & Purposes W. 5-7.2, W. 5-7.3; Production & Distribution of Writing W. 5-7.6; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 5-7.1, L. 5-7.2; Knowledge of Language L. 5-7.3.

Juraj Jánošík is described as a *Robin Hood* figure, an outlaw who robbed from the rich and gave to the poor. Review his role in the novel and write an acrostic poem about him, using *Robin Hood* as the spine words.

☉ Correlates to Common Core Standards: Text Types & Purposes W. 5-7.3; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 5-7.1, L. 5-7.2; Knowledge of Language L. 5-7.3.

Ask students to study flowers and their meanings on the following website: [theLanguageofFlowers.com](http://theLanguageofFlowers.com). Have them select a flower for each of the following characters: the Dollmaker, Rena, Dawid, Karolina, Jozef, and Fritz. Then have them write a paragraph explaining their selections.

☉ Correlates to Common Core Standards: Text Types & Purposes W. 5-7.1; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 5-7.1, L. 5-7.2; Knowledge of Language L. 5-7.3.

Jozef and Rena are ordered by the Germans to move to the Jewish Ghetto. Karolina finds out about this order through the newspapers, “whose pages seemed to weep with the news they carried.” (p. 158) Read about the Jewish Ghetto in Kraków on the following websites: [Krakow-info.com/ghetto.htm](http://Krakow-info.com/ghetto.htm) and [inyourpocket.com/Krakow/The-Jewish-Ghetto-in-Krakow\\_73758f](http://inyourpocket.com/Krakow/The-Jewish-Ghetto-in-Krakow_73758f). Ask students to write a newspaper article about the forced relocation of the Jews, remembering to include who, what, when, where, and why. Remind them to include an appropriate headline.

☉ Correlates to Common Core Standards: Text Types & Purposes W. 5-7.2; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 5-7.9; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 5-7.1, L. 5-7.2; Knowledge of Language L. 5-7.3.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

### The Righteous Among the Nations

[YadVashem.org/righteous](http://YadVashem.org/righteous)

The Yad Vashem program of the World Holocaust Remembrance Center honors non-Jews who took great risks to save Jews during the Holocaust.

### United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

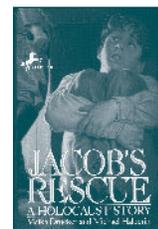
[USHMM.org/learn](http://USHMM.org/learn)

Information for students interested in learning about the Holocaust, including a timeline and an encyclopedia.

## RELATED TITLES



BLACK RADISHES  
PB: 978-0-375-85822-2



JACOB'S RESCUE  
PB: 978-0-440-40965-6



A FARAWAY ISLAND  
PB: 978-0-375-84495-9



THE LILY POND  
PB: 978-0-385-74040-1

# CHRONOLOGY

**June 28, 1914:** World War I or the Great War begins in Europe. The German and Austro-Hungarian Empires (including what is now Poland) fight against Britain, France, and Russia.

**April 6, 1917:** The United States of America enters the war on the side of the Allied Powers—Britain, France, and Russia.

**November 11, 1918:** World War I ends with the surrender of Germany and its allies.

**June 28, 1919:** Germany signs the Treaty of Versailles with the Allied Powers. Many Germans feel the document is unfair because it places responsibility for the war solely on them. Poland is recognized as an independent country by the treaty.

**July 21, 1921:** Adolf Hitler becomes head of the National Socialist German Workers' Party or Nazi Party in Germany. The Nazis are extremely anti-Semitic, meaning they are prejudiced against Jewish people and blame Germany's fiscal and social problems on them.

**October 1929:** The U.S. stock market crashes, leading to an economic depression all over the world.

**January 30, 1933:** Hitler becomes the chancellor of Germany. He vows to make the country strong and prosperous again and has a plan to extend German borders.

**March 10, 1933:** The first concentration camp is created in Germany at Dachau. People who speak out against the demagogue Hitler and his Nazi regime are sent to the harsh camp.

**August 23, 1939:** Nazi Germany and Russia (now called the Soviet Union) sign the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, becoming allies.

**September 1, 1939:** Germany invades western Poland, thus beginning World War II.

**September 3, 1939:** Britain and France declare war on Germany.

**September 17, 1939:** The Soviet Union invades eastern Poland.

**September 27, 1939:** The Polish government flees to Paris, then to London. Poland never formally surrenders to the Germans or the Soviets.

**November 23, 1939:** All Jewish people in Poland are required

by law to wear a yellow star or armband bearing the Star of David. Many of their freedoms are taken away.

**May 20, 1940:** The Auschwitz concentration camp is established in southern Poland.

**September 27, 1940:** Germany, Italy, and Japan sign the Tripartite Pact, becoming allies.

**March 3, 1941:** All Jewish residents of Kraków are forced to move with few possessions into the Kraków Ghetto. Food is scarce. Children are not permitted to go to school. Jewish adults are often forced to do manual labor for the Germans.

**June 22, 1941:** Germany betrays the Soviet Union and invades the country.

**October 1941:** Auschwitz is expanded to include a death camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau. This is part of Hitler's "Final Solution"—his plan to annihilate all Jewish people in Europe.

**December 11, 1941:** The United States enters the war following the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7. They fight on the side of the Allied Powers against Germany and Japan.

**June 1942:** The Germans begin to deport Jews from the Kraków Ghetto to death camps.

**February 2, 1943:** The war turns against the Germans when they fail to capture the Soviet city of Stalingrad.

**March 1943:** The Kraków Ghetto is closed. All remaining residents are sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau to be murdered, or to the Płaszów slave labor camp.

**January 27, 1945:** Auschwitz prisoners are freed by soldiers of the Soviet Union. Over a million people were killed there between 1939 and 1945. The number of Jewish people killed by the Nazis totals six million.

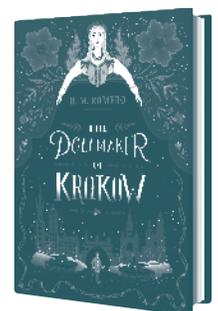
**May 7, 1945:** Germany surrenders and World War II ends in Europe. Hitler commits suicide and many of the top-level Nazis escape to South America and Middle Eastern countries.

**September 2, 1945:** Japan surrenders and World War II is finally over. The number of Allied soldiers who died in the war totals more than 14 million.

**EDUCATORS:** reproduce this timeline for your students.



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