

Number the Stars

by Lois Lowry · Language: EN

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Overview

Number the Stars is a work of historical fiction set in Copenhagen, Denmark, during the Nazi occupation in 1943. The story follows ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen as her family risks everything to help their Jewish friends, the Rosens, escape to Sweden. When the Nazis begin to round up Danish Jews, Annemarie's parents take in Ellen Rosen, who is the same age as Annemarie, and pretend she is part of their family. The novel traces the escalating danger as Annemarie becomes an unlikely heroine, using her courage and quick thinking to deliver a crucial package to her uncle, who is helping the Rosens flee across the sea.

The narrative is told from Annemarie's limited third-person perspective, which allows readers to experience the fear and confusion of a child living under occupation. The story arc moves from the initial, almost normal life of the girls to the sudden threat of deportation, the tense hiding of Ellen, the dangerous journey to the coast, and finally the successful escape of the Rosens. The novel is based on real events and the heroic efforts of the Danish resistance, which saved nearly all of Denmark's Jewish population. It matters because it introduces young readers to the Holocaust and the moral choices people face, while also celebrating bravery, friendship, and the power of ordinary people to do extraordinary things. The title comes from Psalm 147:4, which says God numbers the stars and calls them all by name, a reminder that each person is precious and worth saving.

Key Takeaways

- Courage is not the absence of fear but acting in spite of it, as Annemarie does when she faces the German soldiers.
- Friendship and loyalty can drive people to make incredible sacrifices, as the Johansen family does for the Rosens.
- Even children can play a vital role in resistance efforts, as Annemarie proves by delivering the handkerchief that masks the Rosens' scent from dogs.
- The Danish resistance saved over 7,000 Jews by smuggling them to Sweden, showing that collective action can defy tyranny.
- Small acts of bravery, like lying to protect a friend, can have life-or-death consequences in times of war.
- The story is based on real events and honors the anonymous heroes of the Danish resistance.

- Understanding history helps us appreciate the importance of standing up against injustice and protecting the vulnerable.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1: Why Are You Running?

Annemarie Johansen and her best friend Ellen Rosen are stopped by German soldiers on their way home from school. Annemarie's younger sister Kirsti is with them. The soldiers question the girls, but Annemarie's older sister Lise's fiancé, Peter Neilsen, appears and distracts them. The girls hurry home, where Annemarie reflects on the occupation and the changes it has brought to their daily lives. The chapter establishes the setting and the constant presence of danger, as well as the close friendship between Annemarie and Ellen.

Chapter 2: Who Is the Man Who Rides Past?

Annemarie learns that Peter is part of the Resistance. He visits the Johansen home and brings a secret message for Annemarie's parents. The family discusses the news that the Nazis are closing down Jewish-owned shops. Annemarie remembers her older sister Lise, who died in an accident two years ago, and her fiancé Peter, who is now a fugitive. The chapter deepens the sense of impending danger and introduces the theme of resistance. Annemarie's parents are cautious but determined to help their Jewish friends.

Chapter 3: Where Is Mrs. Hirsch?

Annemarie and Ellen go to Mrs. Hirsch's candy shop, but it is closed. A crowd gathers, and they learn that the shop has been shut down because the Hirsch family is Jewish. The girls are upset, especially Kirsti, who loved the candy. Later, Annemarie's mother explains that the Nazis are taking away Jewish businesses. The chapter highlights the escalating persecution of Jews and the growing fear in the community. Annemarie begins to understand the seriousness of the situation, though she still sees it through a child's eyes.

Chapter 4: It Will Be a Long Night

The Rosens come to the Johansen apartment for a secret meeting. They are planning to escape, but they need to leave Ellen behind for safety. Annemarie's parents agree to take Ellen in and pretend she is their daughter. The Rosens leave quickly, and Ellen stays. That night, German soldiers come to the apartment, demanding to know where the Rosens are. Annemarie's father shows them a photograph of his three daughters, including Lise, and Ellen, who is pretending to be Lise, is spared. The chapter is tense and shows the quick thinking of the Johansen family.

Chapter 5: Who Is the Dark-Haired One?

The German soldiers search the apartment and question the family. They notice that Ellen has dark hair, unlike the Johansen girls who are blonde. Annemarie's father quickly shows a

photograph of Lise, who had dark hair, and claims Ellen is Lise. The soldiers are suspicious but eventually leave. After they go, the family is shaken. Annemarie realizes how close they came to disaster. The chapter emphasizes the constant threat and the bravery required to deceive the Nazis. It also shows the strength of the Johansen family's bond.

Chapter 6: Is the Weather Good for Fishing?

The Johansen family, along with Ellen, travels to Uncle Henrik's farm by the sea. They pretend it is a family visit. Annemarie's mother explains that the weather is important for fishing, but Annemarie senses there is more to it. At the farm, they meet Uncle Henrik, who is a fisherman. The chapter sets the stage for the escape plan. Annemarie is curious and confused about the adults' secretive behavior. The atmosphere is calm but charged with unspoken tension. The chapter builds suspense as the family prepares for something significant.

Chapter 7: The House by the Sea

At Uncle Henrik's farm, Annemarie and Ellen explore the surroundings. They see a small boat and learn that Henrik is a fisherman. Annemarie's mother tells them that the Rosens will be arriving soon. That evening, a funeral is held for Great-aunt Birte, who Annemarie has never heard of. The funeral is a cover for the gathering of Jewish refugees. Annemarie is confused and upset, but she follows the adults' instructions. The chapter reveals the clever tactics used by the Resistance to hide their activities. It also shows Annemarie's growing awareness of the danger.

Chapter 8: There Has Been a Death

The funeral for Great-aunt Birte takes place. Annemarie and Ellen are told to stay in a back room, but they hear the adults talking. Peter arrives and leads a group of Jewish refugees, including the Rosens, into the house. Annemarie realizes that the funeral is a ruse. The refugees are frightened and tired. Annemarie's mother tells her that she must be brave. The chapter is a turning point, as Annemarie fully understands the gravity of the situation. The tension is high as the refugees await their escape.

Chapter 9: Why Are You Lying?

After the funeral, Annemarie confronts her mother about the lie regarding Great-aunt Birte. Her mother explains that sometimes it is necessary to lie to protect others. The refugees are prepared to leave for Sweden. Annemarie's mother gives Ellen a necklace with a Star of David, telling her to wear it until it is safe. The Rosens and other refugees are led to the boat. Annemarie watches them go, feeling a mix of fear and hope. The chapter explores the moral complexity of lying for a good cause and the emotional toll of separation.

Chapter 10: Let Us Open the Casket

The next morning, German soldiers arrive at Uncle Henrik's farm. They demand to search the house. Annemarie's mother pretends to be grieving and explains that the casket contains the body of her aunt. The soldiers are suspicious but eventually leave. After they go, Annemarie's

mother reveals that the casket is empty; it was a decoy. The chapter shows the constant danger and the cleverness of the Resistance. Annemarie learns that the soldiers are looking for the refugees. The tension is palpable as the family must continue to deceive the Nazis.

Chapter 11: Will We See You Again Soon, Peter?

Peter visits the farm and tells Annemarie that the Rosens have arrived safely in Sweden. He also brings news that the Resistance is working to save more Jews. Annemarie asks if she will see Peter again, and he says he hopes so. The chapter is a brief respite from the danger, but it also foreshadows Peter's eventual fate. Annemarie admires Peter's bravery and dedication. The chapter reinforces the theme of sacrifice and the ongoing struggle. It also shows the emotional bonds between the characters.

Chapter 12: Where Was Mama?

Annemarie's mother goes to the boat to deliver a package to Uncle Henrik, but she does not return. Annemarie becomes worried and goes to find her. She discovers her mother lying on the path, with a sprained ankle. Her mother gives Annemarie the package and tells her to deliver it to Henrik before the boat leaves. Annemarie must run through the woods, avoiding German soldiers. The chapter is a turning point for Annemarie, as she takes on a dangerous mission. It shows her courage and determination.

Themes

- Courage and bravery
- Friendship and loyalty
- Sacrifice and resistance
- Innocence and loss
- Hope and resilience

Notable Quotes

- "It is much easier to be brave if you do not know everything." — Annemarie's mother says this to her when Annemarie is frustrated about being kept in the dark about the escape plan.
- "That's all that brave means—not thinking about the dangers. Just thinking about what you must do." — Annemarie reflects on her own bravery after delivering the package, realizing that courage is about focusing on the task.
- "I will be brave, Kirsti. I will be brave for both of us." — Annemarie says this to her younger sister after the soldiers search their apartment, showing her determination to protect her family.

- "The whole world had changed. Only the fairy tales remained the same." — Annemarie's observation about how the war has altered everything, while stories remain a constant source of comfort.
- "You know, Annemarie, sometimes we must make sacrifices for the people we love." — Annemarie's father explains the necessity of risking their lives to help the Rosens.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is *Number the Stars* about?

Number the Stars is a historical fiction novel about ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen and her family in Nazi-occupied Denmark. They risk their lives to help their Jewish friends, the Rosens, escape to Sweden. The story shows the bravery of ordinary people and the power of friendship during the Holocaust.

Is *Number the Stars* worth reading?

Yes, it is a powerful and moving story that teaches about history, courage, and humanity. It is well-written and accessible for young readers, but also resonates with adults. It offers a hopeful perspective on a dark period and highlights the importance of standing up against injustice.

How does *Number the Stars* end?

Spoiler: The Rosens safely reach Sweden. Peter is captured and executed by the Nazis. After the war ends, Annemarie and Ellen are reunited. Annemarie returns Ellen's Star of David necklace, and the family reflects on the sacrifices made. The story ends with a sense of hope and remembrance.

Who should read *Number the Stars*?

It is ideal for middle-grade readers (ages 9-12) and anyone interested in historical fiction or World War II. Teachers often use it in classrooms to introduce the Holocaust. Adults who enjoy well-crafted, character-driven stories will also appreciate it.

How long does it take to read *Number the Stars*?

The book is about 137 pages long. At an average reading speed of 250 words per minute, it takes roughly 2 to 3 hours to read. Most readers finish it in a few sittings.