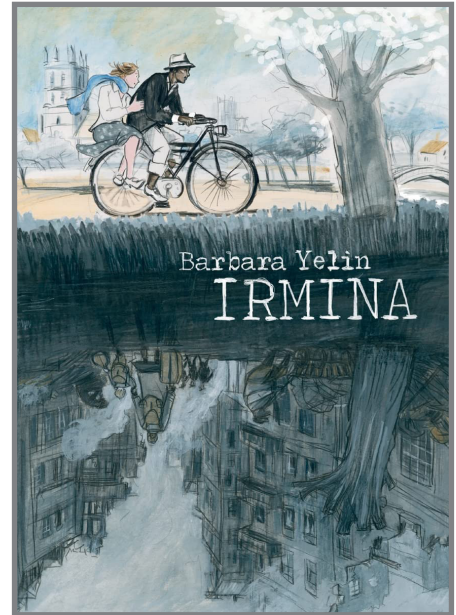


Irmina



AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR
BARBARA YELIN

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Secondary

SYNOPSIS

In the mid-1930s, Irmina, an ambitious young German, moves to London. At a cocktail party, she meets Howard Green, one of the first black students at Oxford, who, like Irmina, is working towards an independent existence. However, their relationship comes to an abrupt end when Irmina, constrained by the political situation in Hitler's Germany, is forced to return home. As war approaches and her contact with Howard is broken, it becomes clear to Irmina that prosperity will only be possible through the betrayal of her ideals.

In the award-winning *Irmina*, Barbara Yelin presents a troubling drama about the tension between integrity and social advancement. Based on a true story, this moving and perceptive graphic novel perfectly conjures the oppressive atmosphere of wartime Germany, reflecting with compassion and intelligence on the complicity that results from the choice, conscious or otherwise, to look away.

ABOUT THE CREATOR

Barbara Yelin was born in 1977 in Munich and studied illustration at the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences. She first came to prominence as a graphic artist in France, before gaining recognition in Germany for her book *Gift* (with a script by Peter Meter), published in 2010. Yelin has worked as a comic artist for newspapers and international anthologies, but her work largely focuses on research-based, historical and biographic graphic novels, mainly about women.

STUDY NOTES

- After reading the graphic novel, facilitate a group discussion using the following prompts:
 - When we read stories about the Nazi regime, what/whose stories are usually told? How does *Irmina* differ?
 - Do you have empathy for Irmina? Why/why not?
 - Did your opinion of *Irmina* change during the course of the graphic novel? How?
 - 'The only thing necessary for evil to triumph in the world is for good men to do nothing.' Edmund Burke. Discuss the following questions in regards to this quote:
 - What does this quote mean?
 - What do you consider evil?
 - What constitutes a 'good man'?
 - How can this quote be applied to *Irmina*?
- In small groups or individually, have students define the following terms and give a brief description of how each

word applies in *Irmina*:

- Volksgemeinschaft
 - National socialism
 - Pogrom
 - Complicity
 - Integrity
 - Oppression
 - Xenophobia
 - Bystander syndrome/Genovese effect.
 - Diffusion of responsibility
 - Passive
 - Accomplice.
- When we meet Irmina at the start of the graphic novel what does she want? What does she value?
 - While Irmina is in London, the situation in Germany is evolving. What is Irmina's attitude towards the situation? Provide examples and find quotes to support your answers. (See pp 67–68; 79; 87–89).
 - Howard names his daughter after Irmina. He remembers her as brave. Look at pp 26–30 and 97, what happens in these scenes? What values does Irmina hold?
 - In *Irmina*, the pictures do as much work as the text to evoke Irmina's story. Consider the motif of smoke as it wafts through the pages. If you were to consider smoke to be representative of Nazi ideals, how does Irmina react to it? How is it permeating? (pp 150–165).
 - Look at pp 177–181. What do the images tell us about Irmina's state of mind?
 - Turn to pp 184–193 when Irmina leaves the house to go shopping. What is Irmina concerned with? What is going on around her?
 - Similarly, consider pp 205–208, pp 212–217 when Irmina receives a letter from her husband. What concerns does Irmina's have?
 - Irmina refers to the Jews as 'our misfortune.' What does she mean? Is this fair?
 - Consider the scene where Irmina meets Howard's daughter (pp 260–266). What is Howard's daughter's view of Irmina? How does Irmina react? Does she agree or disagree with Howard's daughter's assessment of her?
 - Organise the students into teams. Have the students debate the following topics using examples from the text:
 - Irmina acts with self-interest/self preservation throughout her story.
 - Turning a blind eye to suffering is silent approval.
 - The following prompts can be used for essay questions:
 - Irmina is as much a victim of the Nazi regime as the Jewish people. Discuss.
 - Irmina holds a privileged position during the Nazi regime. Do you agree or disagree? Discuss why/why not?
 - History is experienced by individuals. Discuss.
 - Consider the following quote by Edmund Burke: 'The only thing necessary for evil to triumph in the world is for good men to do nothing.' How can this be applied to the story of Irmina?
 - Consider this list of values at the following website <<https://www.berkeleywellbeing.com/list-of-values.html>> then follow the below steps:
 - Have the students select 20 things they value from the list.
 - Have the students select their top 5 non-negotiable values.
 - Visit the below website and, individually, or as a class, complete the Trolley Problem and The Baby Problem <<https://thoughtcatalog.com/lenna-son/2014/06/3-famous-moral-dilemmas-that-will-really-make-you-think/>> Once the students have completed each problem, have the students answer the following questions based on their response to the moral dilemmas:
 - Explain why you selected each answer.
 - Describe how your values influenced your decisions.
 - Were your values tested? Why/why not?
 - Primary resources are considered first-hand account of events. This includes letters, diaries, minutes, photographs,

artefacts, interviews, and sound or video recordings. Ask students to select a significant moment in history. Then ask them to locate a primary resource from that event. Based on that primary resource, ask them to create a piece of creative work (story, fictional letter, collage, short film, etc) that draws on the primary resource.

- Students are to provide a creative explanation for their creative work which includes the following:
 - What the primary resource is
 - Where they located the resource
 - How they incorporated the resource into their creative work
 - Whose story they chose to tell and why?