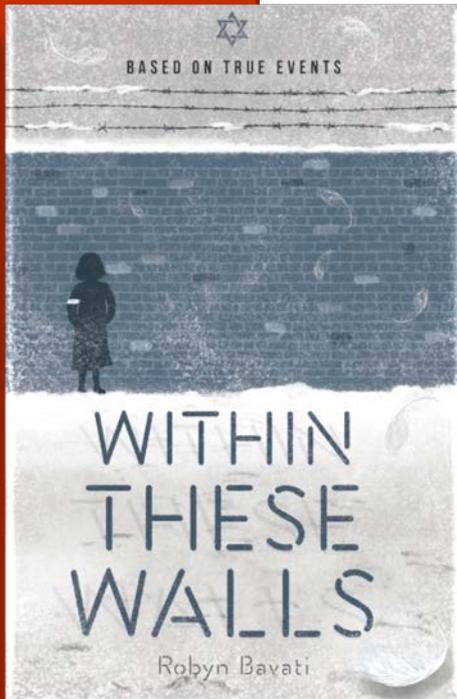


WITHIN THESE WALLS

ROBYN BAVATI



For Miri and her family, life in Warsaw is full of simple joys. The smell of freshly-baked challah, the promise of summer holidays and Fridays when everyone comes together to celebrate the Sabbath.

But when the Germans march into Warsaw with their campaign of hatred against the Jews, Miri and her family must move to the ghetto. One by one, her family members are taken from her, and Miri finds herself alone. Can she survive ... and will she even want to?

Based on true events, **Within These Walls** gives a realistic account of what it was like to be a Jewish child in Warsaw during the Holocaust.

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NOTE: *Within These Walls* is a novel about the Holocaust, and as such contains many distressing episodes that may have a deep effect on students. Educators should prepare students for the confronting details and images they may encounter while studying this title.

TEACHER NOTES

- Before readings **Within These Walls**, divide the class into three groups and assign each group one of the following topics to research and present to the class:
 - Life in Warsaw before the outbreak of WWII
 - Life in Warsaw during WWII
 - Life in Warsaw after the war.
- Consider the title, cover and internal design of the book. Why is it called **Within These Walls**? What effect does the colour palette of the cover have? How are the chapters laid out and what divides the three parts of the story?
- Research the Jewish faith. What is its history? How is the faith observed? What special days are celebrated? What are the rites and obligations of Judaism?

- Why is Tateh's faith so important to him? Why do you think he is so hurt by Zalman's loss of faith?
- The Nazis made it impossible for Jewish people to observe the rites and obligations of their faith, such as going to prayers and burying their dead. How would this impact upon a people's spirit? Why did people persist in observing their faith wherever they could? Consider the use of the potato menorah in Chapter 36. Why was it so important to the Jewish survivors in the ghetto to celebrate Hanukkah, even if it meant sacrificing food in order to do so?
- Chapter 3 introduces Miri's cousins and shows us the bond between them, but more importantly, it demonstrates Miri's love of open spaces and freedom. As you read **Within These Walls**, consider how Miri is slowly entrapped, both physically and spiritually, during the war years. Things to take into account include the growing list of prohibitions against Jewish people, the closing-off of the ghetto and the slow disappearance and death of Miri's family members.
- Turn to Chapter 28, and re-read the passages relating Mendel's death. The author is not explicit here about what has happened to Mendel, but we understand what is happening to him. How is the paucity of information a powerful literary tool here? By leaving the details to the imagination, how are the events more confronting?
- Do you think Miri did the right thing by giving Hinda to Mrs Kowalski? Discuss the various sacrifices made to save lives in **Within These Walls**. In times of extreme distress and privation, how does Miri and others like her rise to the occasion?
- On the other hand, there are instances in the story where people choose death. Consider the ZOB operatives who carried cyanide pills with them and Janusz Korczak. Although the Nazis have control over their lives, these people take control over their own deaths. How is this a final act of civil disobedience and defiance in the face of oppression?
- In Chapter 20, Zalman refers to some Jews who collaborated with the Nazis. Why might they have done this? How would the Jews who were being persecuted have felt about being betrayed by their own people?
- Why does it mean so much to Miri when Sima claims her as family? How does the thought of family help Miri through the isolation of the later war years?
- One of the things Miri finds so hard to understand is how people who were friendly allies one day suddenly became her enemies. What drives people to hate others? Using the Nazis' treatment of Jews as a case study, discuss how people can be made to turn on one another, how a group of people can be turned into scapegoats and how effective it is to

dehumanise people if you want to treat them poorly. Can you think of any other examples of this sort of mass-antagonism since the end of WWII?

- Dov, Sima and the organisers of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising are part of the Zionist movement. What was the Zionist movement? Where did it originate? How was it intrinsic to the ghetto uprising? Would you consider it a political, religious or social movement? Does it still exist today, and if so, in what capacity?
- Why was the Warsaw Ghetto so notorious among the many Jewish ghettos that were created during the war? Using Miri's account as a starting point, investigate the conditions of the ghetto and the many challenges people living there faced. Create a timeline of events from the forced relocation of all Jews into the ghetto to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and its aftermath.
- What happened to the people who went to the *umschlagplatz*? Why did the Nazis prepare death camps for their enemies?
- What is survivor's syndrome? How might this have affected Miri and others who survived the Holocaust?
- Read the author's note at the end of the book. What effect does it have on your reading experience to know how much research went into the writing of **Within These Walls**? Does it make the story more confronting to know that most of the events described were things that happened to real people? Explain your answer.

For advanced students: Read some of the other sources the author used to research the story. How do they compare with **Within These Walls**? Think about the time in which they were written, who wrote them (Holocaust survivors, their relatives or research scholars?) and what age the ideal reader for each source is. How would these considerations change the tone of a text?

- **Within These Walls** tells the story of the millions of Polish Jews who were targeted and exterminated during WWII. What was happening to non-Jewish Poles during this period? As a class, research the creation of Poland's government-in-exile, the execution of intellectuals, the contribution of the Polish armed forces and intelligence service to the Allied war effort and the Warsaw Uprising. The following video is a good place to start: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ejd2rsXoQSI>.