

Number the Stars

Introducing the Novel

Lowry creates suspense and tension without wavering from the viewpoint of Annemarie, a child who shows the true meaning of courage.

—Newbery Committee Chair Caroline Ward

Annemarie is the main character in *Number the Stars*, a novel set in Denmark during World War II (1939–1945). In its simplest form, this historical novel is the story of two ten-year-old girls and the hardships they face while their country is occupied by German Nazis. In a much broader sense, it is a story of the entire Danish nation and its people.

Annemarie Johansen lives with her younger sister Kirsti and their parents in an apartment in Copenhagen. Annemarie's best friend Ellen Rosen, who is Jewish, lives with her parents in the same apartment building. As the novel unfolds, both families are learning to adapt to the German soldiers who have taken control of their country. Both Annemarie and Ellen try to ignore the soldiers on the streets as they walk home from school.

In an effort to adjust to the stress brought on by the Germans, Annemarie often loses herself in the fairy tales she creates for her sister. But the danger heightens, and fairy tales can no longer mask the horrible reality, as German soldiers begin arresting Danish Jews.

Lowry's inspiration for *Number the Stars* was her friend Annelise. The two women were friends for many years, and Lowry heard many stories about Annelise's childhood in Denmark. However, it was not until they were on a vacation together in 1988 that her friend shared with her some of the things she had experienced as a child during the war. Annelise remembered being so cold that she had to wear mittens to bed. She even remembered the high, shiny boots of the German soldiers who occupied her homeland.

Lowry makes many references to the soldier's boots in *Number the Stars*. When Lowry submit-

ted her finished manuscript, her editor thought there were too many references to the boots. Lowry might have removed some of those references if, soon afterward, she hadn't met a Dutch woman whose Jewish mother had been killed by the Nazis. The woman, just a toddler at the time of the Holocaust, remembered only one detail about the soldiers who took her mother away—their boots. Lowry told her editor to keep the references. She said she decided that:

if any reviewer should call attention to the overuse of that image—none ever has—I would simply tell them that those high shiny boots had trampled on several million childhoods and I was sorry I hadn't had several million more pages on which to mention that.

THE TIME AND PLACE

Number the Stars is set mainly in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1943. It is a time when war is raging through Europe and parts of Asia. German forces, commanded by Adolf Hitler, have invaded the lands around Germany, and Japan is attacking nations in the Pacific. Great Britain, France—and later the United States—join forces to stop the aggression.

Adolf Hitler was the leader of the German aggression and was obsessed by the concept of "racial purity." He believed that the German people were members of a master race and destined to take over the world. The German Nazis believed that peoples such as Slavs and those of African descent were members of inferior races. Nazis also believed that Jews were members of the lowest and most dangerous race of all.

Immediately after his rise to power, Hitler embarked on a slow and steady campaign to rid Germany of Jews. In 1935 German Jews lost their citizenship, and marriage between Jews and "citizens of German . . . blood" was forbidden. In 1938 more than 1,000 synagogues were burned, thousands of Jewish businesses were looted, and 30,000 Jews were arrested. Jews began fleeing Germany, but many nations

refused to take them in as refugees. As a result of Germany's expansion, soon not only German Jews but Jews throughout Europe were at risk. It was in Eastern Europe that the Germans began the final and most horrific stage of their anti-Jew campaign. They moved Jews out of their homes and into special sections of the city called ghettos. They established death camps and embarked on a campaign of mass murder.

In early 1942, senior officials of the German government met to devise a "Final Solution" to the "Jewish Question." These men decided that Jews would be transported to concentration camps. There they would either be worked to death or murdered. As a result of this decision, millions of Jews were killed in gas chambers.

In 1940 the country of Denmark, knowing it was too small to defend itself against the large Nazi forces, surrendered to Germany. At the time when *Number the Stars* takes place, there were about 8,000 Jews living in Denmark. Most were the descendants of Jews who had immigrated to Denmark hundreds of years earlier from Spain, Portugal, Germany, and Russia. There were also about 1,500 Jewish refugees who had fled to Denmark in the early 1930s.

In Denmark laws protected Jews from anti-Semitism. This tradition went back to 1690, when a Danish police chief was fired for suggesting that Denmark should imitate other European countries and establish a ghetto where Jews would be forced to live. In 1814 the Danish Parliament passed a bill making racial or religious discrimination a crime.

When the Germans first occupied Denmark in 1940, the former German ambassador to Denmark warned his superiors back in Berlin that it would be dangerous to limit the civil rights of Danish Jews in any way. Later, a Gestapo colonel visited Denmark and complained that the Danes' tolerant attitude toward Jews was beginning to influence the German soldiers stationed in Denmark. He feared that if a crackdown against Jews was ordered, some of these soldiers might not be willing to enforce it.

In 1943 when the Danish people heard that the Germans had decided to arrest their Jewish citizens, they banded together to form the Danish Resistance. Members of the resistance helped nearly 7,000 people—almost the entire population of Danish Jews—cross the sea to freedom in Sweden.

Did You Know?

Jews were not the only victims of Adolf Hitler's desire to create a master race. The Nazis also killed

- Gypsies
- elderly people
- mentally handicapped and physically challenged adults, children, and babies
- people with epilepsy
- people with a history of mental illness
- people too ill to work
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- people of Slavic nationality, including Russian prisoners of war

Before You Read

Number the Stars Chapters 1-5

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Would you ever be willing to risk your life for another person? Under what circumstances might you take this risk?

Journal Writing

While few people will ever be called to risk their lives for a friend or neighbor, many of us run into situations that require courage to stand up for someone else. Try to remember such a situation in your own life and in your journal describe what happened.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how and why the members of the Johansen family take a risk for friends.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Throughout their long history, followers of the Jewish faith have faced prejudice and persecution. The Romans banned Jews from the holy city of Jerusalem during the days of the Roman Empire. A thousand years later, Crusaders massacred German Jews. In 1492 the Jewish population was driven from Spain. By the end of the nineteenth century, most of the world's Jews lived in Russia and Poland. A substantial number also lived in Germany, and about one million had emigrated to the United States.

In the late 1870s, some people began to think of Jews as belonging to a different "race," and some writers and politicians of the time began to criticize Jews for their religious beliefs. Adolf Hitler's ideas about German "racial purity" were an extension of myths about race. He used these myths to generate hatred toward the Jews.

Rosh Hashana

Rosh Hashana is the Jewish New Year. It occurs on the first day of the seventh month of the Jewish calendar, which is based on lunar months. The seventh month of the moon calendar usually falls in September. Rosh Hashana, which means "Head of the Year" in Hebrew, is one of the holiest days of the Jewish year. It commemorates the creation of the world and is a time for quietly reflecting on one's actions during the previous year and for repenting of one's sins. On Rosh Hashana, an ancient musical instrument called a *shofar* is played. The shofar is a ram's horn. When it is blown, it creates a high-pitched blast. The notes of the shofar call Jews to experience a spiritual reawakening.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

contempt [kən tempt'] *n.* feeling of scorn toward a person or thing

exasperated [ig zas' pə rāt' əd] *adj.* extremely annoyed

imperious [im pēr' ē əs] *adj.* bossy or bullying in an arrogant way

intricate [in' tri kit] *adj.* very detailed

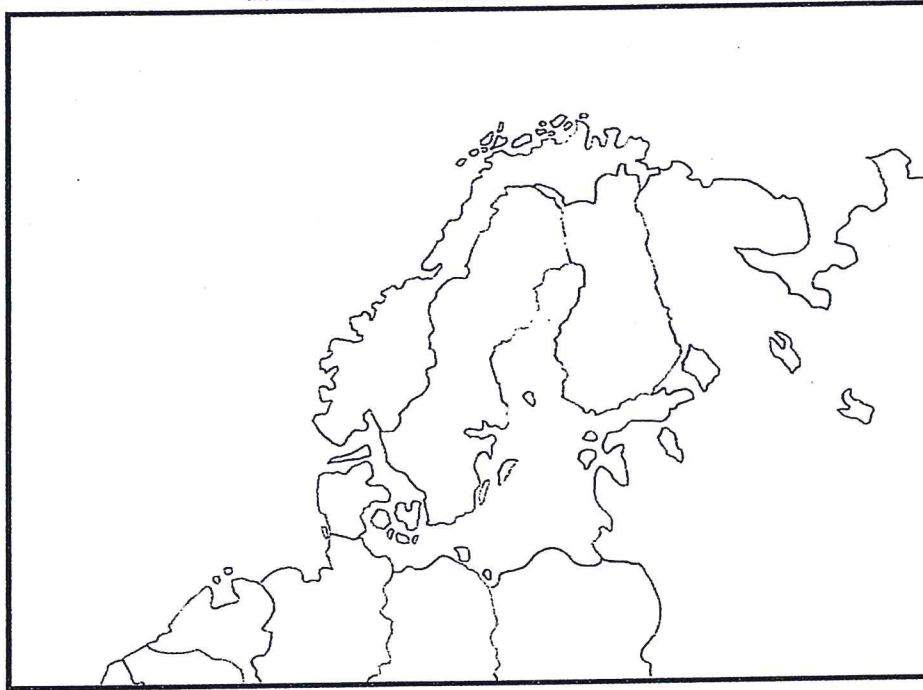
sabotage [sab' ə təzh'] *n.* destruction of property or interference with activities as a part of an effort against an enemy

The events in *Number the Stars* take place in Northern Europe during the German occupation. Though the story takes place only in Denmark, it is important to understand where the surrounding countries are located in relation to this country, as many are mentioned throughout. Remember, the threat of German occupation did not reach only these neighboring countries, but it also affected many others with its widespread carnage.

On the following MAP OF NORTHERN EUROPE, identify the following seven countries:

Denmark Finland Germany Norway Poland Sweden Netherlands

MAP OF NORTHERN EUROPE



Next, using an encyclopedia or the Internet, determine which countries were occupied by Germany during World War II, and which were not. Identify these countries by coloring those that were occupied red, and those not occupied blue. Then, discuss possible escape routes Jewish citizens may have taken from Denmark to reach an unoccupied country and freedom.

Activity II: Identifying Theme

Pre-Reading

Before reading Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars*, take a moment to consider the following two writing prompts. These prompts deal with fear and hiding—two concepts that help develop the overall theme of the story. Choose the prompt to which you feel you can reply best and compose a one page, three-paragraph response. After writing a rough draft, proofread and revise your paper for mistakes and organization before writing a final copy.

- Imagine what it would be like to live in isolated hiding. What everyday necessities would you have to give up? How would this affect your relationships with friends and family?
- Imagine what it would be like to live in constant fear, where at any moment you could be taken away and forced to change your life forever. How would your everyday routine be affected? Would you be able to live your life to the extent that you are living it now? Explain.

Use the WRITING PROCESS GUIDELINES to format your response.

Sometimes a reader can determine the meaning of an unfamiliar word simply by using information found in the sentences that surround the new word. Sentences oftentimes hint at or allude to the meaning of a word based on the placement of that word in the sentence. The following sentences are from chapters one through three of *Number the Stars*. Determine the definition of the words in bold type by using clues in the given sentences. If you are still stuck, refer to the pages as noted and try reading the paragraph as a whole for a clearer context. The first one has been done for you as an example.

Chapter 1

1. "Far back, little Kirsti was **plodding** along, her face in a pout because the girls hadn't waited for her." (Pg. 2)
Plodding means: to move along at a slow pace

2. "He **prodded** the corner of her backpack with the stock of his rifle." (Pg. 3)
Prodded means: _____

3. "She glanced through the window, down to the street corner where the soldiers stood, their faces **impassive** beneath the metal helmets." (Pgs. 9-10)
Impassive means: _____

Chapter 2

4. "Thinking of Lise, her **solemn**, lovely sister, always made her sad." (Pg. 13)
Solemn means: _____

5. "Mama had been **crocheting** that evening three years ago: the lacy edging of a pillowcase, part of Lise's trousseau." (Pg. 14)

Crocheting means: _____

Trousseau means: _____

6. "Her fingers moved rapidly, turning the thin white thread into an **intricate** narrow border." (Pg. 14)

Intricate means: _____

Chapter 3

7. "Kirsti **dawdled** just behind them or scampered ahead, never out of their sight." (Pg. 18)

Dawdled means: _____

Scampered means: _____

8. "'I did not!' Kirsti said **haughtily** from the bedroom doorway." (Pg. 19)

Haughtily means: _____

9. "He was a tall teenager with thick glasses, **stooped** shoulders, and unruly hair." (Pg. 20)

Stooped means: _____

Unruly means: _____

10. "Copenhagen had a **curfew**, and no citizens were allowed out after eight o'clock." (Pg. 22)

Curfew means: _____

11. "He grinned, kissed her cheek, and **ruffled** her long hair." (Pg. 23)

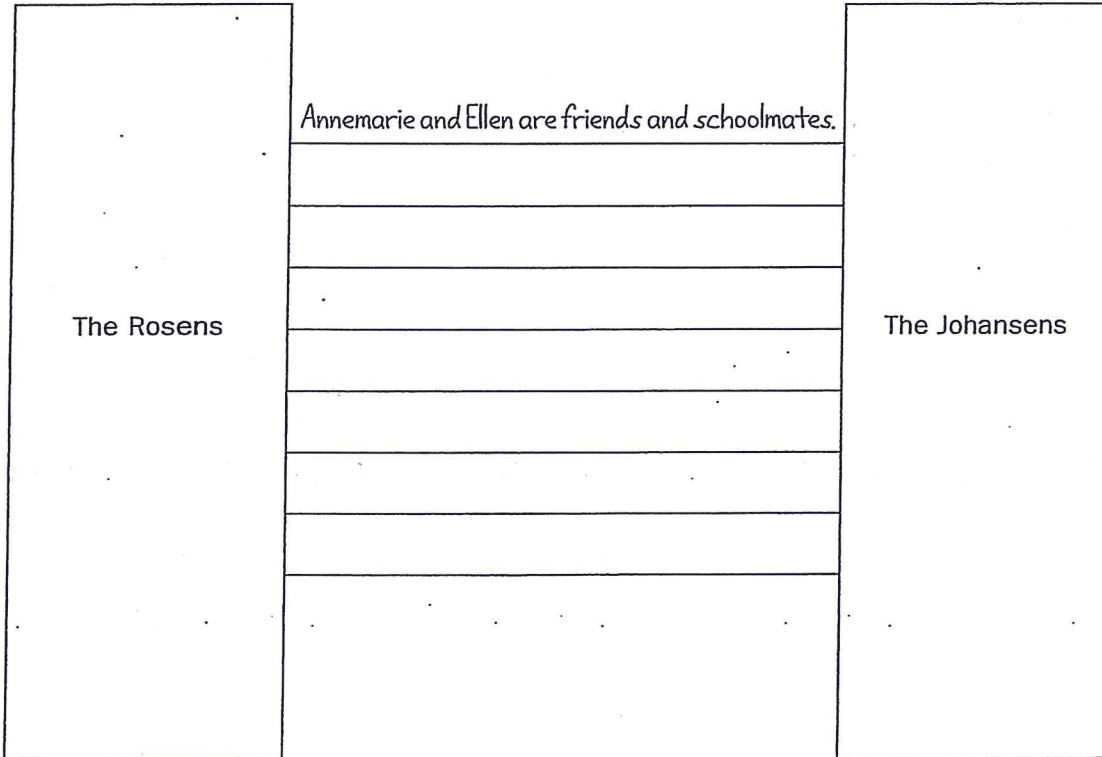
Ruffled means: _____

12. "Later, once more in her bed beside the warm cocoon of her sister..." (Pgs. 25-26)

Active Reading

Number the Stars Chapters 1-5

Two families are introduced in this section of the book—the Rosens and the Johansens. As you read Chapters 1 through 5, you will see how close the two families are. On the diagram below, list actions, facts, and events that illustrate their closeness and friendship.



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Analyzing Literature (continued)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Lowry presents events through the eyes of Annemarie. How does Annemarie's incomplete understanding of events help create suspense? Give an example from the novel.

5. How might the Johansens answer the Focus Question on page 12? How does this answer compare with yours?

Literature and Writing

Writing a Dialogue

Some of the actions in the story occur "behind the scenes," when Annemarie is not present. Fill in the blanks by imagining what the Johansens might have said to each other when they decided to help the Rosens. What dangers might they have foreseen? Why did they decide to help despite the dangers?

Responding

Number the Stars Chapters 1-5

Personal Response

Were you surprised when the Johansens agreed to take in Ellen? Why?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. How does Annemarie behave around the German soldiers? How does Kirsti? Why might the sisters behave so differently?

2. Contrast the fantasy world of the fairy tale Annemarie tells Kirsti with the reality of the world the girls know. Why might Kirsti be especially in need of hearing fairy tales? Why might fairy tales be comforting to Annemarie?

3. Whom does Ellen pretend to be when the soldiers come to the Johansens? Why?

Responding

Number the Stars Chapters 1-5

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

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Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Although Lise Johansen has been dead for several years when this story begins, she is still important to the novel. In your literature group, discuss what you learn about Lise's life, her personality, and her death. Refer to specific information in the book. Then discuss the impact that her death has had on her family. What signs are there that the Johansens have not come to terms with Lise's death? What clues are there at the end of this section that the family's wounds may be starting to heal? Support your conclusions with evidence from Chapters 1 through 5.

Internet Connection

Annemarie has fond memories of Tivoli Gardens, the amusement park in the center of Copenhagen. Look up Tivoli Gardens on the Internet to answer the following questions: When was Tivoli Gardens created? How big is it? What were its special features when it was designed? What is Tivoli Gardens like today? Take notes, and present your findings in an oral report to your class.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Number the Stars Chapters 6–11

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Do you think of yourself as a brave person? Why or why not? What is your definition of bravery?

Define It

Think of different kinds of bravery. Define them and give an example for each. (Examples: physical bravery—getting a shot at the doctor’s; performance bravery—performing in public)

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how Annemarie’s Uncle Henrik defines bravery.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Many of the world’s religions share beliefs about the importance of treating other people well. One of these shared beliefs is the golden rule. In the collection of Jewish teaching called the Talmud, this rule is stated as “The things you hate should not be done to others.” Christianity’s Book of Luke in the New Testament states, “Do to others what you would wish them to do to you.” Islam teaches, “You are not a real Muslim until you want for other people what you want for yourself.” The Hindu Mahabharata states, “Do nothing to others that would cause you pain if they did it to you.”

The Resistance

Most of Denmark’s Jews were saved because of prompt and sometimes very imaginative action by ordinary citizens. For example, when Jorgen Knudsen heard that the Germans were starting to round up Jews for deportation, the Danish ambulance driver looked through telephone directories for individuals whose family names were “Jewish-sounding.” He drove his ambulance to the home of one family after another, warning the family to escape. A few of the people he contacted were frantic because they couldn’t think of any place to seek refuge. Knudsen drove these individuals to a hospital where one of the physicians was active in the Resistance. The doctor disguised these new arrivals as hospital patients. A week later, hundreds of Jewish refugees were still hiding in this hospital when news came that the Gestapo planned a search of the facility. Hospital officials pretended that a funeral was being held in the hospital chapel. A procession of about twenty taxis came to take the “mourners” away.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

deftly [deft’ly] *adv.* in a quick and skillful way

distorted [dis tōrt’əd] *adj.* twisted out of shape

protrude [prō trōōd’] *v.* to stick out

ruefully [rōō’fəl ly] *adv.* in a regretful or mournful way

tentatively [ten’tə tiv ly] *adv.* with uncertainty

Active Reading

Number the Stars Chapters 6-11

In this section of the novel, characters often speak in secret code or say the opposite of what they mean to prevent the Nazi soldiers from uncovering their plans. As you read, keep track of times when characters disguise what they really mean. Fill out the chart below, telling who the person is, what he or she says, and what he or she really means.

Name of Character	What the Character Says	What the Character Really Means
Papa	Is the weather good for fishing?	Is it a good time for helping refugees escape?

Responding

Number the Stars Chapters 6-11

Personal Response

According to the personal definition of bravery that you came up with in the **Focus Activity** on page 16, do you think the Johansens are brave?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What lie does Uncle Henrik tell Annemarie?

2. How do Annemarie's experiences in this section force her to grow up in a way that Ellen is not yet forced to?

3. Why is Mrs. Johansen's response to the German soldiers so clever?

Responding

Number the Stars Chapters 6-11

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Why does Lowry include Annemarie's thoughts about how the Jews are standing straight despite their loss of all obvious sources of pride?

5. Who are some of the refugees who have fled political or social tyranny and come to the United States in recent decades?

Literature and Writing

Opinion Piece

In this section, Annemarie is faced with an ethical dilemma. Ethics are a set of values or principles by which people live. They help to define good and bad behavior. On one hand, Annemarie knows that lying is not ethical. On the other hand, she and her family must lie to protect the lives of others. In some cases, especially in time of war, people are faced with these types of ethical dilemmas. Write an opinion piece that justifies Annemarie's and her family's actions during the war. Support your opinion with examples from the novel.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Lowry uses the natural world as a metaphor for life and her characters' situation. One of the major symbols is that of stars in the night sky. Other symbols include flowers, animals, and meadows. In your group, discuss what the various descriptions of the natural world suggest about the characters' moods, about their situation, and about the meaning of life. Then evaluate the effectiveness of these symbols.

Art Connection

Imagine that you are an artist commissioned to create a cover for *Number the Stars*. Think about the major elements of the novel—the plot, the characters, the theme, the setting, and the symbols. Think of ways to draw these elements together in a single, unified design. Then create your cover.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Number the Stars Chapters 12-17

FOCUS ACTIVITY

How do you prepare yourself when you have something difficult to face or to accomplish? Do you think about something else or give yourself advice?

Make a List

Make a list of some tactics you have used in the past to prepare for and deal with difficult situations.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how Annemarie copes with an important and frightening mission.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

In 1953 the Israeli Parliament created Yad Vashem, a memorial to the Holocaust and a center for Holocaust-related research. The center was authorized to honor Gentiles (non-Jews) who had risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. To be considered, a person must have helped to save the life of at least one Jew from Nazi persecution and taken action in spite of danger or difficulty. As of mid-1997, Yad Vashem had recognized over 13,000 such individuals. Each received a medal inscribed with the words, "Whoever saves a single life, saves the entire world."

Sweden as a Refuge

Sweden was neutral during World War II: It did not take sides with either Germany or Germany's enemies. Throughout the 1930s, Sweden issued very few entry permits to Jewish refugees. However, in 1943 Sweden could see that the tide of the war was turning against Germany. Germany was retreating in North Africa and in Stalingrad, Russia. It seemed just a matter of time before Germany was defeated. Therefore, the Swedish government dared to offer official sanctuary to Danish Jews even though this action would infuriate Germany.

Because the two countries are separated only by a narrow strait, many Jews could be quickly transported from Denmark to Sweden. When faced with the problem of how to move thousands of refugees to Sweden, Resistance leaders immediately started contacting the captains of many of the fishing boats that worked the waters off the nation's eastern coast. Many captains accepted the dangerous assignment. In the early days of the operation, fees ranged from about \$150 to \$1,500 per person. Resistance workers got involved to make sure that none of the captains made an unfair profit from the refugees' desperation. They bargained with the sailors and brought the price down to as low as \$65 per person.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

brusque [brusk] *adj.* rough or abrupt in speech

devastating [dev'əs tāt'ing] *adj.* overwhelmingly terrible

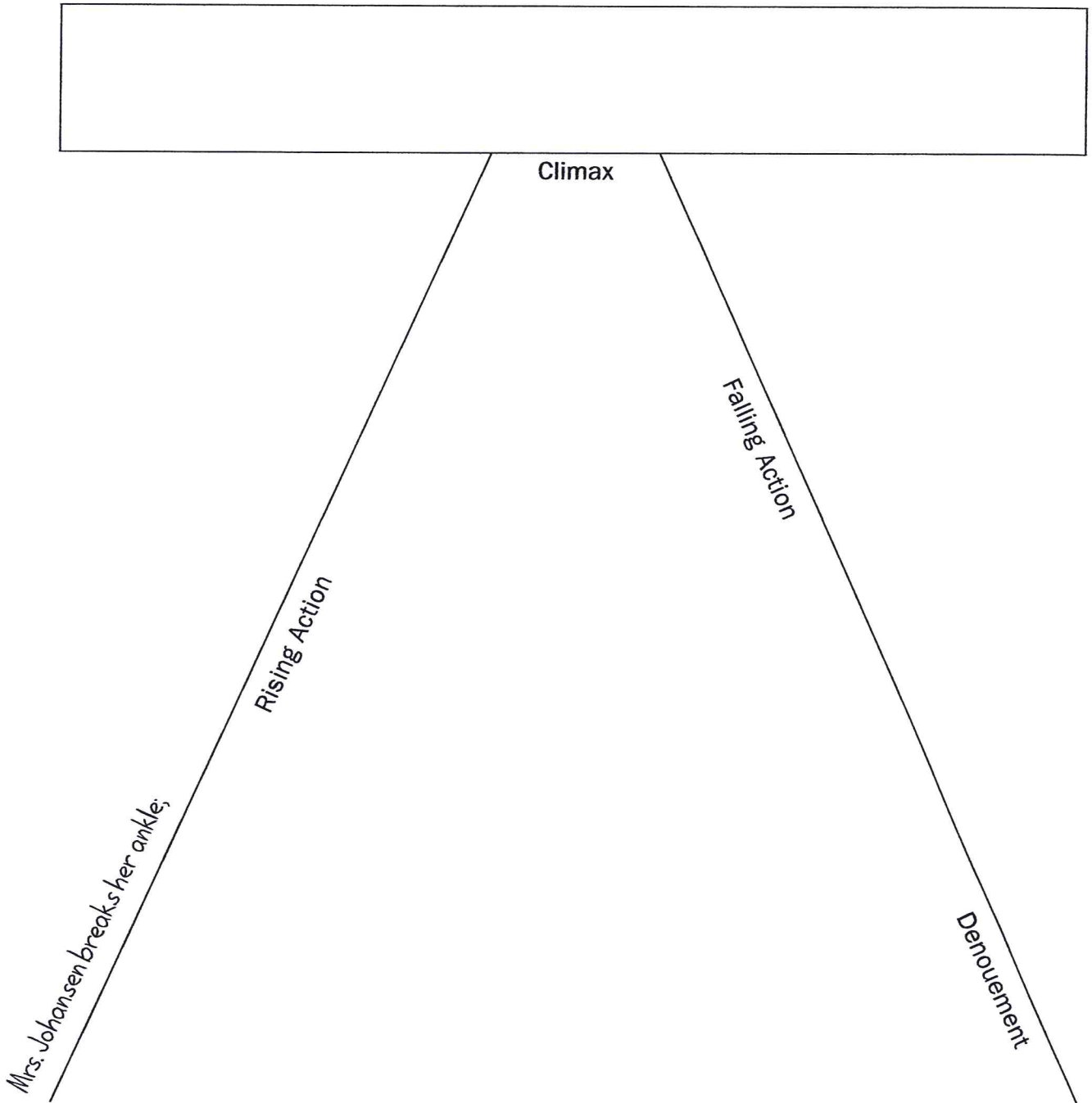
quaver [kwā'ver] *v.* to tremble (said of a voice)

taut [tôt] *adj.* tightly stretched

Active Reading

***Number the Stars* Chapters 12-17**

The climax, or point of highest tension, of *Number the Stars* occurs in the third section. As you read, note the events that are part of the rising action (the events leading up to the climax), the climax, the falling action, and the denouement or resolution.



Responding

Number the Stars Chapters 12-17

Personal Response

Did you find this part of the book exciting? Why or why not?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Why did Mama send Annemarie with the packet for Uncle Henrik instead of taking it herself?

2. How does Annemarie use what her uncle has taught her and her observations of Kirsti's earlier behavior to deal with the German soldiers?

3. When Henrik returns from taking the Rosens to Sweden, how does he show that he now regards Annemarie as an equal?

Responding

Number the Stars Chapters 12-17

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Why might Lowry have included so many references to people stumbling, tripping, and falling? Why are these references important to the plot? How do they contribute to the story's mood and message?

5. Some people, like Annemarie, are good at understanding how other people think and feel and then using this information to deal with them effectively. How might someone like Annemarie apply this skill to a career?

Literature and Writing

Letter of Recommendation

Imagine that Annemarie Johansen is a real person and that you want to recommend her for an honor. Write a letter to Israeli authorities explaining why Annemarie deserves a medal for bravery. Describe her achievements in detail. Make sure you use the correct style for a formal letter.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

In the first section of this book, Annemarie clings to fairy tales as the one thing that hasn't changed in her world. After her distressing encounter with German soldiers in Copenhagen, she comforts herself and her sister with a happy tale about a king and queen with a beautiful daughter. In Chapter 14 Annemarie is running through the woods at night by herself. She thinks about a different sort of fairy tale, "Little Red Riding Hood." In your group, discuss how and why Annemarie's feelings about fairy tales have changed. Then work together to retell *Number the Stars* as a fairy tale.

Eliminate the realistic, historical details of the setting, transform the Nazis into dragons or ogres, and use fantasy to solve the problem. Keep Annemarie as the heroine of your story and Ellen as the friend she helps. Then discuss the ways in which both realistic novels such as *Number the Stars* and fairy tales can be used to teach similar lessons about life, danger, love, and bravery.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Responding

Number the Stars

Personal Response

Overall, did this book make you feel optimistic or pessimistic about human nature? Why?

Writing About the Novel

In your opinion, why did Lowry name this book *Number the Stars*? Think about the whole text of the psalm from which the title is taken. Think about the context in which it is read and the way Annemarie reacts when she hears it. Then explain the significance of the title to the theme of the book.

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