

Stolen by Night

AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Secondary
(Violence)

SYNOPSIS

THE OCCUPATION.

THE RESISTANCE.

THE WORLD AT WAR.

On May 10, 1940, the Nazis begin their march across Europe, and within weeks, France has fallen. At first, Nicolette's world seems more or less the same despite the occupation. She and her best friend, Jules, still spend their days after school racing around Paris on their bikes and their evenings rushing through homework when they'd rather be riding. But as the months pass, the Third Reich tightens its hold on France and it becomes clear just what is at stake. Nicolette and Jules are drawn into a growing resistance movement, determined to do their part to fight back. It's a deadly secret they'll have to keep from everyone, including their families. Nicolette's own father works for local law enforcement, which is now under Nazi control, and who knows what might happen if anyone found out she joined the Resistance. But as Hitler's empire grows, no-one can escape the horrors of war. Including Nicolette.

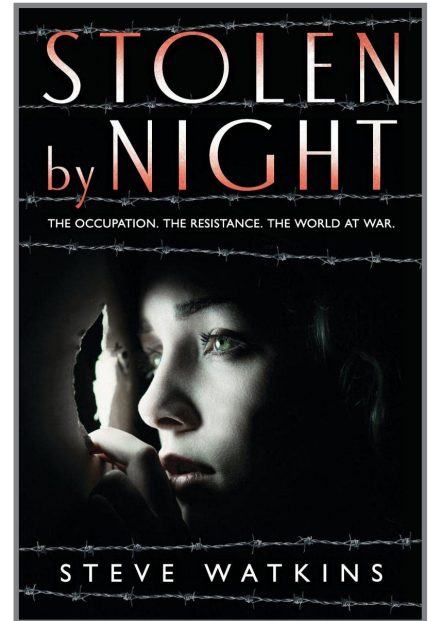
One night, she vanishes without a trace, taken from the street by Nazi soldiers and declared an enemy of the state. Soon, Nicolette finds herself confronting the very heart of Hitler's plans, bearing witness not just to the atrocities, but also to the courage, bravery and hope that can emerge in even the darkest times. And it is in these small but powerful moments that Nicolette realises her greatest weapon against the Nazis: to live, so she can tell the world the truth of what happened. But can one girl survive what was designed to destroy so many?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steve Watkins is the author of the young adult novels *On Blood Road*, *Juvie*, *What Comes After*, *Great Falls*, as well as the middle-grade novels *Down Sand Mountain*, *Sink or Swim*, and the *Ghosts of War* series. A former professor of journalism, creative writing and Vietnam War literature, Steve co-founded and helps a non-profit yoga studio and works with an urban reforestation organisation in his hometown of Fredericksburg, Virginia.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:



- What mood and emotive state does the artwork on the cover convey?
 - What genre do you think this book is likely to be?
 - When and where do you think this novel is set?
 - Who can you see in the cover artwork, and what do they seem to be doing?
 - What symbolism is used in the cover artwork, and how does it complement the meaning of the title?
 - What do you predict is likely to happen in this novel?
- Paris is Nicolette's home, and is where all the action in the first part of the novel takes place. In pairs or small groups, research online or in the library and try to locate a comprehensive map of Paris. As you read the novel, mark on the map the various landmarks, places and districts that Nicolette mentions. You might need to research further to find a map of Paris from the 1940s or earlier, as modern maps will be markedly different in a lot of ways. If you can't locate places mentioned, research that specific location to see if, when and in what way it has changed since 1940.
 - Search online for street views of some of the older areas of Paris where the young resistance fighters hide and avoid the German soldiers. Choose one view and write a brief descriptive piece sharing what you can see in the image. Illustrate your writing with a sketch of at least part of the image.
 - When the Germans first invade France, Nicolette's father is adamant that it will not be a universally bad thing, he insists that if everyone just cooperates then they will soon go back across the Rhine, and leave a more orderly France under German administration behind them, because after all 'The trains now run on time in Germany.' (p 31) Why do you think that he is so insistent on sharing this viewpoint with his family? Historically, Nicolette's Papa was far from alone in holding these beliefs. As a class, discuss how and why someone in the late 1930s and early 1940s might have come to this type of conclusion. Consider in your discussion what was commonly known about Nazi Germany at the time, and which groups of people would have been most susceptible to this viewpoint and why. How accurate do you think his assessment of the Nazi regime and Hitler's intentions was?
 - Nicolette's father's behaviour later on in the Occupation is both notably different from how he behaved at the beginning, as well as being unrecognisable as the same man from Nicolette's memories who taught her how to care for a bicycle and carried her on the back of his own. As a class, discuss what this behaviour might indicate as to his internal thoughts and feelings, as well as how he might be expected to have responded when Nicolette is taken by the Nazis and disappears. Individually, write a diary entry from the point of view of Nicolette's father, sharing how his opinions of the Nazis has changed from that he held at the beginning of the war, why it has changed, and what his hopes and fears are surrounding Nicolette's disappearance.
 - Some of the French army escaped the Nazi invasion, and fled to England from Dunkirk. As a class, discuss what you know of the importance of Dunkirk during WWII, and how what happened there had a profound effect on the outcome of the war. In pairs, research further, and use your research to help you write a brief factual piece outlining where Dunkirk is, what happened there, who was involved, and why it was important and to whom.
 - Nicolette hears of the Battle of Britain on the Ashers' hidden radio. What was the Battle of Britain, when did it occur, and why is it considered to be part of a pivotal event in history?
 - Why did the Ashers have to hide their radio? As a class, discuss the different purposes of censorship and news blackouts in wartime.
 - In the novel, part of Winston Churchill's famous speech is quoted when Nicolette hears it on the radio. Research online or in the library, and listen to or read the entirety of this speech. As a class, discuss what the emotive impact would have been on the population of the UK at a time when the prevailing belief was that they were facing imminent invasion.
 - Jules tells Nicolette that this is how the occupiers truly control the citizens of Paris: through deprivation, through the demands on our time, through the interminable lines. Do you agree with Jules? Why/why not and in what ways? As a class, discuss the impact on people of having to endure ongoing privation, fear and despair. Individually, write an opinion piece, exploring the emotional effect of ongoing oppression. Consider in your writing whether this was an intentional effect of the Occupation, or simply a byproduct of the fascist Nazi regime with its lack of care or concern for the individual. Use evidence from the text to support your assertions, highlighting the changes in behaviour shown by at least two characters over the course of the first half of the novel.
 - The people of Paris called the young folk in the resistance Bébés Terroristes. What is the English translation of this

phrase, and why, in your opinion, was it overwhelmingly young people who risked their lives in this way?

- Is there anything else that you can think of, that Nicolette, Jules and their friends could have done to protect themselves from capture, or from the effects of one of their group being captured?
- In pairs or small groups, research where the Vosges are, and what the climate is like there.
- Ricard quotes Friedrich Nietzsche to Nicolette, telling her: “When you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you.” Nicolette does not understand the meaning of this at first, but later, she comes to know what Nietzsche (and Ricard) meant. As a class, discuss what you believe this quote means, both Nietzsche’s original philosophical statement, and how Nicolette and Ricard apply it to their own experiences within the context of the events within the novel.
- Why, in your opinion, does Jules prioritise resistance over survival?
- Who do you believe is braver: Jules with his refusal to place his own survival ahead of his need to resist; or Nicolette, with her determination to survive no matter how much she suffers, so that she can one day inform the rest of the world of what has happened to those she has seen killed?
- Why do you think that individual Kapos changed over time, becoming crueler and more brutal? As a class, discuss the effect of dehumanising language and attitudes, and how it affects empathy and compassion.
- Why is it important that we learn and talk about the horrors of the Holocaust, and the Nazi’s reign of terror and brutality over Europe? What are the risks of allowing these events to fade from societal memory, and placating ourselves with the reassurance that ‘it couldn’t happen today’?
- How did reading this novel affect you personally? Individually, create an artwork, poem or short story that expresses at least one aspect of your emotional response to Nicolette’s story.

AUTHOR OF NOTES

RAE CARLYLE