



Grades 3 – 6; Ages 7 – 12

## Fania's Heart

Written by Anne Renaud  
Illustrated by Richard Rudnicki  
*Inspired by a guide by Helen Wolfe*  
Teacher's Guide

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## Summary

Ten-year-old Sorale discovers a tiny heart-shaped book among her mother's belongings. Its pages are shaped like petaled flowers, upon which are written words in languages Sorale does not understand. Who wrote these words? Where did the heart come from? Why has her mother never mentioned this tiny book before?

*Fania's Heart* is the true story of the crafting of a heart-shaped birthday card, against all odds, within the confines of Auschwitz and of the women of immeasurable resilience, courage, and loyalty who risked their lives to create it.

This narrative non-fiction book for young readers chronicles the daily horrors of existence in a concentration camp and the tremendous fortitude of its prisoners who proved they could still treat each other with humanity, despite the horrors inflicted upon them.

*Fania's Heart* explores several themes. It emphasizes the courage, resilience, and bonds of friendship expressed by Fania's work colleagues in the crafting of a heart-shaped birthday card and the enormous risk they took in creating this gift. Since the Holocaust is the setting and historical context of the story, readers learn of the struggles people went through to survive day-to-day. The book's sombre illustrations reinforce its stark setting and the hardships of its characters.

*Fania's Heart*, written by Anne Renaud, is appropriate for children between the ages of seven and twelve, and older, as well as for English as a Second Language (ESL) adults who are at the high beginner and low intermediate levels.

## About the Author

Anne Renaud has a penchant for stories that have a historical slant. She has written on the topics of Pier 21, the Empress of Ireland, and the Canadian Tulip Festival. She has written several children's picture books, in both English and French, including *Mousseline vole au vent*, *Missuk's Snow Geese*, *Amande Lavande*, *Les pierres d'Emma*, and *Mr. Crum's Potato Predicament*. Anne lives in Westmount, Québec.

## A. Listening and Speaking Activities

These can be used as non-evaluated activities before your class starts reading the book or as evaluated projects during or after reading the book.

### ACTIVITY 1: SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

This is a pre-reading discussion to prepare young readers to study the book. This activity has several objectives. First, it gives them the opportunity to describe their own relationships with their friends. Second, they practise using vocabulary needed to describe the protagonists in the story.

Have the students work in small groups. Assign one or two students to record the answers. The rest of the group members can take turns presenting to the whole class.

**ACTIVITY 1:**  
**SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION:**  
**INTRODUCTION TO *FANIA'S HEART***

**DIRECTIONS**

- a. Organize yourselves into groups of four or five students. The teacher could also select groups, or the groups could be created at random.
- b. Discuss the questions below and answer them as a group.
- c. One or two group members should listen and record the group's answers on a computer or on chart paper.
- d. The other group members will be responsible for presenting the answers to the rest of the class.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What are some words that you would use to describe your relationship with your friends?
2. Have you ever been in a situation when a friend (or friends) did something to express how much they cared for you? If you have, describe that situation.
3. What is the meaning of the word *courage*? Don't use a dictionary. Decide on a good definition by having a discussion with your group members.
4. What are the meanings of the words *heroes* and *heroines*? Do you know a hero or heroine in your family? If you do, name that person and explain in a few words what they did. Create a list for the group that could look like this.

## Our Group's Heroes and Heroines

Person's Name	What They Did
Mai's aunt Tam	helped her family escape from war in her native country
Lucia's mother	rescued her family from a house fire
Megan's sister	stood up for her friend who was being bullied
Brandon's father	got groceries for his sick neighbour

5. What are the personal qualities of heroes and heroines? After you have discussed the heroes and heroines in your group, make a list of the special personal qualities that made those people heroes and heroines. The personal qualities that you identify could be nouns or adjectives. Your list could look like this.

### Special Qualities of Heroes and Heroines

- courage (or courageous)
- determination (or determined)
- intelligence (or intelligent)
- selflessness (or selfless)

## ACTIVITY 2: INTRODUCTION TO THE HOLOCAUST

*Fania's Heart* is aimed toward children between seven and twelve years old. Children of these ages can read and study the book as a story of courage and survival. However, adults who are ESL learners at the high beginner and low intermediate levels can also read and appreciate the book.

For older students, it would benefit them to have a brief introduction to the Holocaust, which is the setting of the story. There are many Internet resources that can be used to help them understand the period. Depending on your students' ages and language abilities, choose one or two short resources that can be used to complete this activity.

Alternatively, you could have students research their own Internet resources on the Holocaust. Some resources they may find useful are as follows:

Montreal Holocaust Museum

<https://museeholocauste.ca/en/history-holocaust/>

The Wiener Holocaust Library

<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

[www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)

When doing this activity, provide students with two maps to aid in their research. One map would be of the occupied and invaded countries during the Holocaust, and the other would be of concentration camps built and inhabited during that time. Both maps are easily available on the Internet. Give students copies of each map.

Once students have a basic introduction to the Holocaust, you could create a shared Google Doc for the class where students can add questions they have. As a class, look at the questions and then break students up into groups to answer the questions that they relate to. Students can share their answers verbally, via PowerPoint, using art or other visual aids, etc.

ACTIVITY 2:  
INTRODUCTION TO THE HOLOCAUST:  
FILL IN THE BLANKS

**DIRECTIONS**

Organize yourselves into groups of four or five students.

Using the Internet resources that you have found or that your teacher has given to you, fill in the blanks with correct information.

1. The Holocaust was a time in history that occurred between 1939 and 1945.
2. The man who started the Holocaust was named Adolf Hitler.
3. He was the leader of a political party called the National Socialist German Workers' Party, also called the Nazi Party.
4. That man was the Chancellor or leader of Germany.
5. When he became leader, his government passed laws that hurt or discriminated against different groups of people including Jewish people, Ukrainians, Polish people, Roma, Black people, homosexuals, mentally or physically disabled people and nuns and priests.
6. During the Holocaust, the Nazis invaded many countries in Europe. The first country they invaded was Poland. Some other countries that they invaded were Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Luxembourg, France, Yugoslavia, and Greece.
7. When the Nazis invaded and occupied countries in Europe, they made Jews and other groups of people leave their homes and then put them in places called ghettos. Sometimes people were sent to extermination or death camps and killed right away. Prisoners who could work were sent to concentration or labour camps.



8. Life in these prison camps was very dangerous. Prisoners never had enough food to eat, and many died from starvation. Also, the camps were very crowded and not clean, so people got sick from illnesses such as typhus and dysentery.
9. Prisoners needed to obey everything that their guards told them to do. If they didn't, the guards could punish them or even kill them.
10. The Holocaust ended in 1945, when the armies of countries such as Great Britain, Canada, France, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, the Soviet Union, China, Haiti, Honduras, Luxembourg, Yugoslavia, Panama, Cuba, Greece, Costa Rica, South Africa, and India defeated the Nazi army in battles, and the Nazis surrendered to them.

### ACTIVITY 3:

#### LEARNING ABOUT OTHER PERSECUTED GROUPS IN THE HOLOCAUST

This activity provides an opportunity for students to learn about people, other than Jews, who were persecuted or killed during the Holocaust. Students can be organized into groups and work cooperatively to research and present information about that persecuted group. This activity would be appropriate for academically gifted, ESL, or adult students.

Share the following chart as a starting point:

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/classification-system-in-nazi-concentration-camps>

### ACTIVITY 3: CREATING A VISUAL PRESENTATION ON PERSECUTED GROUPS IN THE HOLOCAUST

#### DIRECTIONS

1. Organize yourselves into groups of four or five students.
2. Here is a list of groups of people who were also persecuted or killed during the Holocaust:
  - a. Roma people
  - b. People with developmental and physical disabilities
  - c. Teachers or university professors
  - d. Priests, nuns, and other religious people
  - e. Communists
  - f. Queer people
3. Each group will choose or be given one of these groups of people to research. Your goal is to create a visual display about that group's situation during the Holocaust. Your display should be a combination of important facts about that group and pictures or graphics that would make your presentation more interesting. Your display can be done on hard copy or published online on your class website.
4. Use any search engine allowed by your school.
5. Find appropriate pictures or graphics that would make your presentation more interesting to read.
6. Answer these questions to complete your assignment.
7. Who were the people in this group? Describe any specific information about them.
8. Why did the Nazis want to hurt or kill these people? What reasons did they give for treating them so badly?
9. How did the Nazis punish or hurt these people?
10. Did other people try to save this group? What things did other people do to try to save them?

## B. Reading Activities

### ACTIVITY 4: COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

These questions evaluate your students' comprehension of the story. They focus on the elements of storytelling including plot, character, theme, setting, climax, conflict, and symbolism. If appropriate for your students' grade level and ability, introduce the storytelling terms as pre-reading activities. There are also questions requiring students to express their feelings about the story and identify with the experiences of the protagonists. There are also inference questions that require students to "read between the lines." Other questions are used to practise prediction skills. Use these questions to encourage ongoing discussion of the story or assign them as written assignments or homework questions.

1. What do you think Sorale means when she says, "My mother had many secrets?"
2. What is the relationship between Fania and the other women?
3. Where are Fania and the other women?
4. Look at the artist's drawing of the place where the prisoners lived. Describe this place. Would you want to live in this place? Why or why not?
5. Look at the artist's drawings of Fania and her fellow prisoners. How old do you think they are? Describe their appearances. In your opinion, do they look different from the women you know who are their age?
6. What do you think happened to Fania's brother, sister, and parents?
7. Who were the Nazis? Look at the drawings with Nazi soldiers. What do their facial expressions and body language tell you about their personalities or what they are doing to the other people in the drawings?

8. Fania states, “As the months went by, we kept each other’s spirits up with words of encouragement so we would not drown in our sad thoughts.” What words of encouragement do you think they might have said to each other?
9. Why do you think Fania says, “People did not live to be old in that place?”
10. The women in the camp lived in “barracks.” How is a barrack different from a bedroom that most people have? Use the drawings in the book to help you answer the question.
11. What did the workers do to fight back against the Nazis?
12. Where did Fania hide her birthday card when she received it? Why did she hide it?
13. What did Zlatka and the others have to do to make the heart? What did they use for glue?
14. Why does Fania think *What a sacrifice!* when she realizes what she has been given?
15. Why is it important that her birthday card remain a secret? What would happen if the Nazis were to find it?
16. Why does Fania say that the birthday card is not a sad heart even if it was made in a concentration camp?
17. What does Fania mean when she says, “Their words saved me”?
18. In the Author’s Note, it states where Fania hid her birthday card in the weeks following her birthday. Where did she hide it?
19. What are three words that you would use to describe the relationship between Fania and Zlatka? Give reasons for your choices.

## ACTIVITY 5: UNDERSTANDING VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

The ability to learn and understand new vocabulary in context is a key skill in reading comprehension. Depending upon your students' experience, you may wish to first introduce simpler generic vocabulary from context exercises.

The assignment below is a multiple-choice exercise. Emphasize that the exercise should be done without a dictionary and that students should practise guessing the meaning of the underlined word from the way that it is used in the sentence.

Depending on your students' ability and age, the exercise can be done in groups or independently as individual student work. For younger or less confident readers, this activity could be done before reading the book.

ACTIVITY 5:  
UNDERSTANDING VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

**DIRECTIONS**

- A. Read the sentences below and guess the meaning of the underlined word in each sentence.
- B. Using your copy of *Fania's Heart*, find the sentence so that you can understand the context or situation in which the word is used.
- C. Circle the answer that is the best synonym or definition of the underlined word.

1. Each page opened like wings, revealing penciled writing inside.

**Revealing** means

- a. disguising
- b. concealing
- c. making visible

2. Germany's Nazi army had invaded many countries in Europe.

**To invade** means

- a. to help
- b. to hurt
- c. to play with
- d. to enter to conquer

3. My mother went quiet for a while, and I stroked her hand.

**To stroke** means

- a. to handle roughly
- b. to scratch

c. to rub gently

d. to wash

4. Every day, we woke in darkness to the bellows of guards.

**Bellows** means

a. shouts

b. whistles

c. sneezes

d. laughs

5. As the sun rose, we plodded through the camp gates, then along a dirt road until we reached a large factory building.

**To plod** means

a. to march

b. to run

c. to walk slowly

6. Sometimes we put dirt in the parts we made, or assembled them incorrectly, so they could not work.

**To assemble** means

a. to shatter

b. to fit together

c. to break up

d. to explode



7. We were forbidden to talk, forbidden to move from our benches.

**Forbidden** means

- a. forced
- b. not allowed
- c. asked
- d. encouraged

8. The guards wanted to be sure we were not smuggling anything to use against them.

**To smuggle** means

- a. to sneak something in or out secretly
- b. to make with your hands
- c. to break in little pieces
- d. to bury

9. Exhausted, we then set off on the hour-long march back to camp.

**Exhausted** means

- a. fearful
- b. happy
- c. very tired
- d. saved

10. The guards were quick to whip or kick us if we stumbled and fell.

**To stumble** means

- a. to stop suddenly
- b. to trip and lose balance
- c. to run very quickly

11. We also received our daily ration of bread, often stale or streaked green with mold.

**Ration** means

- a. portion
- b. recipe
- c. package

12. We slept four, five, and even six to a bunk, on a thin, lice-infested mattress with no pillow and one blanket to cover all of us.

**Infested** means

- a. hidden
- b. covered or spread over
- c. cleaned

13. We had a better chance of surviving than the prisoners who worked outside, shattering rocks in a nearby quarry.

**Quarry** means

- a. a forest of very tall trees
- b. a small lake
- c. a deep hole from which stones are removed

14. But we coped as best we could.

**To cope** means

- a. to move slowly
- b. to fall over and over
- c. to avoid a difficult situation
- d. to manage a difficult situation

15. We recited recipes to each other and imagined the day when we could eat to our hearts' content.

**Hearts' content** is an English idiom that means

- a. until we fall asleep
- b. as much as we want
- c. together

16. Zlatka and the others had to steal or barter the scissors, needle, thread, pencil, and paper in exchange for their meager food rations.

**Meager** means

- a. rotten
- b. small
- c. abundant
- d. sweet

17. What a sacrifice!

**Sacrifice** means

- a. an object of importance or value that is given up
- b. an object that is hidden
- c. an object that is destroyed

18. I wish that all your wishes should be fulfilled.

**Fulfilled** means

- a. become reality
- b. interesting
- c. forgotten
- d. destroyed

19. The Nazis' hatred toward Jews was reflected in increasingly brutal and oppressive laws.

**Oppressive** means

- a. surprising
- b. humane
- c. **cruel**
- d. unexpected

20. In 2001, while visiting the museum, Montreal filmmaker, Carl Leblanc, was so moved by this relic he decided to search out the women who had signed the book.

**Relic** means

- a. an object of little value
- b. **an object of historical or sentimental interest**
- c. an object that was repaired
- d. an object that is new

## C. WRITING ACTIVITY

### ACTIVITY 6: JOURNAL WRITING

Journaling is an excellent way to check your students' understanding of the story and for them to express their feelings about what the protagonists are experiencing. Students can provide handwritten journals or, if technology is available, can write online in the class website or blog. Teachers may choose to have students not share their journals unless they want to share with the teacher and may choose to not mark spelling and grammar. Teaching students to journal is a great way for students to express themselves without judgment.

#### DIRECTIONS

1. You will need to write five journal entries while you are reading *Fania's Heart*. Choose five questions from the list below.
2. Each journal entry should be 75–100 words. Please check your spelling, grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary after you finish writing your entry.
3. Make sure to date and give a title to each of your journal entries.

#### JOURNAL ENTRY QUESTIONS

- a. On the first page of the book, there is a sentence that reads, “There are words that injure and words that heal.” Give five examples of words that injure and words that heal. Why did you choose these specific words?
- b. What is your opinion of the drawings used in the book? Do you like the way the illustrator (artist) created the drawings? Why or why not? How did the illustrations help you understand the story better?
- c. What are four adjectives you would use to describe Fania's life in the concentration camp? Give the reason why you chose each word. Give examples from the book to support your word choice.

- d. Why do you think Fania said she was an old lady because she was going to celebrate her twentieth birthday? Why do you think there were no elderly women among the workers?
- e. Why did Fania say that the women who made the heart had filled its pages with their courage? Have you or someone you know done something that required courage? If so, describe it.
- f. One of the messages in the birthday card reads: *I wish that all your wishes should be fulfilled*. What do you think Fania's wishes would have been? If you had been in Fania's situation, what would you have wished for?
- g. How would you describe the relationship between Fania and Zlatka? Do you have this kind a relationship with someone?
- h. At the end of the book Fania says, "Their words saved me." Why was the heart so important to Fania? What do you think might have happened to Fania had her friends not made the heart for her?
- i. Look on the last page of the book. In the Author's Note, it reads, "Her daughter, Sandy (called Sorale as a child, a Yiddish name of endearment), her son, Harvey, her grandchildren, and great-grandchildren are her ultimate triumph." What do you think is meant by "ultimate triumph"?

## EXTENSION/ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES

### ACTIVITY 7: GUEST SPEAKER

If your city or community has a Holocaust Education Centre or Jewish Community Centre, invite a guest speaker to talk to your students about the Holocaust. The guest speaker might possibly be a Holocaust survivor who could relate his or her personal experiences of survival. Afterwards, have the students journal about their impressions of the speaker.

The Montreal Holocaust Museum offers virtual testimonies with a Holocaust survivor. A survivor testimony adds a personal dimension to the history of the Holocaust and the millions of victims. It puts students in direct personal contact with a complex and incomprehensible part of history. The survivor's live testimony is followed by a Q&A session with participants.

Montreal Holocaust Museum:

<https://museeholocauste.ca/en/guided-tour-testimony/>

*See also:* Shoah 1985 | Part 1 [English Subtitles]

<https://youtu.be/eNcvwHgyXcg>

## ACTIVITY 8: VISIT TO A HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE

Organize a class visit to your local Holocaust Education Centre. Many synagogues and Jewish Community Centres have resources to help students learn more about survival stories from the Holocaust.

The Montreal Holocaust Museum offers virtual history classes. A virtual history class is an interactive presentation that explores the history of the Holocaust by showcasing key artifacts and survivor testimony video clips from its permanent exhibition. A class can be easily integrated into citizenship education, history, ethics, and religious culture courses. It is also highly relevant for second language and literature courses.

<https://museeholocauste.ca/en/virtual-education-programs/>

The Montreal Holocaust Museum also welcomes in-person visits. For anyone unable to come to the museum, the museum can come to them with an app.

<https://apps.apple.com/ca/app/montreal-holocaust-museum/id719081593>



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE

This teacher's guide was largely inspired by a guide prepared by Helen Wolfe for another Holocaust picture book entitled *The Promise*. I adapted Helen Wolfe's guide for *Fania's Heart*, but also kept parts of her guide in their entirety, as they related to the education of the Holocaust for young readers.

Helen Wolfe was an educator for almost 40 years. She had a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Education and earned professional certification in Senior English, English as Second Language (ESL), Law, and Special Education and as a Guidance Specialist.

Helen Wolfe was experienced in all grade levels, from kindergarten to Grade 12. She taught in a wide variety of public and private school settings. Since 1988, her focus was as an adult educator in secondary school credit programs. She wrote, revised, and implemented many courses of study in English, Social Science, and ESL.

In 2011, Helen Wolfe wrote *Terrific Women Teachers*, a non-fiction chapter book for young readers that is part of the Women's Hall of Fame Series from Second Story Press. Her second book, *World Shakers: Inspiring Women Activists*, another non-fiction chapter book for young readers, is part of the *Do You Know My Name?* series from Second Story Press and came out in May 2023.

Her belief was that every student, even those with language and other learning challenges, has the right to read and appreciate well-written children's literature. That philosophy of inclusion motivated her to write teacher's guides to help make quality literature accessible to all learners.

For more information on Helen Wolfe's life and accomplishments:

<https://thecjn.ca/lives/obituary-helen-wolfe-69-lived-life-to-its-fullest-despite-her-disability/>