



Grades 4 – 7; Ages 9 – 13

# Clara's War

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Teacher's Guide

ISBN: 978-189676-442-9

Second Story Press  
[www.secondstorypress.ca](http://www.secondstorypress.ca)

# *Clara's War*

Author: Kathy Kacer

## Summary

It's a dangerous time for thirteen-year-old Clara and her family. They have just been imprisoned in Terezín (*Terezínstadt*), a ghetto in a medieval town near Prague—which was built to show the world how “well” the Nazis were treating Jews during the Second World War. Here Clara encounters hunger, disease, and filthy living conditions. Even worse is the constant threat of being deported to concentration camps where the possibility of death awaits her.

But in the midst of the horror of these conditions, Clara makes strong friendships with Hanna, a girl from home, and Jacob, an older boy who helps her learn about life in the ghetto. Clara participates in classes where education, music, and poetry flourish. Life in the ghetto takes an unusual turn for the young people when an inmate writes a children's opera, *Brundibár*, which provides moments of joy and laughter. With an escape being planned by Jacob, a family tragedy to confront, and an inspection tour by the Red Cross at hand, Clara has some challenging decisions to make.

Inspired by real events and performances of *Brundibár*, this compelling work for readers ages ten and up includes photographs of the ghetto and of the children on the opening night of the opera. A review of the performance written by a young boy in an underground ghetto newspaper adds further depth to the book.

## About the Author

Kathy Kacer has written more than twenty books about the Holocaust, and many of her books have won awards including the Silver Birch, the Red Maple, the Hackmatack, and the Jewish Book Award. As a child of Holocaust survivors, Kathy Kacer is a passionate advocate for Holocaust education. A former psychologist, Kathy now travels the globe speaking to children and adults about the importance of keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive. Kathy lives in Toronto with her family.

## Vocabulary by Chapter

### Chapter 1

dark	dawdled	desperation	keepsake
kosher	lighthearted	Munich Agreement	outspoken
straightforward	synagogue	withdrawn	

### Chapter 2

Charles Bridge	daze	memento	Moldau River
periodically	Prague Castle	practical	reassuringly
Saint Wenceslas	summons		

### Chapter 3

awkwardly	barracks	Bohušovice	commotion
confiscated	disembark	dormitories	expectation
gulped	inmates	maintaining	meekly
Nazi	reassure		

### Chapter 4

agonizing	churn	emerged	fumbled
inquiringly	ladling	occupants	shabby
shuddering			

### Chapter 5

absentmindedly	avail	scrounge	transport
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### Chapter 6

bullhorn	midst	ravenous	routine
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### Chapter 7

aftereffects	bedlam	comical	conniving
deportation	gingerly	grimaced	

## Chapter 8

averted	deliberately	flared	illegal
impact	retreat	vulnerable	

## Chapter 9

alternative	anxiously	courtyard	delirious
deteriorating	disperse	dreary	inescapable
intently	latrines	pandemonium	petroleum
sentries	stiflingly	typhus	ventilation
vermin			

## Chapter 10

Brundibár	enormous	opera	overcome
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## Chapter 11

alto	encore	exhilarated	interfere
interjected	soprano	spontaneously	tension

## Chapter 12

curtain call	ovation	soberness	suspicion
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## Chapter 13

confide	masterminded	stirred	vicinity
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## Chapter 14

accompaniment	adjustment	looming	privilege
resourcefulness			

## Chapter 15

antibiotics	clasped	crucial	hurdle
inflammation			

### Chapter 16

destiny	minimize	recuperate	
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### Chapter 17

bravo	eager	substitute	
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### Chapter 18

absorbed	adjusted	critic	tributes
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### Chapter 19

expose	deception	Red Cross	suspicious
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### Chapter 20

fragrance	sod		
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### Chapter 21

anticipation	arouse	comforting	commander
disassembled	dutifully	orchestra pit	pavilion
picturesque	unison		

### Chapter 22

betrayed	bittersweet	constricted	deafening
enslaved	hesitation	life-threatening	overwhelming
protruding	uncertainty	wistfully	

### Chapter 23

accurate	persistent	retracing	unrelenting
weary			

### Chapter 24

isolation	maneuvered		
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### Chapter 25

conquering	disheartened	fate	postponed
quartz	skeptically		

### Chapter 26

confidante	rambled		
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### Chapter 27

obviously	familiar		
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### Epilogue

spared			
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## Pre-Reading Activities

Before reading *Clara's War*, visit the following online resources about the Holocaust:

- <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/theresienstadt>
- <https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/ghettos/theresienstadt.html>
- <https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/the-camps/theresienstadt-a-case-study/>
- <https://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/theresienstadt/krasa-hans/>

Below are suggestions for questions and activities that students can complete before reading the book to understand some of the context of the story's setting.

1. What information do you know about the Holocaust? What questions do you have about it?
2. Looking at a map of the Czech Republic, can you locate the town of Terezín?
3. Research the online resource of Terezín during WWII, <http://www.terezin.org/the-history-of-terezin>, and study the following images:
  - a. The entrance
  - b. The barracks
  - c. The children during a visit from the Red Cross

What is your reaction to the images? Do these images frighten you? Why or why not?

Do these children look happy? Are they hiding their true feelings well or can you tell how sad they truly are? Looking at the two little girls with their arms around each other, what do you think their relationship is?

4. What was Auschwitz concentration camp? Where was it located? Why is it so well-known?
5. After reading the book's preface, describe what the conditions were like for the inmates.



## Comprehension and Discussion Questions

### Chapter 1

1. How do Clara and her family receive food? How long would the food last?
2. Why do you think Clara is not allowed to socialize with her Christian friends?
3. List the ways the world has changed for Clara, her family, and all Jewish people since March 15, 1939.
4. What did Clara and other Jews have to wear that identified them as Jews? How did some Christians treat Jews? Why did they treat them in this way?

### Chapter 2

1. Complete the chart below by filling in the location of the landmark and listing three features of each place.

Landmark	Location	Features
A) Moldau River		1. 2. 3.
B) Charles Bridge		1. 2. 3.
C) Prague Castle		1. 2. 3.
D) Saint Wenceslas statue		1. 2. 3.

2. Why does Clara's mother make her wear so many clothes at one time?
3. What does Clara's father do for a living? Does that give them any protection or special treatment?
4. In addition to wearing the yellow star, what else did Jewish people have to carry around to identify themselves?
5. How would you feel about leaving your home and everything you know behind?

### Chapter 3

1. Describe in your own words the scene that welcomes Clara and others when they arrive at Bohušovice.
2. What items does Clara's mother bring that were not allowed? Why do you think they weren't allowed?
3. Give two reasons why families are separated and not allowed to stay together.
4. How many Jews are in Terezín when Clara and her family arrive?
5. Clara has to appear confident and strong in front of her brother, Peter, even though she was scared. Was there a time in your life when you needed to appear confident and strong even though maybe you weren't? Describe the situation and how you handled it.

### Chapter 4

1. The author describes Clara as confused and afraid one minute, and calm and clear another minute. Give an example of something that makes Clara feel afraid and something else that makes her feel calmer. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt many confusing emotions at the same time? What brought you comfort during those times?
2. How does the weather affect the people in the barracks?
3. When the girls in the barracks tell Clara about the situation east of where they are, what are they referring to?

## Chapter 5

1. Why do you think the secret magazine that the boys publish is a vital part of the boys' lives?
2. Martin, a journalist, writes about the new transport that arrived, and states that over 25,000 Jews have died or have been sent east. What is happening when they are sent east?

## Chapter 6

1. How does the bathroom and breakfast routine for the girls in Terezín differ from your own? Describe in your own words.
2. Marta and a few of the girls describe what their school is like and explain how they are taught by other inmates, and not real teachers. Describe the classes and who teaches them.
3. Classes are not supposed to be taught, so what instructions does Marta give in case the guards appeared?
4. There is a process at the end of class: Where do the supplies and drawings go? What would happen if the guards found the supplies and drawings?

## Chapter 7

1. A series of events happens in the food line. List the events in point form in the order that they happen.
2. What is said that stops the Nazi guard, Heindl, from hurting Peter? Why do you think the other guard steps in?
3. What is one of the many survival tactics that are needed in Terezín?
4. Marta states that Peter was lucky. Why does she say this? What could the consequences have been?

## Chapter 8

1. When girls get their yellow slips to leave Terezín, why do the others avoid looking at them?
2. The girls are each provided one half metre of space in the barracks. Why are they desperate to hang on to it?
3. The new girl, Monica, tells Clara about “death camps” and what “going east” really means. She says she is lucky to be at Terezín. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

## Chapter 9

1. Bugs are unavoidable in the ghetto. How do the inmates deal with the infestations of head lice and bed bugs?
2. Research modern typhus and fill in the blanks on the chart.

Type of Typhus	Symptoms	Causes	Treatments

3. Jacob confirms the rumours that the Nazis have a genocide plan for the Jews. He then tells Clara he has a plan of his own. What is the plan? Do you think it is worth the risk?

## Chapter 10

1. Why do you think the guards never interfered with cultural or recreational activities?
2. What cultural or recreational activities do you participate in or enjoy?

## Chapter 11

1. Research Hans Krása and write a short biography about him in your own words. For example: Who is he? What is he known for? Where was he born?

## Chapter 12

1. What do the children do to forget about their situation in Terezín?
2. Jacob wants to escape Terezín with a couple other men. He speaks of challenges that they face planning the escape. What are they?
3. Clara is happy and excited to be part of the opera, but all around her are reminders of her reality. Do you think the opera will be enough of a distraction to take Clara's mind off the reality of Terezín? Why or why not?

## Chapter 13

1. On the way to the meeting to plan the escape, Jacob is aware of every noise that surrounds him. Why is he so nervous? What could happen if Jacob is caught?
2. Make a list of pros (good things) and cons (bad things) of escaping Terezín.

## Chapter 14

1. What clues does Clara notice of her mother getting ill?
2. Jacob is almost caught when he is late for rehearsals. What could have been the consequences if he had been caught?

## Chapter 15

1. What is wrong with Clara's mother? What contributed to her illness and why was it not treated properly?
2. Clara's father explains that an operation could help her mother. Why does he not make a promise that it will help?
3. Clara loses control and breaks down when she sees her mother in the hospital. Why do you think Clara finally lets go of her emotions? Why now?
4. Clara cherishes her mother's touch more than ever. Can you relate to this? Was there a time in your life where you cherished something more than usual?

## Chapter 16

1. Concentrating on rehearsals is the best remedy for Clara to keep her mind off her worries. What works for you when something is bothering you? What do you do to keep your mind busy?
2. Clara's mother has a calm face when Clara goes to see her in the hospital and she can tell her mother is starting to feel better. Why does Clara start to cry?
3. As a reader, were you bracing yourself for the worst news about Clara's mother? Why or why not?
4. Jacob declares he is escaping. He wants freedom. What does he want to experience again?

## Chapter 17

1. The opening night of *Brundibár* is a huge success. Why do people yell "bravo" at operas, plays, and concerts?
  - a. Definition: "Bravo: A term used during applause to commend the performers on stage. 'Brava' for female performers, 'Bravo' for male performers, 'Bravi' for the entire ensemble." From <https://www.eno.org/discover-opera/opera-glossary/>
2. "His days are numbered now. We face him with no fear. We are unbeatable." are the lyrics in the final victory song. How does this relate to the lives of the inmates of Terezín?

## Chapter 18

1. Rudi insists that the attic be cleaned up after every performance. Why do you think he insists on doing this?
2. The cast sometimes celebrates after a performance and then have to sneak back to their dorms well past curfew. Why do you think they would risk being caught? Do you think it is worth the risk?
3. Clara describes the opera as a labour of love that brings hope even though some cast members have been given slips to go east. Why would Clara still view the opera in this hopeful way?

## Chapter 19

1. What is the Red Cross organization?
2. The world is starting to notice and wonder what sort of treatment the Jews are receiving from the Nazis. What “rumours” are alarming?
3. Think about what it would be like if the world saw the state of the inmates and the town of Terezín as it really was. What would be the effects?
4. The Red Cross is going to visit Terezín. Do some research to find out who urged the Red Cross to visit Terezín, which delegates went with the Red Cross, and what changes were done and why.
  - a. Use this article as a starting point for your research: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/theresienstadt-red-cross-visit>

## Chapter 20

1. Clara is down on her knees smelling the fresh dirt, grass, and flowers. Why does she do this?
2. Why is Clara so angry seeing all the changes? Why isn't she happy to see Terezín improved?
3. Along with the new improvements such as parks and playparks, the inmates also receive more food and healthier food. Why are these improvements made?
4. *Brundibár* will be performed for the Red Cross. Rudi states, “We must remain proud of what we have accomplished here,” even though he knows that the improvements are a trick. Do you agree with Rudi? Why or why not?

## Chapter 21

1. Fill in the table using the information from this chapter to describe what changes were done at Terezín.

Buildings/Outside	People

2. The men from the Red Cross are going to make a report on what they saw to three main countries. What are the countries?
3. After the performance, why is there no joy in the cast's success?
4. Why does the Nazi officer have the children call him "uncle Rahm?" Why does Jacob not say what he really wanted to the Red Cross? What stops him?
5. After the visit, Terezín returned to the way it was. Was this a shock to you? Why or why not?

## Chapter 22

1. It is time for Jacob to make his escape. He states that he has never felt so alone or unsure of himself. Why does he feel this way?
2. When Clara is talking to Jacob, why does she struggle to keep her voice even?
3. When going over the wall, Jacob suddenly can't move. What is stopping him?

## Chapter 23

1. How do you think the guards realise that there are inmates missing? Why are they so angry?



2. Why do the inmates have to repeat the same exercise over and over again?
3. Clara describes life in Terezín as upside down. Why does she feel this way?
4. The guards do not announce the escape. Why do you think that is?

#### Chapter 24

1. Clara's father says, "We just try to keep them as comfortable as possible for their last days," when describing the very ill patients. What does this mean?
2. Clara's father "looked like a broken man." What does this mean?
3. Why does Clara not cry when Peter passes?

#### Chapter 25

1. Why is Clara so sad and why doesn't she believe the rumours that the allies are in Europe and fighting the Nazis?
2. Hanna is getting transported east. Why does she seem positive and almost upbeat?
3. Describe what the author meant when she wrote, "...it was important to spend as much time together as they could, to hold on to these last moments and store them up to use as fuel for the future."

#### Chapter 26

1. Why does Hanna talk so much as she waits for the train to deport her from Terezín?
2. Have you ever had to say goodbye to a friend or family member that moved away? How did you feel?

#### Chapter 27

1. Clara welcomes a new girl, Margaret, into the barracks. She tells her, "...you'd be amazed at what's possible—even in Terezín." Do you agree with this? Why or why not?

## Responding to *Clara's War*: Project on the *Brundibár* Opera

### Reading Comprehension Task

In Chapter 11, the opera director, Rudolf Freudenfeld, explains what *Brundibár* is about. Summarize what he says.

### Research Task

Research the *Brundibár* opera. Who wrote it? When and where was it performed? What is the plot? What language is it in? Was it still performed after the Holocaust?

Start here to learn about *Brundibár*:

- <https://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/theresienstadt/brundibar/>
- <https://youtu.be/TnLnS9wv30w>

### Music Task

Listen to these clips of the opera:

- <https://youtu.be/fMiuQfaysrE>
- <https://youtu.be/1sUCb3W20n4>

What style of music is this? What are some features of opera music? Can you name any other operas? Have you listened to other music like this before? How does this music make you feel?

### Writing Task

What are the parallels between the opera and what was happening at the time in Europe to the Jewish people? Make a chart on a whiteboard, on paper, or using Google Docs or PowerPoint, comparing the two stories of the opera and the real events in Europe, using pictures and text.

### Visual Arts Task

Design a costume for the opera. Draw a picture of it to share with the class.

## Further Reading

### Picture Books (Ages 7+)

*The Brave Princess and Me* by Kathy Kacer illus. Juliana Kolesova

Juvenile Fiction \$18.95 ISBN: 978-1-77260-102-2

*The Promise* by Pnina Bat Zvi and Margie Wolfe illus. Isabelle Cardinal

Nonfiction \$18.95 ISBN: 978-1-77260-058-2

*Fania's Heart* by Anne Renaud illus. by Richard Rudnicki

Nonfiction \$18.95 ISBN: 978-1-77260-057-5

*The Secret of the Village Fool* by Rebecca Upjohn illus. Renné Benoit

Fiction \$18.95 ISBN: 978-1-926920-75-7

*The Magician of Auschwitz* by Kathy Kacer illus. Gillian Newland

Nonfiction \$18.95 ISBN: 978-1-927583-46-3

### Middle Grade (Ages 9-12)

*Hana's Suitcase* by Karen Levine

Nonfiction \$18.95 ISBN: 978-1-896764-55-9

*What Does Hate Look Like?* by Sameea Jimenez and Corinne Promislow with Larry Swartz

Nonfiction \$21.95 ISBN: 978-1-77260-290-6

*All About Anne* by Anne Frank House

Nonfiction \$24.95 ISBN: 978-1-77260-060-5

*She's A Mensch! Ten Amazing Jewish Women* by Anne Dublin

Nonfiction \$22.95 ISBN: 978-1-77260-320-0

*Hidden on the High Wire* by Kathy Kacer

Fiction \$13.95 ISBN: 978-1-77260-251-7

*Under the Iron Bridge* by Kathy Kacer

Fiction \$15.95 ISBN: 978-1-77260-205-0

*The Brushmaker's Daughter* by Kathy Kacer

Fiction \$10.95 ISBN: 978-1-77260-138-1

*Shanghai Escape* by Kathy Kacer

Fiction \$14.95 ISBN: 978-1-92758-310-4

*The Choice* by Kathy Clark

Fiction \$14.95 ISBN: 978-1-927583-65-4

*Clara's War* by Kathy Kacer

Fiction \$8.95 ISBN: 978-1-896764-42-9

*The Secret of Gabi's Dresser* by Kathy Kacer

Fiction \$7.95 ISBN: 978-1-896764-15-3

*The Underground Reporters* by Kathy Kacer

Nonfiction \$17.95 ISBN: 978-1-896764-85-6

*The Diary of Laura's Twin* by Kathy Kacer

Fiction \$14.95 ISBN: 978-1-897187-39-5

*Hiding Edith: A True Story* by Kathy Kacer

Nonfiction \$14.95 ISBN: 978-1-897187-06-7

*The Ship to Nowhere* by Rona Arato

Fiction \$14.95 ISBN: 978-1-772600-18-6

*To Hope and Back: The Journey of the St. Louis* by Kathy Kacer

Fiction \$14.95 ISBN: 978-1-897187-96-8

*Guardian Angel House* by Kathy Clark

Fiction \$14.95 ISBN: 978-1-897187-58-6

*We Are Their Voice: Young People Respond to the Holocaust* by Kathy Kacer

Nonfiction \$16.95 ISBN: 978-1-926920-77-1

*The Righteous Smuggler* by Debbie Spring

Fiction \$9.95 ISBN: 978-1-896764-97-9

*When We Were Shadows* by Janet Wees

Nonfiction \$14.95 ISBN: 978-1-77260-061-2

*The Night Spies* by Kathy Kacer

Fiction \$8.95 ISBN: 978-1-89676-470-2

*Hana's Suitcase on Stage* by Karen Levine and Emil Sher

Book + Play \$18.95 ISBN: 978-1-89718-705-0

*Hana's Suitcase Anniversary Album* by Karen Levine

Nonfiction \$24.95 ISBN: 978-1-92692-036-8

(10th anniversary special edition)

### **Ages 13+**

*Heroines, Rescuers, Rabbis, Spies: Unsung Women of the Holocaust* by Sarah Silberstein Swartz

YA Nonfiction \$19.95 ISBN: 978-1-77260-262-3

*Branded by the Pink Triangle* by Ken Setterington

YA Nonfiction \$15.95 ISBN: 978-1-926920-96-2

*To Look a Nazi in the Eye* by Kathy Kacer with Jordana Lebowitz

YA Nonfiction \$13.95 ISBN: 978-1-77260-040-7

*Names in a Jar* by Jennifer Gold

YA Fiction \$14.95 ISBN: 978-1-77260-207-4

*Witness: Passing the Torch of Holocaust Memory to New Generations* compiled by Eli Rubenstein, with March of the Living

Nonfiction \$32.95 ISBN: 978-1-77260-149-7

*Hidden Gold: A True Story of the Holocaust* by Ella Burakowski

Fiction \$14.95 ISBN: 978-1-927583-74-6

*A Partisan's Memoir* by Faye Schulman

Nonfiction \$19.95 ISBN: 978-0-92900-576-8

*Restitution: A family's fight for their heritage lost in the Holocaust* by Kathy Kacer

Nonfiction \$19.95 ISBN: 978-1-89718-775-3

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*The Holocaust Remembrance Series for Young Readers Teacher Resource*

\$149.00 ISBN: 978-1-89718-794-4

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