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 Chicken House UK

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# HITLER'S ANGEL BY WILLIAM OSBORNE

## SYNOPSIS

Otto and Leni have escaped to England from Nazi Germany. They thought they were safe, but now the British want them to go back.

Dropped behind enemy lines, they embark on a secret operation. Their mission is to find and kidnap a girl who could bring down Hitler.

And so begins their bravest journey yet ...

## AUTHOR BACKGROUND

After studying at Cambridge University, William became a barrister but his career took a sharp swerve when he switched to scriptwriting in Hollywood.

He has worked on over 60 movies including *Twins*, *Goldeneye* and *The Mummy*. He now lives in London where he continues to write films and books.

*Hitler's Angel* is his first book for Chicken House.



# AUTHOR MOTIVATION

***You've had an exciting career already as a screenwriter, what made you want to write children's books?***

I think primarily, because I had children. My eldest is now fifteen and my youngest is seven, so I've had quite a long time reading children's books to them and I had a long time scriptwriting so I thought this would be a wonderful time in my life to change direction and start to write stories, I suppose selfishly for my children, but also for a wider audience. This seemed the perfect opportunity to do it and I was fortunate enough to come up with an idea that I thought was a great idea for a children's book.

***Is writing a novel very different from writing a film script?***

Yes it is, and it proved to be a very different experience from the off. Obviously when you write a film script, it has sort of been described as writing a set of instructions as to how to put up a piece of furniture, but when you come to write a book (obviously there are more words) but you have to really focus differently on how you're telling the story. I think what is true for both forms, screen-writing and book, the most important thing which remains the same for them both is the story. You've got to have a great story and if you can have a great story then, I've been lucky enough with Chicken House to have had editors who have really helped me with turning it from what I think was quite 'screen-play' in the first draft to a really polished book in its finished edition.

***Hitler's Angel is set in 1940's wartime. Have you always been fascinated by World War 2?***

Yes, I think I have actually! I mean I was born in 1960, which is only fifteen years after it had finished (the war) and now it seems like ancient history. But when I was growing up, it was still very relevant and all the books that were being written in the 60's and a lot of the films, some of the great war films (*Battle of Britain, Where Eagles Dare*, etc) were being made so that kind of kept my interest as a child and then I was very interested in history and then since I've become an adult I have always kept reading about the subject. I think it is an amazing part of history, for terrible reasons but it also has incredible stories in it.



***Did you have any reservations about focusing your story on Adolf Hitler?***

Yes I did, I think (I hope) I've treated it sensitively because it is a difficult period of history for millions of people still and I don't want to exploit Hitler in any way that would seem not to take account of his 'evilness' and his role in history so I hope I've trodden carefully around the subject and I do think it is something that you have to be very much aware of when you're writing about the period, if you're going to use him in a story.

***It's obvious from the book that you love writing action, did you have a favourite action hero when growing up?***

Yes I did, it was James Bond and I suppose that has remained pretty true for the last forty years but when I was growing up, it was really about the books and not so much about the films and now I suppose what has happened is that James Bond is really about the film. The books are sort of like historical novels now anyway, but when I was growing up, any other kind of thriller writer from that period I used to love reading.

## **THEMES**

- History
- Friendship
- Loyalty

## **WRITING PROMPTS/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Before you read this book, take a look at the front cover. On it is a quotation from Bear Grylls, the famous ex-SAS adventurer. Why do you think that quotation has been chosen? Why do you think Bear Grylls likes this book? Is it to do with the type of book? What do you expect from this story when you look at the cover illustration and the type of lettering used? Discuss with your group.

2. At the beginning of the book there is a map of Bavaria in 1941. Do you think the children make a realistic journey in the story? Find a map of Germany and something with which to measure distance (milometer, string



and ruler), and trace Otto and Leni's route.

3. When Otto is swimming out to the rescue boat at Dunkirk (page 3), he will not let go of his father's watch even when he thinks he might drown. Can you explain this action once you have read more of the story? Is there an object that you would hang on to, even if it might be dangerous to do so?
4. What do you know about Rudolf Hess and his journey to Britain during the Second World War? What do you know about Winston Churchill and his leadership? Write a short paragraph about each of them, using your research. What do you think they might say to each other? Try this out with a partner in a drama lesson.
5. Otto is unhappy at his school and Catchpole was nasty to him, but do you think it was right for Otto to have punched him (page 17)? Is it ever acceptable to hit someone? Do your friends agree with you?
6. Now you have read more of the book, can you suggest why the publisher suggested on the back cover that people should read page 44? Choose a single page from another novel that you have read that could do a similar job. Explain to a partner why you have chosen that page, and compare your choice with that of your partner.
7. Otto falls out of the sailing dinghy when an aeroplane flies very low over it (page 84). Why does he get so upset? Is there anything that would remind you, in a similar way, of a time when you were either very frightened or very happy? Discuss with a partner or with others in your group
8. Otto and Leni are taught to use a secret code by flashing their torches (page 106). Why do they need to do this? Can you invent a similar code? How could you communicate with someone else without making any noise?
9. The tension of the story increases when Leni is trying to rescue Angelika from her cell (chapter 17). Can you suggest how the author has achieved this atmosphere? Which words or phrases give you that feeling of danger? Discuss with a partner.
10. Angelika turned out to be much braver than Otto and Leni expected (page 123), even though she is very young. Have you ever been surprised by courage in yourself or a friend? Write a paragraph describing it.



11. Otto, Leni and Angelika have to disguise themselves quickly. How do they do this? What would be the quickest and easiest way for you to disguise yourself?
12. Bletchley Park, mentioned on page 139, was Britain's top secret, code-breaking centre in the Second World War. See what you can find out about it in books or on the internet. Have fun making codes and sending messages. Can you 'break' your partner's code?
13. What do you think is meant by 'Loose Lips Sink Ships' (page 142)? Can you invent other slogans to encourage others to do something?
14. Imagine you are one of the three children on the train (page 166). You need a story to explain your reason for travelling. Can you act out such a situation in a drama lesson, using chairs for the train compartment, or write your own version? Is there ever a time when it is right to tell lies? Discuss with a partner.
15. What do you think the author is suggesting on page 193? Are Otto and Leni falling in love? How do you know? Do you think this improves the story or not?
16. Otto and Leni desperately discuss two options in the barn (page 200). With a partner, act out the debate: to leave Angelika or complete the mission as expected. Spend time thinking about points you could use, making notes. Remember the children have to talk quietly - you cannot shout as you might be overheard!
17. In this book Leni often saves the situation when Otto has got into trouble (page 222). In many books and films it is the male characters who are given the brave roles and the girls who are rescued. Why do you think the author has written this story in a different way? Can you give examples of other places in the story where Leni has saved the day?
18. Imagine you are sitting in the sidecar of the motorcycle combination (page 227). Describe what happens and how it feels as you roar towards Heydrich and then on into the darkness. Make the description as exciting as you can!
19. On page 234 Otto reveals that he has a cyanide capsule in his shoe that could kill Angelika. For a moment Leni is not sure what he will do. They are in great danger, but do you think Otto would really kill her? Was



MacPherson right to hide giving the capsule to Otto from Leni? Why do you think he did that?

**20.** There are some hints in the story about who Angelika's parents really are. Have you noticed any? Can you list them?

**21.** The children think they might be landing near Davos in Switzerland (page 252). Find the town of Davos on a map and see if you can discover more about it either in a book or on the internet. What is it famous for now? On a good map you might be able to find the mountain Piz Buin which marks the border of Germany and Switzerland.

It must be terrifying to be engulfed in an avalanche (page 271). Could you invent a mime or dance sequence about being caught by an avalanche and struggling to get out and rescue others?

**22.** There is another difficult decision to be made when Leni and Angelika reach the rope bridge (page 290). Do you think they made the right decision? Discuss with a partner.

**23.** On page 307 Otto quotes, *'The end justifies the means.'* Do you think he means what he says? What does it mean in the context of this story? Do you agree with MacPherson? Does he really believe it?

