

Teacher's resource for Sonia's Song by Sonia Korn-Grimani

Questions for reading comprehension and analysis

Verse One- *Sonia's Song* by Sonia Korn-Grimani Reading Comprehension Worksheet

Geography

Countries:

Germany
Poland

Cities:

Wuppertal, Germany (now Wuppertal-Elberfeld)
Lask, Poland
Lodz, Poland
Essen, Germany
Pabjanice, Poland

Vocabulary

Chancellor
boycott
regime
The Bund –General Jewish Labor Bund
Schwaebabahn
Herr, Frau
Hasidic
Orthodox
anti-Semetic
Mein Kampf
Volksschule
Aryanization
Hitler Jugend

Events:

Hitler's ascension to power in 1933
Nuremburg Laws
1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin

Ch. 1

Why did Sonia's Mother Chawa (Eva) move to Germany?

Why was Sonia's father Jacob prevented from going to college to study journalism?

Ch. 2

Who became Chancellor of Germany in January 1933?

What were the Nuremberg Laws, and to whom did they apply to in Germany? How did the Nuremberg Laws affect Sonia's family?

Ch. 3

What does Hitler carefully remove before foreign visitors and dignitaries arrive for the the 1936 Summer Olympic games in Berlin?

After dropping of Sonia's brother at school, Sonia and her Mother suddenly become trapped in a crowd. How does Sonia know that they are in danger? What do they do to escape?

Ch. 4

What does Sonia overhear when listening to her mother and the other adults talking?

Why are the curtains closed in the middle of the afternoon?

Why do the people in the group stagger their departure?

Why does everyone in the group have to be home by 8 p.m.?

Why does Sonia's father not go with the rest of the family to Poland?

How does Mother act differently on the train? Why do you think she does this?

What does Mother try to convince her relatives to do? What is Grandfather's response?

Ch. 5

How does life change for Sonia and her family after their return to Germany? How does this reflect the changing social situation for Jewish people in Germany at this time?

What does Sonia see in Frau Rohland's apartment on Christmas Eve? How does this contrast with Sonia's family's apartment and how does this make Sonia feel?

Ch. 6

Why does Sonia watch the other children from the window? Why can't she join them?

What gift does Mother give Sonia? How does this gift help Sonia?

Ch. 7

Why are Sonia and Heini not allowed to go to public school anymore? Where must Sonia and Heini go to school and in what language must they be taught? How does this put Sonia and the other children at a disadvantage?

Where else can Sonia and Heini no longer go?

What does the boy in the uniform yell when he notices Sonia and Heini playing on their front step? What does the boy encourage the other children to do? How do the adults watching the scene react? Do you think their reaction is strange?

Why is Sonia's stay at the hospital dangerous for her and her family? What could the hospital do if they discover her identity?

Ch. 8

Where has Mother gone? Why was she taken? What do Sonia and Heini try to do to get her back? Are they successful?

What happens to the Polish deportees?

What happens to Mother?

Ch. 9

Where does Sonia go after taking the coin from the windowsill? What does she notice darkening the sky?

Describe the scene that Sonia sees that afternoon on November 10, 1938.

Verse Two- *Sonia's Song* by Sonia Korn-Grimani
Reading Comprehension Worksheet

Vocabulary

smugglers
Vehrmacht
Fifth Columnist
Propaganda
abate
waning, waxing
Monsieur, Madame

Geography

Countries: Belgium
France
Spain
Portugal

Cities: Aachen
Brussels
Dunkerque (also spelled Dunkirk)
Paris-Plage (Pas-de-Calais Seafront)
Amiens
Paris
Berchem-Saint Agathe

Events

Kristallnacht
Battle of Dunkerque (Dunkirk)
Battle of Belgium/ Battle of France

Ch.10

What is the significance of the date November 9, 1938 in history? What happened that night?

What triggered this event? Do you think this incident was the real reason?

What happened to Father's store?

What happened to Sonia's friend Leo? How does Sonia react when she hears the news?

What does Mother's underground contact warn her to do?

What must Jewish people give up if they declare their intention to leave Germany? How does this make their departure more difficult?

What document does Mother receive on May 24, 1939? What does it declare? What must Sonia and her family do by June 30? Why isn't Father included in the document?

What plans does Mother make for Sonia's and Heini's departure? Why do you think Mother kept it a secret from Sonia and Heini until the last minute? Why couldn't the whole family leave together?

Who shows up at Sonia's door at five o'clock?

Where do the smugglers leave Sonia and Heini?

What must Sonia and Heini do when they hear a train?

How long do Sonia and Heini walk to get to the Belgian border?

Who discovers them at the border?

What did Sonia's mother hide in the lining of Sonia's jacket pocket?

Ch.11

Who is "the Last Customer?"

Why didn't Mother travel with Sonia and Heini, and how did that put her more at risk?

What happened to Mother after Sonia and Heini left with the smugglers?

What item of special significance to Sonia did the looters take?

Ch. 12

How does life in Belgium contrast with life in Germany for Sonia and her family?

As undocumented refugees, what are Sonia's parents not allowed to do?

How does Mother make ends meet?

What is Sonia's first impression of her classmates?

Why are Sonia's schoolmates weary of her at first?

What do they learn what will happen in May 1940?

Ch. 13

What are Mother's plans for escape? How much time do they think they have? How much time do they really have? What didn't Mother account for?

What wakes up Sonia and Heini the next morning?

How has Mother saved up money for their escape?

Describe what Sonia sees, hears and smells when she and the other refugees arrive in Dunkerque.

Once they get into Dunkerque, where does Sonia's family try to go next? Where do the other families in the group decide to go?

What are the planes targeting? How does this affect Sonia's family's plans? How does it affect those trying to leave by boat for England?

Ch. 14

Where does Sonia and her family spend the night after the train station is bombarded?

Why do you think the bombing has abated?

What do they learn the next morning about the boats that left the port?

Why can't they take the train?

Describe the scene on the road going south out of Dunkerque.

What do the planes start to target after Sonia and the others reach Pas-de-Calais?

What does Mother throw over their heads to protect them?

What does Sonia see from the ditch?

Where are the refugees sleeping at night? How are they getting food?

How does the farmer's wife react to Mother after Mother tells her that she is Jewish?

Who does the group spot driving down from the top of the hill?

How does Mother take charge?

How long is Sonia, her family, and the group of refugees out on the road between Arras and Amiens?

How are the refugees treated?

Who helps them get back to Brussels? How does he propose they get there?

Why do you think the driver is driving extra fast?

Why do Sonia and Heini have to attend Flemish classes despite their Mother's protestations?
How do the children in class react to Sonia and Heini?

Ch. 15

What is the movie shown in the movie house? Who is the hero, and who is the villain? What happens to the villain at the end of the movie and what is the audience's reaction?

What are some examples of the anti-Semitic decrees beginning to take hold in Belgium by 1942?

What does Mother do to ensure that she can still travel and go out in public? Who helps her by entering into the deception?

What does the Decree of May 27, 1942 state?

How many hiding places have Sonia and her family move to in the summer of 1942? Why did they have to move so frequently?

Verse Three- *Sonia's Song* by Sonia Korn-Grimani
Reading Comprehension Worksheet

Vocabulary

Underground
rationing
Resistance
Gestapo
round-ups
extermination camps
"Train of Death"
Allies
Free French Forces

Geography

Ottignies, Belgium
Wavre, Belgium
Malines, Belgium
Antwerp, Belgium
Liège, Belgium
Normandy, France
London, England

Events

June 6 1944—Allied liberation of Northern France and Normandy
Liberation of Paris

Ch. 16

Why can't Father venture outside of the house? What might happen to him if he did?

What strikes Sonia as odd about *Le Joli Coin* upon first seeing it?

What names does Mother introduce herself, Sonia and Heini as? Why does she do this?

Why do you think Madame J. says initially that she will not take the children? What changes her mind?

What rooms are off limits to the orphans?

Ch. 17

How does life change for Sonia in the orphanage?

How does Sonia become part of Madame J's 'elite' group?

Ch. 18

What does Sonia do to help adapt to life at the orphanage, even though it is forbidden by Madame J.?

What do the children see when they peer into the window at Madame J.'s dining room?

How do you suppose Madame J. got luxurious food for the dinner with Abbé Vaes when there is a food shortage, rationing, and the children are going hungry?

Ch. 19

Why does Sonia try to disguise her sickness from her mother?

Who does Mother plan to send to check-up on the orphanage and what important question does she want to find out?

Which kindhearted neighbors try to help the orphans and how do they try to help? Are they successful?

How does Madame J. react after the children return from visiting the nuns in Wavre?

Ch. 20

Why does Madame J. insist the children convert to Catholicism?

What name does Madame J. give Sonia?

Why do you think Madame J. encourages the orphans to sing publicly if it puts the children at risk of being discovered? Do you agree or disagree with Madame J.'s judgment?

What does Sonia promise herself to learn when the war is over? Do you think she will keep her promise?

Ch. 21

What items does Sonia discover in Madame J.'s room? Why do you think these items are there and where do you think she got them?

How does Sonia react? How would you have reacted?

How do Madame J. and Sonia react to each other after Sonia returns from the room? Would you have reacted in the same way? What would you have said?

Where do you think the money for building the new playroom and wing on the orphanage came from?

Do you think it was right for Madame J. to make Sonia a keeper of her secret? Do you believe Madame J.'s story? Would you have kept the secret?

Ch. 22

Why do you think Sonia did not reveal the truth to Madame D. when she came to ask questions about if the children were hungry?

Why do you think that Madame J. refused to leave Madame D. alone with Sonia, Heini, Rosa and Albert?

Why does Sonia still not reveal Madame J.'s secret to her mother? What would you have done?

Ch. 23

What does Sonia find as odd in Madame J.'s actions when Ottignies is being bombed?

Why do you think Madame J. left the orphans alone during the bombing raid?

What vision does Sonia see in the dark while she and the other children are waiting in the basement?

What are the names of the four new boys to Le Joli Coin? How do they help the orphans?

Do you think that the four new boys have an ulterior motive for staying at the orphanage?

After the performance at the Town Hall in Ottignies, Sonia makes a near-fatal mistake. What was this mistake, what could have been the repercussions for her and the other orphans?

How do Sonia and Heini smooth over her indiscretion? What do you think the soldiers were thinking?

What do the children find in the forest in the spring of 1944? Where did the item come from?

What does the item symbolize for Sonia?

Ch. 24

Why do you think Madame J. tries to keep news of the liberation from the children? What does she tell the children instead?

How does the danger intensify for the orphans at Le Joli Coin that summer?

Who do the children see encroaching on the grounds and approaching the orphanage, and what are they looking for?

What does Paula tell the children to do?

What have Pélican, Élan, Occapi and Pinson seen from the trees? Why do you think the German soldiers did this?

What does Sonia notice around the neck of the American soldier and how does this affect her?

Verse Four- *Sonia's Song* by Sonia Korn-Grimani
Reading Comprehension Worksheet

Vocabulary

V1, V2 rockets
immigrate
emigrate
refugee

Geography

The Ardennes
Bastogne
Genoa, Italy
Naples, Italy
Mediterranean Sea
Suez Canal
Red Sea
Ceylon (Sri Lanka)
Melbourne, Australia
Alexandria, Egypt
Corfu, Greece
South Africa
Hong Kong
Sydney, Australia
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Thailand

Events

Battle of the Bulge/ Ardennes Offensive December 1944-Jan 1945
Patton's victory at Bastogne
Israel Statehood 1948

Ch. 25

What is stamped on Sonia's identity papers and what does this mean? How will this affect Sonia and her family?

Why does Father order Heini back from Paris?

Ch. 26

How does Sonia's new faith compare with those of her parents after she comes back from the orphanage? Why do you think Sonia held onto her new faith with such conviction?

Where (in downtown Brussels) does Father go to travel everyday? What is he looking for there? What does he finally find?

Ch. 27

How did music unite the people onboard the S.S. Napoli? Describe the scene in your own words.

How did Sonia keep in touch with her friends from Le Joli Coin? Where did Albert and Rehla emigrate to, and how was their experiences similar or dissimilar to Sonia's in Australia?

Ch. 28

How has Sonia's experience during the war help her in Australia?

Ch. 29

What were a few of the effects of the intense wave of immigration to Australia by European and Asian refugees after the war?

Ch. 30

Why did Sonia's Mother return to Germany after the war? What was she hoping to get back?

Who does Sonia's Mother meet in Düsseldorf? What does he say to her and what is her reaction?

What is Sonia's reaction when she sees their old apartment building in Wuppertal? Why doesn't Sonia want to go inside?

How does the old doctor's reaction compare with that of their old neighbors, and how does that reflect on the changing norms of German society after the war?

How has Madame J. changed since we last saw her? How has Sonia?

What similarities does Sonia notice in the current children at the orphanage compared to her own experience?

Epilogue

What event caused Sonia to want to write her memoir?

Why does she consider herself “Jewish with a small ‘j’”?

By the end of the book, does Sonia forgive Madame J.? What would you have done in Sonia’s shoes?

The book is divided into 4 major sections. What are these sections called and why do you think they are called this?

Recommended activities

Do you have a parent, grandparent, or other elder relative who loves to tell stories about his/her youth? Record him or her telling you some favorite stories from when he/she was your age. Transcribe them and turn them into a story, writing from 1st person point of view.

Do your students have questions for Sonia? Send student’s questions for Sonia to song@claygrouse.com.