

A DISCUSSION GUIDE TO



FOLLOW-UP TO THE BESTSELLING
**MAX IN THE
HOUSE OF SPIES!**



ABOUT THE BOOK

MAX BRETZFELD IS BACK IN BERLIN, WHERE HIS MOST DANGEROUS MISSION IS ABOUT TO BEGIN! THE THRILLING CONCLUSION TO THE WORLD WAR II SPY DUOLOGY THAT BEGAN WITH MAX IN THE HOUSE OF SPIES.

Max is on a mission.
Well, two missions.

One has been assigned by his British spymasters: Infiltrate the Funkhaus, the center of Nazi radio and propaganda.

The other they have forbidden: Find his parents.

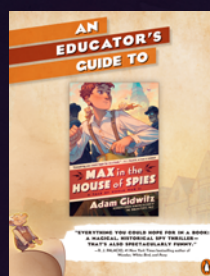
Max Bretzfeld was willing to do anything to return to Germany, even become a British spy. Training complete and forged papers in hand, the radio wunderkind's missions have begun. But nothing is as he expected. His parents are missing. Nazi intelligence is watching him. And the lines between lies and truth are becoming more blurred every day. Max will need every tool at his disposal, from his radio expertise and spy training to the help of Berg and Stein, the immortal creatures living on his shoulders. Even so, there's no guarantee he'll make it out of Berlin alive.

★ "A heartrending
MASTERPIECE of . . .
historical fiction."

— *Booklist*, starred review

★ "A **NAIL-BITING, LAUGH-OUT LOUD, STOP-AND-THINK READ.**"

— *School Library Journal*, starred review



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THE GUIDE
FOR BOOK 1**

★ "A **HEADLONG THRILLER** laced with provocative and topical historical truths."

— *Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ "A **BRILLIANTLY ENGINEERED.**"

— *The Horn Book*, starred review



This guide was written by Talya Sokoll and Angie Manfredi.

TALYA SOKOLL is a school librarian right outside of Boston. They love to read and have served on a number of award committees, including the Stonewall Children's & Young Adult Literature Award, the Sydney Taylor Book Award, the Morris Award, and the Rainbow Book List. Never in their wildest dreams could they have imagined that they would get to write resource guides for children's literature. They are the faculty advisor to the Jewish affinity group at their school and are currently pursuing a master's of Jewish professional studies at Gratz College so that they can continue their lifelong journey as a student. They are passionate about Jewish history, pickles, and the daily reminder that "it is not incumbent upon you to complete the task, but neither are you at liberty to desist from it" (Pirkei Avot 2:16).

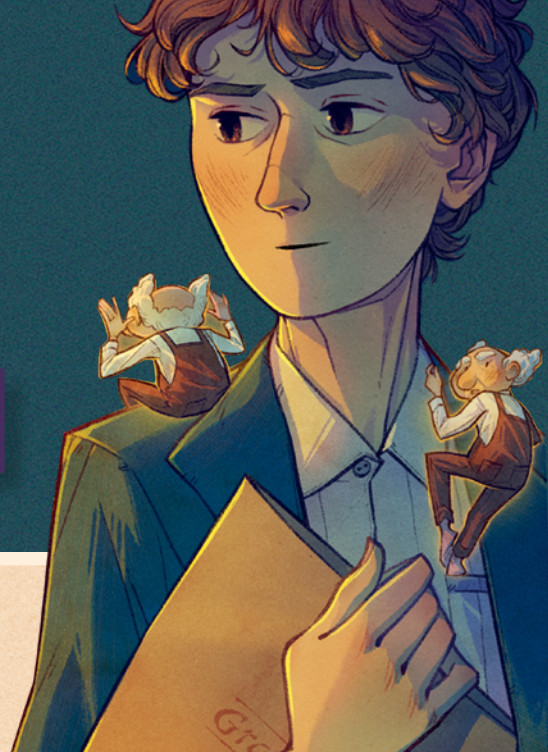
ANGIE MANFREDI is a middle school librarian in the Southwest. She has worked in public, special, and school libraries for seventeen years. She has created educator guides for Penguin Random House, Scholastic, and HarperCollins, and her writing has appeared in *Romper*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *American Libraries*, and *School Library Journal*. In librarianship, her strengths include readers' advisory and programming. She has a special interest in collection development with an equity-focused lens and supporting the right of all youth to see the world accurately reflected in the books they read, especially those that empower and uplift their lived experiences. You can find her online at www.fatgirlreading.com and @misskubelik.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 At the beginning of the book, when Max returns to Berlin and his old apartment, many things look the same. Stein and Berg even remember hundreds of years of history there. What are some things that have changed, both obvious and maybe harder to see?
- 2 Right away, Max hears a radio broadcast from the Ministry of Propaganda and Popular Enlightenment (p. 32). Hans Fritzsche says all the opinion polls show "one hundred percent" of people have warm feelings about Adolf Hitler. Why is the news reporting these numbers? Who do these reports help or reassure? Who are these reports for?
- 3 Pastor Andreas tells Max his story of how life changed in Germany after WWI. He concludes with: "Better to believe lies and live proudly than believe the truth and have to eat tree roots for dinner" (p. 37). Do you agree? Do you think the choice is ever that easy, or are there other considerations that are part of it, or even potential consequences? What might they be? What would you choose?
- 4 Early on, Max is charged with befriending Freddie so that he can gather more intel for the British. Berg and Stein discuss this task, with Berg saying, "So you are going to use that boy Freddie? You are going to twist him around your finger, then betray him?" And Stein replies, "So what, Max is doing the same thing the Nazis do: using someone to achieve a goal. What do the philosophers say? The *ends* justify the *means*?" (pp. 88–89). Do you think that what Max is doing is similar to what the Nazis did? Why or why not? Does it make it okay for him to lie to Freddie because he is doing it for the "right side"? How does Max's treatment of others change over the course of the book? What does he realize about himself and others, like Freddie?
- 5 Berg asks Max, "To defeat a monster, Max, do you have to *become* one?" What do you think? Why yes or no?
- 6 Max has moments when German propaganda makes him question what's right. That's when Stein asks him to consider: "So how do you compare evil?" (p. 108). What answers do Berg and Stein provide for this dilemma? How do you think this question can be answered? Can it be answered?
- 7 There is a lot of discussion about the power of media in shaping how people view others. We see this propaganda at work in the views of many characters. How do Goebbels and the others who work at the state radio shape public opinion of Jewish people to serve their own purposes? How does Max disrupt that? Can you think of any other examples throughout history of the media being used to create a specific kind of narrative about a group of people? How do those narratives impact how we treat people who are different than us? How do we recognize and fight back against propaganda?
- 8 Why does Herr Pfeiffer ultimately trust Max and share his true story with him? How does that sharing change Max?
- 9 Max feels confused that Herr Pfeiffer "admires" Nazis like Hans Fritzsche, but Herr Pfeiffer tries to explain the difference between "admiration" and "fear" (p. 119). How does this change what you think about the actions of some characters? How does it help Max understand what is happening in Germany? What do you think the difference is?
- 10 How do Rudi and the other Hitler Youth react to Max attacking Peter? Were you surprised?
- 11 When Max realizes that perhaps for once he is the bully, he thinks that it feels "weirdly good" (p. 145). Do you think this is a feeling that will last?
- 12 When Max gets inside the Funkhaus, Herr Diewerge tells him, "This is *not* a lie. This is an *exaggeration*" (p. 153). Do you think all the people in Germany know this? Believe it? What about the people working in the Funkhaus? What does Max learn about this line of thinking?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)



- 13** Melita Maschmann tells Max that there are “feelings we can’t afford to have” (p. 166). Think of a character from this book and then describe what they do about feelings they might not be able to afford.
- 14** What did you think of von Roenne’s confession to Max (p. 202)? Were you surprised? Did what he said make sense to you? Did you feel like you could trust him?
- 15** When Max meets Hitler, he contemplates killing him. He asks himself if killing Hitler in that moment would “stop the lies” or if it would “make Hitler a martyr” (p. 250). Why did Max ultimately decide not to try to kill Hitler in that moment? Was that the right decision? Why or why not?
- 16** Max thinks he knows what the antidote to “The Big Lie” is (p. 251) and that it’s very simple. What do you think the antidote is? Do you think there’s more than one solution?
- 17** When did you realize that Stein and Berg were gone? What do you think was ultimately their true purpose for latching onto Max? How do you think Stein and Berg decide where to go? How did that realization make Max feel? How did it make you feel?
- 18** Pastor Andreas protects Max and helps him in various ways throughout the book. At the end of the story, Max describes Pastor Andreas as a resister who has to be very careful: “He resisted the Nazis by helping us—but in every other aspect of his life, he collaborates. He doesn’t know what else to do” (p. 297). Is Pastor Andreas a resister? A collaborator? Both? What are other ways, big and small, that characters resist the Nazis?
- 19** In chapter 54, Max lists many reasons that the Germans he met collaborate, fail to resist, or even actively support the Nazis. Did you find any of these reasons compelling? Did you relate to any of them? How do you think they will reflect on them after the war is over?
- 20** Max is surprised to learn, at the end of the story, that Uncle Ewen had a secret mission he was hoping Max would complete in addition to infiltrating the Funkhaus. What was this mission? Why was Max chosen for it (even though he didn’t know it)? How did he feel, ultimately, about being part of Uncle Ewen’s plan to find proof of the concentration camps? Why did Uncle Ewen feel it was necessary to have this be a part of Max’s mission? How does Max’s eyewitness account change the possibility of the response from the US and Great Britain?
- 21** Uncle Ewen reveals to Max that he suspects Hitler believing his own lies will lead to his downfall. There is much in this book about the power, and the danger, of lies. How does this tie back to Uncle Ewen’s warning and what Max has observed?
- 22** How does Max change over the course of the second book? Is it for the better? For worse? Both? What causes those changes?
- 23** What about his journey surprised you?

ACTIVITIES

DESIGN YOUR OWN RADIO BROADCAST

Max loves tinkering with radios and spends a lot of time at the Funkhaus. While there, Max learns how the Germans used the radio for propaganda. However, he also sees how people like Herr Pfeiffer use the radio as a lifeline to music and news from outside the rigid walls of the Third Reich. Ultimately, Max uses the radio to broadcast his message of hope and perseverance across Germany. For this activity, pick one of two options:

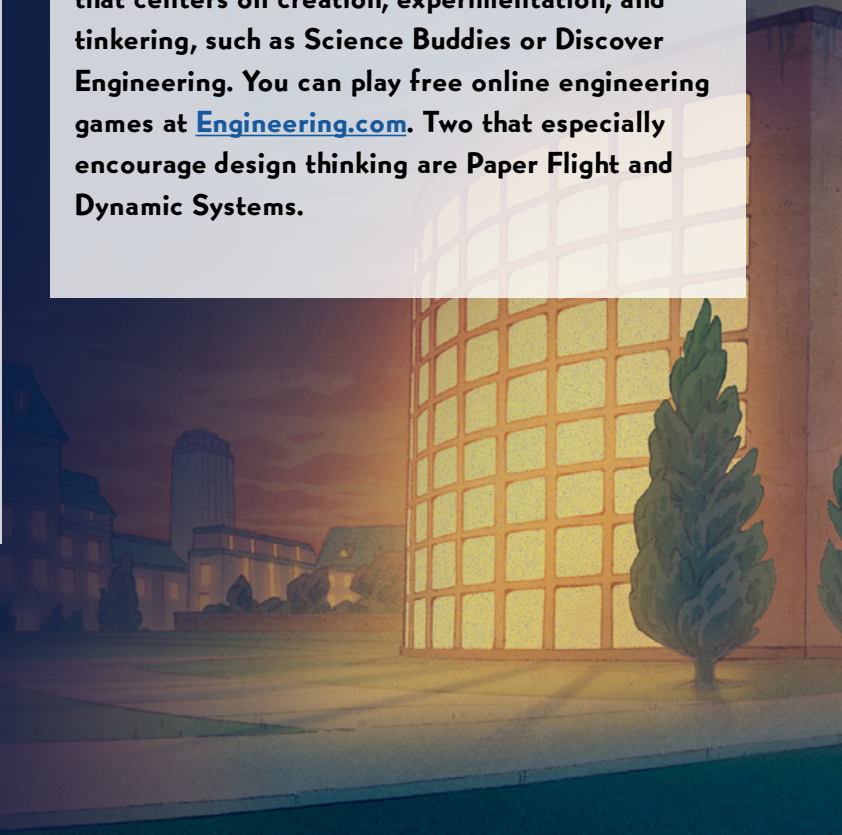
- ❖ Imagine that you are growing up during World War II, either in Germany or the United States. You have been given ninety seconds to write an inspiring radio broadcast that will be heard all over the country. What would you say? What message(s) would you want to convey? Write a ninety-second speech and give it in front of your classmates.
- ❖ Think of an issue that affects you now, as a young person. Write a ninety-second speech advocating for why others should care about it and why it matters.

A technology-based expansion for this activity could involve recording your own versions of these podcasts. How could you format or present them? How does your delivery impact your message and how does Max witness that firsthand with Hans Fritzsche?



MAKE A CONNECTION

One of Max's skills is tinkering and repairing circuits. This is a good chance to look for collaboration opportunities in your school or community. Reach out to your librarian or any maker class at your school. What activities do they have for circuits or building? Your public library may also be open to makerspace collaboration. Look to online resources that gather STEM project ideas to see what you can create in your own class that centers on creation, experimentation, and tinkering, such as Science Buddies or Discover Engineering. You can play free online engineering games at [Engineering.com](https://www.engineering.com). Two that especially encourage design thinking are Paper Flight and Dynamic Systems.



ACTIVITIES

(CONTINUED)



LEARN ABOUT RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS

There were many ways that people resisted Hitler, the Nazis, and the oppressive government of the Third Reich. Some of these methods of resistance were very big and some were smaller. Many groups of young people cropped up in Germany and other places to provide a counterpoint to the hatred and vitriol being spewed forth. Break up into pairs and pick one of the following groups to teach your classmates about through a presentation. Consider the following questions:

- ❖ What was the mission of this group?
- ❖ Who took part in the group?
- ❖ Why did they care about resisting the Nazis?
- ❖ How did they get their message across?
- ❖ What danger did they face?

GET STARTED by using the links below, but try to use your library resources to find additional primary and secondary sources.

- ❖ [Edelweiss Pirates](#)
- ❖ [Sophie Scholl and the White Rose](#)
- ❖ [Leipzig Meuten](#)
- ❖ [Swing Kids](#)

JUST IN TIME

We've included a timeline for important historical events connected to this book (see next page for timeline). Timelines are a great way to help students organize their understanding of a story and structure and can also get them talking about character development and the stakes in the story. Here are some possible timeline activities:

- ❖ Make a copy of the included timeline and remove the dates. Have students work together in small groups to organize the timeline. Who can get closest to the right order?
- ❖ Use the copy without dates and give each student one event. Can they arrange themselves in the right order? Can their classmates put them in order? This can be a good way to get everyone up and moving.
- ❖ You can find other timelines of WWII and use them in these ways to enhance the background understanding of the events of this book.
- ❖ Have your students create a timeline of the events just in the book. Tell them not to worry about dates but to put the events of Max's experience in the order of how he experienced them, even if that's not the order we learned about them. You can then discuss how and why the author structured the timeline as he did. Why do we not find out about Max's visit with his mother until later in the book? How does this change the impact? Students can be creative with this part—encourage them to illustrate or color-code their book timelines.

ACTIVITIES

(CONTINUED)



TIMELINE

APRIL 7, 1933

The first law restricting Jewish participation in public life in Nazi Germany is passed

NOVEMBER 9, 1938

Kristallnacht (The Night of Broken Glass), a nationwide Nazi riot

SEPTEMBER 3, 1939

Great Britain and France declare war on Germany

MAY 20, 1940

Auschwitz is established as a series of camps utilizing Jewish and other prisoners as forced labor

SEPTEMBER 7, 1940

Germany begins "The Blitz" against Great Britain, a bombing campaign targeting industrial cities like London

OCTOBER 31, 1940

Great Britain defeats Germany in the Battle of Britain

DECEMBER 11, 1941

Nazi Germany and Italy declare war on the United States

JUNE 6, 1944

British, US, and Canadian troops land on the beaches of Normandy, France

SEPTEMBER–DECEMBER, 1944

Allies reach the German border

APRIL 30, 1945

Hitler commits suicide, Goebbels follows suit the next day

MARCH 13, 1933

Two months after Hitler becomes chancellor of Germany, he creates the "Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda" and puts Joseph Goebbels in charge

SEPTEMBER 15, 1935

"The Nuremberg Laws" prohibit marriage between Jews and non-Jews and eliminate all political rights for Jews

DECEMBER 2, 1938

First Kindertransport arrives in Great Britain

SEPTEMBER 1, 1939

Germany invades Poland, officially starting WWII and bringing an additional three million Jews under Nazi rule

SEPTEMBER 17, 1939

Soviet Union invades Poland from the east

JUNE 15, 1940–AUGUST 6, 1940

Soviet Union occupies the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania)

SEPTEMBER 27, 1940

Germany, Italy, and Japan sign agreement forming the Axis powers

JUNE 22, 1941

Nazi Germany launches a surprise invasion of the Soviet Union

JANUARY 20, 1942

At the Wannsee Conference, the "Final Solution"—the extermination of every Jew inside Greater Germany—becomes the official goal of the Nazi regime; concentration camps are converted to death camps

JULY 20, 1944

Operation Valkyrie, a secret plot involving German military officers, fails to assassinate Hitler

DECEMBER 16, 1944

The Germans launch a final offensive, the Battle of the Bulge

MAY 7, 1945

Germany signs an unconditional surrender at the headquarters of US General Dwight D. Eisenhower

1939–1944

Nazi Germany begins the forced expulsion of Polish people from their land; Melita Maschmann and many others took part in these efforts, forcing over 1.7 million Poles out of their homes

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Bestselling author ADAM GIDWITZ was a teacher for eight years. He told countless stories to his students, who then demanded he write his first book, *A Tale Dark & Grimm*. Adam has since written two companion novels, *In a Glass Grimmly* and *The Grimm Conclusion*. He is also the author of *The Inquisitor's Tale*, which won the Newbery Honor, and the Unicorn Rescue Society series. Adam still tells creepy, funny fairy tales live to kids on his podcast *Grimm, Grimmer, Grimest*—and at schools around the world. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife, daughter, and dog, Lucy Goosey.

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