

Book Club Discussion Questions for *In Hitler's Backyard* by Gare Thompson

How does each member of the Mann family react to the laws that restrict the Jews in Munich? Why is Gertrude more active than Carl? How is Anna innocent of what is happening to Lolly and her family?

Each member reacts differently because of their age, their knowledge of what is actually happening, and their feelings about Lolly and the political situation. Gertrude acts. She does not hesitate, though she knows she may cause trouble her family. Carl, however, tries to help but in quiet ways that will not hurt the family. He feels it is his job to protect the family, even if it means not acting on his beliefs. Margaret is torn in her emotions. She often feels helpless and frustrated as there is little she can do to save her friend, Hannah. She tries to distance herself from Heinrich, but realizes she has to be very careful in how she acts towards him and what she says out loud versus what she truly feels.

What member of the family do you most identify with and would you react the same way? Share a time you have stood up for a belief.

Margaret is frustrated by the times in which she lives. She has seen her dream shattered. What do you think will happen to Margaret? Do you think she will become a doctor or will she end becoming a "good German girl?"

Margaret's options have changed. She will become a nurse, but it is not likely the times will allow her to fulfill her dream of becoming a doctor. Falling in love with the pilot will also change her life. Given the time period, she will most likely become the pilot's wife and over time become the good "German" girl. However, Margaret is also strong so as the times change and more roles open for women, she may change, too.

At the beginning of the book, Anna is the innocent one. However, all the Manns have a sense of innocence in that they cannot quite come to grips with what is happening in Germany. Many Germans felt like the Manns. They were overpowered by the government and able to do little to change their lives. How has Anna lost her innocence and how will she continue to grow and change?

Anna is young and naive and wants to be a "good German girl." That is her goal. For Anna, in the beginning of the book, life is black and white. There are good people and bad people. Over time, she begins to see the world in shades of grey. She realizes that life is not black and white and there are deadly repercussions for wrong moves. Anna realizes that secrets must be kept in order to survive.

Both Anna and Margaret are examples of "good German girls." Anna and Margaret define the term differently and it has different meanings for the two of them. How would you describe a "good German girl?" If you were living in Germany at this time period, how would you become a "good German?"

The family keeps secrets in order to protect each other. Do you think families should keep secrets? What would happen to the Manns if they shared all their secrets?

In the cast of the Mann family, they are keeping secrets for survival. The less each knows about things that different members of the family have done, the easier it is for them to remain safe. Gertrude keeps the most dangerous secrets. She helped Lolly escape by giving her papers and sewing her jewels in her dress. If Lolly had been caught or questioned, the Mann family would have been thrown in prison or worse. This is a secret Gertrude cannot share, but those actions terrify her as she realizes how much she put her family at risk. Carl tries to ignore the political world of both Munich and the Eagle's Nest. He feels the less he shares, the safer his family will be. Margaret hides her friendship with Hannah and her dislike of Heinrich and her anger at what has happened in Germany and its affect on her life, while Anna simply grows and learns to keep silent at crucial times. She learns sometimes secrets can keep you safe.

Tante Beatrice and Gertrude represent opposite sides of German women. How does their age and their background and their friends influence how they act and what they do? Which character do you most identify with? Why?

When the bombs come, it is the end of the novel, but not the end for the Mann family. What do you think happened to them once the war was over?

The story is based on a true account of a young girl who grew up at the Eagle Nest. Why do you think the author chose to tell the story as historical fiction and not simply write a biography of the young girl?

The woman preferred telling her story through the genre of historical fiction. The author choose that genre so the story could be more dramatic and he could let the characters develop and evolve. Many of the events in the story are true and others are made up to propel the story. Which parts of the story do you think are true and which ones are made up?