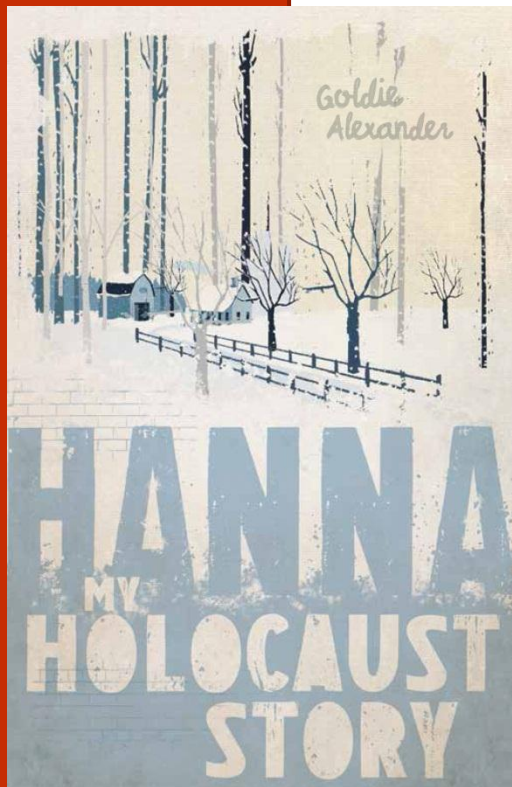


# MY HOLOCAUST STORY

# HANNA

GOLDIE ALEXANDER



One day, in 1939, Hanna Kaminsky overhears Papa warning her grandfather of Nazi Germany's threat to Poland. And then the thud comes—the Luftwaffe's bombs convince Hanna and her family that all is about to change.

Soon all the Jews in Warsaw are being rounded up. The Kaminskys manage to flee to a farmhouse where they hide in the attic for their safety. Increasingly stripped of their freedom, their lives and the world around them becomes marked by food rations, running and hiding, squalor, disease—and the fear of not making it through at all.

Amongst these conditions, Hanna finds some comfort in reading and gymnastics, but will they be enough to equip her in this bleak world and in the Warsaw Ghetto?

**My Holocaust Story: Hanna** provides a window into the austerity and inhumanity of the Holocaust, while also showing that hope can be found in incredible acts of kindness and in the power of the imagination.

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**NOTE: My Holocaust Story: Hanna** deals with the traumatic history of the Holocaust. Educators are advised to be mindful of students' personal circumstances and family heritage when commencing study of this title.

## TEACHER NOTES

- Consider the first section of the 1941 part of **My Holocaust Story: Hanna**, when Hanna doesn't know where the soldiers are taking her and her family and they are eventually taken to the ghetto (pp 3–8, ending with 'We were still alive.'). What

are some of the feelings and reactions Hanna and her family have to what is happening to them and in their surroundings? What impact did these events and Hanna's descriptions have when you first read them?

- As a class, discuss how **My Holocaust Story: Hanna** has contributed to students' understanding of the Holocaust. Select appropriate images of aspects and events mentioned in the novel such as the Star of David armband, Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass) and the ghetto conditions to widen historical discussion.
- Hanna's papa says 'Imagination is a powerful tool, never forget that.' Imagination and creativity become motivational forces for Hanna and Adam in an increasingly bleak environment. Do you think that Hanna's reading and gymnastics and Adam's violin playing were helpful for them? In what way? How do you think things would be different if they didn't have these outlets?
- While the Holocaust was marked with some of the most inhuman acts and miserable conditions, acts of kindness did exist and often came from unexpected places. Ask students which events and people they thought displayed kindness and compassion in the novel and why? Discuss Elza and Anya's role and expand the discussion on hidden children and their helpers during the Holocaust.
- We are never told who betrayed Elza and Anya's secret of hiding the Kaminskys, but there are some people that we are led to suspect. Do you think it matters that we don't find out? Do you think Jarek or Andre may have been the 'perpetrators' and why? Considering overall circumstances, do you think such an action is somewhat understandable or should it have never happened?
- A German soldier tells Hanna, 'This world is so removed from any kind of humanity. We are all in terrible danger, no matter what side of the wall we are on. No-one will ever be free of what is happening here.' What do you think are some of Hanna's and the soldier's feelings and unspoken thoughts in this scene? What do you consider to be the signs of humanity that the world is removed from during the Holocaust years (reflecting on the novel and your wider understanding of actual history)? Do you think humanity will ever be free of what happened during the Holocaust?

- Do you think Hanna changed through the course of the novel? What impact do the words 'pluck and audacity', which she takes from *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, have on her by the novel's end?
- Consider asking students to get into groups and create an underground newspaper that could have been read in the Warsaw ghetto, which balances news articles and notices with creative writing – poems, short plays and art.