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A New Look at an Old Story

Most of the stories Americans here about World War II are about Jewish people or life in the United States during this time period. *The Book Thief*, by Markus Zusak, shares the reality of Nazi Germany through giving insight on the way of life and the use of flavors.

It can be difficult to understand the World War II German home front. *The Book Thief* helps explain by giving the reader a taste of the German way of life. From the beginning of the story, the audience gets hints that tensions are high, but things get into full swing when The Jesse Owens Incident is told. Liesel's best friend Rudy, charcoaled himself to look like the African-American athlete, Jesse Owens. He then raced children at a local track. It all seemed like fun and games until Rudy's father showed up. "Son, you can't go painting yourself black, you hear? ... you shouldn't want to be like black people or Jewish people, or who is...not us," (page 60). It is then that Rudy learns the dangers of being different in society.

Another point the reader learns are the struggles of not joining the Nazi party. "In 1933. 90 percent of Germans showed unflinching support for Adolf Hitler. That leaves

10 percent who didn't. Hans Hubermann belonged to the 10 percent," (page 63). Hans Hubermann struggled finding work because of his lack of party membership. Shop owners, such as Frau Diller, would refuse service to anyone who didn't *heil Hitler* as they walked through the door. When Liesel stated that she hated the Fuhrer, Hans slapped her. "Don't ever say that! His voice was quiet but sharp... 'You can say that in our house,' he said, looking gravely at Liesel's cheek. 'But you never say it on the street, at school, at the BDM, never!'" (page 116). Through the text, the reader can understand the true dangers of opposing the Nazi Party.

Finally, Zusak uses flavors to describe the feeling of the times. Tastes are something that everybody can relate to, so they are used to explain the harsh reality of Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. "Personally, I like a chocolate-colored sky. Dark, dark chocolate. People say it suits me," (page 4). A brown sky represents the darkness of death. It's evil. The chocolate flavor, however, shows that there is a pureness involved in war. In the midst of chaos, innocence is still evident in the people living through it.

The Book Thief gains its power through perspective. By telling the story through the character, Death, readers are more impacted. They also learn the power of war and innocents by understanding citizens of Nazi Germany and the use of flavors for description. It makes something so tragic, relatable to everyone. If the book had been written from the perspective of a Jewish person or from the American homefront perspective, like so many of the stories we hear, *The Book Thief* would not have been as memorable. The points that were made would most likely have been lost with the messages of all of the other World War II stories.