



TEACHERS' RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper primary and lower secondary
Ages 11 and older; years 6 to 10

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English – literacy; visual literacy; and examining literature
- **General capabilities:** Ethical capability

THEMES

English

- gender identity
- adolescence and puberty
- racial and religious identity: survival, choice and chance
- racism
- human rights
- resistance and defiance
- truth and deception
- hiding
- familial and romantic love
- friendship and trust
- faith
- cruelty and kindness
- tolerance and acceptance
- loss and displacement
- immigration and inhumanity

History

- World War 2 and the Holocaust

PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia and Anita Selzer
Gratitude is extended to Ann Sanciolo, Co-Head of English, Korowa Anglican Girls' School, Melbourne; Linda Chapman, Education Officer, Jewish Museum of Australia; and Nicole Scott, Alkira Secondary College, Cranborne, Victoria.

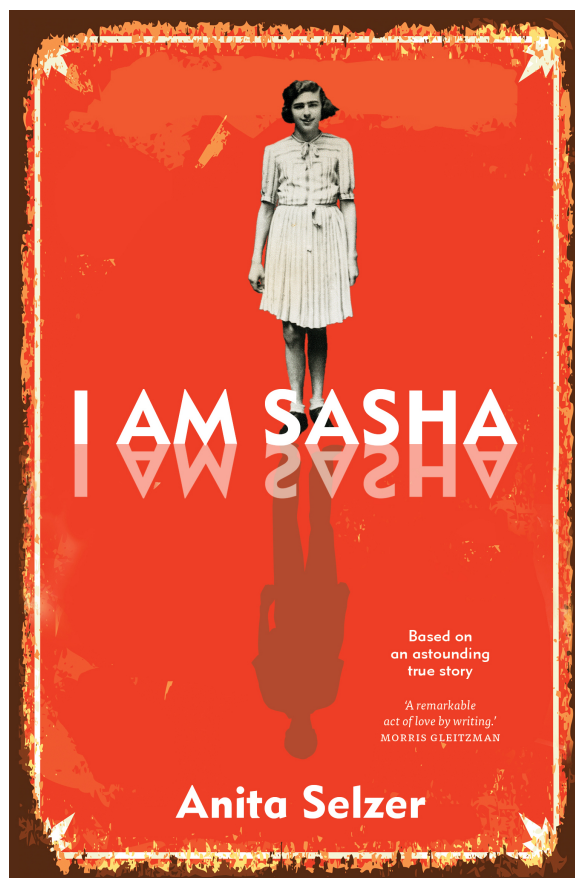
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I am Sasha Anita Selzer

PLOT SUMMARY

One boy's extraordinary experience of wartime survival . . . One mother's incredible courage . . .

Based on an astounding true story.

It is German-occupied Poland in 1942 and Jewish lives are at risk. Nazi soldiers order young boys to pull down their trousers to see if they are circumcised. Many are summarily shot or sent to the camps.

A remarkable mother takes an ingenious step. To avoid suspicion, she trains her teenage son to be a girl: his clothing, voice, hair, manners and more. Together, mother and son face incredible odds as their story sweeps backwards and forwards across occupied Europe.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anita Selzer writes non-fiction for children and adults. Her interest is in women and history. She has written about Australian sportswomen who achieved at high levels including the Olympics: athletes, basketballers, golfers, hockey players, netballers and swimmers; girls' education in Australia; governors' wives in Australia; pastoral pioneers of Como House. Before becoming a writer, Anita was a teacher of English and Politics and completed Masters and Doctorate degrees in Education, focusing on gender and history, and a Graduate Diploma in Women's Studies.

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

What research did you do for this book?

The starting point was my grandmother's written memoir. She had left me the bones of Sasha's story in a memoir written in English, although Polish was her native tongue. I talked to other family members who knew the story and filled in any gaps and Holocaust survivors about their experiences. I then read survivor transcripts, a lot of history in books, journals and searched online to learn about the context to grasp a broader knowledge and better understanding of events in the war and Holocaust. I also read some young adult books on the Holocaust to acquire a sense of what they were like.

Why did you choose to tell this story?

I decided to tell this story because my grandmother wished the world to know how she and Sasha survived the war, defying the Nazis in the process. She handed me her memoir many years ago asking me to write and publish their story. The initial motive for writing it was to honour her wish. I then thought about it further and realised that it was important to educate the young about Sasha's journey and the horrors of the Holocaust. I felt I had to impress upon them that such an event must never happen again to any people.

What was challenging in this project?

I felt telling the story was emotionally painful as it was based on the lived experiences of my father and grandmother who were the main characters in the book. I felt as though I was with them experiencing their suffering. The wide reading was also challenging, with an abundance of literature on the Holocaust.

What was the most rewarding part of the project?

Hearing the Penguin editors' reactions after reading *I am Sasha* brought tears to my eyes and was the first most rewarding part. The editor and publisher read the story overnight and told me how they loved it and could not put the pages down.

The next moment was receiving and signing the contract with Penguin and after that, seeing the wonderful cover designed by their creative designer. And the fulfillment of a promise to my Nana to write and publish the story of her survival with Sasha felt amazing.

What do you think is Sasha's greatest legacy?

Sasha moved forward with his life after the war and let go of the past. He created a new life with my mother in Australia and was the sweetest man, harbouring no bitterness or anger – a wonderful father. Resilience and kindness: that was his legacy. The way he lived his life after the war. I now believe he had me, his only child, born to tell his tale. And my three children, his grandchildren are here to carry on his genealogy.

PRE-READING CLASS DISCUSSION

Have a class discussion on persecution and the horrors it causes.

- Does anyone know about the period in history during World War Two called the Holocaust?
- Brainstorm about this period and the current knowledge of the students.





TEACHERS' RESOURCES

WORKSHEET 1: COMPILE A READING LIST ON THE HOLOCAUST

Compile a reading list with the class to encourage independent reading and sharing of knowledge.

Questions

1. Do you know anyone who has been forced to leave their home because of persecution?
2. Do you know anyone who has lived through and experienced the Holocaust?
3. What do you know about World War Two and the Holocaust? What word or emotions come to mind when discussing the Holocaust?
4. Have you read any novels, poetry or non-fiction books and/or seen any movies and/or television programs about the Holocaust? If so, what have you read? List sources.
5. List three reasons or more as to why World War Two broke out?
6. What do you think is meant by the word 'Holocaust'? How would you describe it to other people?
7. How would you define the word 'racism'? Is racism still a problem? Why do you believe this?
8. What are your views on bullying? Do you believe that bullying is still a problem? Explain the reasons for your answer.



WORKSHEET 2: KEY STUDY TOPICS – BOOK ANALYSIS

Questions

1. **Characters** – Refer to the text and give examples from it to support your view.

(a) What words would you use to describe Sasha? How does Sasha change throughout the story?

(b) How would you describe Larissa? How does she change throughout the story?

(c) Does their relationship change?

(d) What sort of relationship did Larissa have with her father and sisters?

(e) How would you describe Bella and Wicek?

(f) Select a character from *I am Sasha* and explain how like/unlike you are compared to them.

(g) Who is the hero in the text? What heroic qualities does he/she display?

Activity: Role Play

Select a scene with dialogue from *I am Sasha*. Dress up as a character from the scene and act out the part of that person. Class discussion follows about that character.

2. **Themes** – *I AM SASHA* has many themes. Choose at least three themes and give examples from the text.

(a) Did Sasha feel he was a boy or a girl? How did he feel about it and what did he have to do to enact it? What was the significance of the dress? How did he feel about the dress after the war had ended?

(b) What was Sasha's racial and religious identity? How did he feel about his religion and faith in God from his upbringing and life experience? How did Sasha feel about his grandfather?

(c) Survival: what choices did Sasha and Larissa make in their lives about their survival? How much was left to chance?

(d) Discuss the relationship between Sasha and Larissa? How and when did it change?

(e) What sort of person was Larissa?

(f) Discuss the relationship Larissa had with her father and sisters.

(g) What sort of people were Bella and Wicek?

(h) What are some examples of racism in the book?

(i) What are human rights? Provide an example. Which human rights were violated in *I am Sasha*?

(j) What are examples of resistance and defiance in the story? **What would have been the consequences if caught?**

(k) How important was truth versus deception in the story?

(l) Provide examples of the importance of family love in *I Am Sasha*.

(m) Describe how Sasha felt about Adriana and Mila. What was the difference?

(n) Discuss friendship in the story. Provide an example of an important friendship and explain the reason for your choice.

(o) What was the significance of Zayda's teachings about Moses Mendelssohn at the beginning of *I am Sasha*?

(p) Discuss cruelty and inhumanity in the story. Is cruelty and inhumanity a problem today? Provide an example.

(q) Discuss kindness, tolerance and acceptance in the story.

(r) How did Sasha feel about his adolescence and puberty? Was Sasha unlike adolescents today? Why or why not?

(s) Describe what life was like in the displacement camp for Sasha?

(t) What were some of the issues facing Sasha as an immigrant?



WORKSHEET 3: ACTIVITY – BOOK REVIEW

Write three paragraphs in a book review of *I am Sasha*.

1. In paragraph 1, briefly summarise the plot.
2. In paragraph 2, select the parts you liked best in the book and explain why.
3. In paragraph 3, comment on the themes and message/s the author wishes to convey.

Examine Literature – class discussion

1. Identify the author's style of writing?
2. Why are some words in italics? Note them. What is the effect of the italics?
3. How do you, the reader, respond to this choice in language.
4. The author includes letters as a means of conveying information. Why do you think she has included the letters rather than presenting the information in plain text? What do you learn in these letters?
5. What techniques are employed by the author to evoke our emotions as readers?
6. *I am Sasha* is told from Sasha's point of view. What effect does this have on you, the reader?
7. *I am Sasha* is set in the past. What relevance does the story have for you and your world today?



WORKSHEET 4: ACTIVITY – LETTER TO A FRIEND

Imagine that you are Sasha who has transformed into a girl from a boy, hiding during the war. Write a letter to your friend about what life was like. Include what you see, hear and feel.



WORKSHEET 5: VISUAL LITERACY – THE VISUAL STORY

1. What does the cover tell you about the story?
2. What do you learn from the timeline provided in the beginning of the book?
3. What do you learn from the map of places provided in the book?
4. What do you learn from the photos in the book? What is in the foreground of the photos? What is in the background? What is the purpose of these photographs?
5. Do they convey any information that is different to the text?
6. Why do you think the pictures are important in the book?
7. Why do you think Larissa's memoir is important?
8. What does the Father's Day card tell you about Sasha's daughter's relationship with her father Sasha?



WORKSHEET 6: ACTIVITY – THE BRODY GHETTO

1. What is a ghetto? What were they used for?
2. What does the text tell you about the Brody ghetto? What does the photo of the ghetto on the back cover of the book tell you? Can you see anything in the photo that is not in the text? If so, what?
3. What further information would you like to research about the Brody Ghetto?

HISTORY – CLASS DISCUSSION

1. *I am Sasha* is an historical book about the Holocaust. It is based on real people who lived through this event. It is based on Larissa's memoir and other survivors' testimony as well as other sources. What is a primary source and what role do primary sources play in the recording and writing of history?
2. How do you think such an event like the Holocaust could happen?
3. Why were certain groups in society targeted in the Holocaust? Name them.
4. Are certain groups in society targeted today? Can you name these groups?
5. Who was Adolf Hitler and what was his goal?
6. Was Hitler the only one responsible for the Holocaust? Who else was responsible and why?



WORKSHEET 7: ACTIVITY – HISTORY CLASS DISCUSSION

The class can be divided into research groups. In groups of four, research and prepare notes on

1. *Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass*, and record notes. What was the significance of this event?
2. Why did Hitler want to conquer Europe?
3. Find examples of pogroms against Jews in Poland before the war and discuss.
4. Find out more on Hitler invading Lwow.

ETHICAL CAPABILITY

Refer to the text providing examples to support your view,

1. Examine the meaning of truth and happiness in Sasha's life. Did he value either? What made him happy?
2. How did Sasha react to his freedom after the war?
3. Sasha was living with a false identity. Discuss how difficult this was for him.
4. Germany has assumed responsibility for its war crimes against the Jews, recording this history by establishing memorials, museums and preserving concentration camps for people around the world to come and see. Discuss Germany's actions.
5. What is one way that you can honour the memory of those who perished during the Holocaust?



WORKSHEET 8: ACTIVITY – RESEARCH THE NUREMBERG TRIALS

1. What attempts were made to bring justice for war crimes against humanity and peace?
2. Name three Nazis who were charged with these crimes and find out what you can about them and their sentence. Discuss their sentence.



WORKSHEET 9: THE BOOK'S COVER

What do you think of the book's cover?

How do the design choices reflect the story? Include your own summary of the story.

Design your own alternative cover.



WORKSHEET 10: A JOURNAL

Imagine that Sasha keeps a journal. Compose three journal entries, specifying a particular point in his journey, like when Larissa first informs him that he will become a girl, for example.



WORKSHEET 11: A SHORT SPEECH.

Write a short speech for a designated group of people, like journalists or or any other group, on the significance of Sasha's story to our lives and our world today.

Who is the audience for your speech?

What would you want future readers to know about this book?

Explain why they should read it?





TEACHERS' RESOURCES

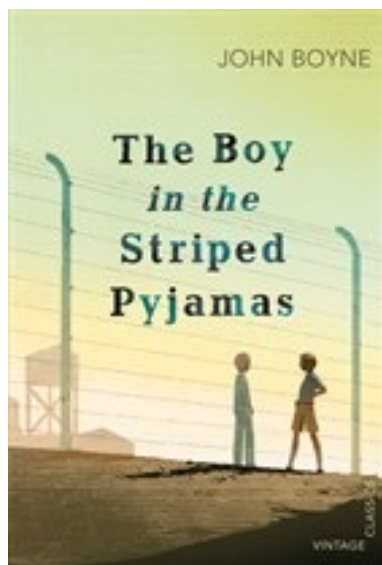
WORKSHEET 12: *ANNE FRANK: THE DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL* BY ANNE FRANK AND *I AM SASHA* BY ANITA SELZER

Providing examples from the text, answer the following questions:

1. How do *Anne Frank* and *I am Sasha* convey the idea that discrimination and intolerance are misguided and perilous?
2. Anne and Sasha reach the age of fourteen during World War Two. Discuss how they feel about their identity?
3. Anne left a diary behind and Larissa a memoir. What role do these primary sources play in telling the life stories of Anne and Sasha?
4. Discuss the different ways Anne and Sasha dealt with their hiding during the war?
5. Discuss the role played by 'righteous gentiles' (non-Jews) in hiding Anne Frank and Sasha Fein.
6. How did Anne Frank and Sasha Fein muster the human spirit to continue life while in hiding?
7. Research the 'righteous gentiles' who helped Anne and Sasha at the Yad Vashem website at <http://www.yadvashem.org/righteous>. Share any information that you were able to find.



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA

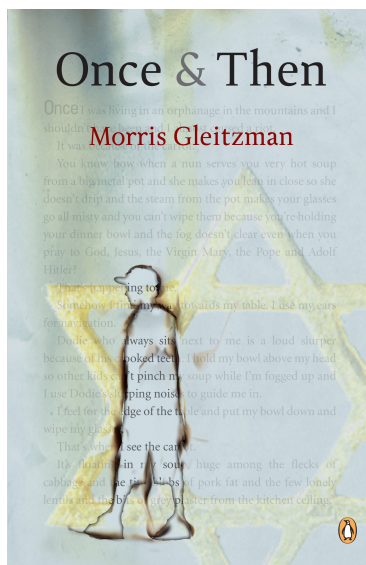


The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas
by John Boyne

Why this story? Read it as an example of an extraordinary tale of friendship and the horrors of war seen through the eyes of two young boys.

Bruno doesn't like his new house. He had to leave all his friends behind in Berlin, and there are no children to play with here - until Bruno meets Shmuel, a boy who lives on the other side of the wire fence near Bruno's house, and who wears a strange uniform of striped pyjamas.

[Teachers' resources available.](#)



Once and Then
by Morris Gleitzman

Why this story? Read it as another example of a fictionalised account of survival set in World War Two.

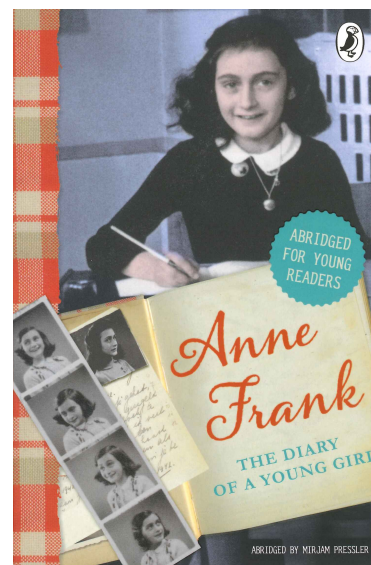
Morris Gleitzman's two best-selling novels in one volume for the first time.

My name is Felix.
Once I saved a girl called Zelda from a burning house.
I had a plan for both of us.
Pretend to be someone else.
Be safe forever.

Then the Nazis came.

'Haunting . . . dangerous and desperate, full of courage and hope.' *The Guardian*

[Teachers' resources available.](#)



Anne Frank: The Diary Of A Young Girl
by Anne Frank

Why this story? Read it as the most famous, tragic example of a first-hand account of adolescence spent in hiding from the Nazis.

In the summer of 1942, fleeing the horrors of the Nazi occupation, Anne Frank and her family were forced into hiding in the back of an Amsterdam warehouse. Aged thirteen when she went into the secret annexe, Anne kept a diary in which she confided her innermost thoughts and feelings, movingly revealing how the eight people living under these extraordinary conditions coped with the daily threat of discovery and death, being cut off from the outside world, petty misunderstandings and the unbearable strain of living like prisoners.

This edition has been specially abridged for younger readers who want to discover Anne's extraordinary story for themselves.



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
I am Sasha	Anita Selzer	9781760146702	6-10	\$17.99		
The Diary of a Young Girl (Young Readers' edition)	Anne Frank	9780141345352	6+	\$14.99		
The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas	John Boyne	9780857533937	6+	\$35		
Once & Then	Morris Gleitzman	9780143203032	4+	\$24.99		
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