

The Secret *of the* Village Fool

Discussion Questions

Written by Rebecca Upjohn

Illustrated by Renné Benoit

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think people called Anton Suchinski the “village fool”?
- Why did Anton risk his own life to protect the lives of Milek, Munio, Mama, Tata, Eva and Zipora?
- Why did the six people in Anton’s care need his protection?
- How did Milek’s feelings about Anton change from the beginning of the story to the end?
- Why do you think the six survivors wanted to help Anton years later? Why did he need help then?
- What does “Righteous Among Nations” mean? How does someone become recognized as a Righteous Gentile?
- What does the word “Holocaust” mean? How is it used to describe events that took place during WWII? Why?

Making Connections

- Have you ever wanted to stand up for someone who was being treated unfairly but didn’t know how or were afraid to do so? Or have you ever wished someone would stand up for you? Write a journal page about how you felt or about what you might do if this happened.
- Have you and your family ever helped a neighbour or has a neighbour ever helped you? Write one paragraph describing the situation.
- If you had to leave your home and go into a hiding place for a year, what items would you need to survive? Make a list. Including the words in that list write a story about what it is like to live

in hiding. Writing prompts: Why did you have to leave your home? Who are you hiding with? Who are you hiding from and why?

- Anton was not someone you would think of as a hero, and yet he risked his own life to save six other people. What is a hero? Can you make a list of Anton's qualities and actions that made him one? Do you or someone you know have those same qualities?
- During the story of *The Secret of the Village Fool*, the village of Zborów, where Anton lived, was in Poland. Now it is in Ukraine. Find a map of Poland and Ukraine during WWII. Now find a map today. How have the borders of each country changed and why?
- After the war, Milek and Munio and their parents moved from Poland to the United States. Eva moved to Uruguay and Zipora moved to Israel. The culture and language was different in each case. What would some of the challenges be if you moved from one country to another? How would you make friends in your new country?

Activities

- To help keep the boys occupied, Zipora teaches them how to play Cat's Cradle. It is a game played by two or more people. There are some basic instructions here: www.wikihow.com/Play-The-Cat%27s-Cradle-Game. Can you create new figures?
- While Tata told stories to everyone in hiding, Milek pressed pieces of straw into the dirt walls to make pictures to go with the stories. Using regular drinking straws and glue/tape and paper, can you make a picture to illustrate a scene from *The Secret of the Village Fool*? Alternative method: Press straws or popsicle sticks, or twigs into clay or play dough to make your picture.
- Retell the story orally. Sitting in a circle, begin with one person telling the first scene of the book. Change to the next person for the next scene. Continue taking turns to the end. Alternative method: In groups act out the story as a play.
- Anton could not read or write. Can you "write a letter" to your best friend without using words? Work in pairs and exchange letters. Can your friend understand your letter? Can you understand your friend's? What are some of the challenges of "writing" a letter without using words?



The Secret *of the* Village Fool

Drama & Writing

Written by Rebecca Upjohn

Illustrated by Renné Benoit

Developed by Martha Attema, children's author and teacher www.marthaattema.com

Drama

- Divide the students in groups of six. They each take on a role of one of the characters in the story.
- They move to a small area of the classroom, their hiding place. (Taped off with masking tape on the floor)
- Each group role plays how they would pass their day and nights in the small hiding place. They can only use whispering voices. When they move furniture or themselves it has to be as quiet as possible.
- They will engage in storytelling, cat's cradle games, art games (straw pictures), eating and sleeping using many restrictions and limitations.
- One student or the teacher can be Anton. Anton needs a stopwatch and a drum.
- After a few minutes of role playing, the nazis arrive and they will search Anton's house.
- Anton hits the drum once.
- All the people in hiding, freeze. They don't move or talk and they are very scared of being found.
- Anton decides how long this scene will last (a minimum of 2 min., a max. of 3 min. When he hits the drum again the people in hiding continue their activities.
- Depending upon the available time, Anton can repeat this scene several times.

Note: While the students in hiding are frozen, they have to imagine what will happen to them and to Anton if they are found by the Nazis.

Writing assignments

1. **Reflective Writing:** Write a short piece about the dynamics in your group, the activities, the limitations and the fear.
2. **Character Sketch:** Write a paragraph describing your character. Who are you? How old are you? What makes you special?
3. **Short Story Writing:**
 - a. Introduction: Describe the people, the space and the activities
 - b. Plot: What happened when the Nazis came? How did you feel? How did everybody else feel?
 - c. Ending or Resolution: How were you liberated? How did you feel? (Make up your own ending)
4. **Different Ending:** What if? Write a paragraph in which you change the ending.



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Word Search

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S V D E E Q S Y N A G O G U E
R I N P T N K G T L T S G X F
E L A T F A E O E O G K D F O
I L L B N N R S D O Q I H N S
D A O V T A V E O F A R U T C
L G P I H P G M T R L K N S H
O E L R K X J E F I E M G U O
S E L T I E K A V B L K E A C
D N U O R G R E D N U L R C O
N O T N A W H C S E C Q I O L
S L L O R C S T H Y U V O L A
D I S G U I S E E I T R J O T
G D K Q P A G A H O E O O H E
R O T C E T O R P H U F L P V
L O M J E W I S H D G S E Z E

AFRAID
DISGUISE
GENTILE
HUNGER
KERCHIEF

ANTON
EUROPE
HERO
ILLITERATE
KEROSENE

CHOCOLATE
FOOL
HOLOCAUST
JEWISH
POLAND

PROTECTOR
SCROLLS
SYNAGOGUE
UNDERGROUND
VILLAGE

RIGHTEOUS
SOLDIERS
TORAH
VEGAN
ZLOTYS

Word Definitions



AFRAID: Adjective. Feeling of fear or anxiety; frightened.

ANTON: Noun. The main character in *The Secret of the Village Fool* who saves the lives of six Jewish people in Zborów, Poland during WWII.

CHOCOLATE: Noun. A food made from cacao beans that is eaten as candy or used to flavour other sweet foods.

DISGUISE: Noun. A method of changing one's appearance or concealing one's identity.

EUROPE: Noun. A continent divided into many countries in the Eastern Hemisphere between Asia and the Atlantic.

FOOL: Noun. Someone who is deficient in judgement, sense or understanding; a person who acts unwisely.

GENTILE: Noun. A person who is not Jewish.

HERO: Noun. A person who is admired for great or brave acts or fine qualities.

HOLOCAUST: Noun. 1. Destruction on a massive scale causing extensive loss of life usually by fire or nuclear war. 2. The genocide of European Jews and others by the Nazis during WWII 3. Historical: from the Greek holokauston: "that which is completely burnt". Also: a Jewish sacrificial offering that is burned completely on an altar.

HUNGER: Noun. An uncomfortable feeling in your stomach caused by the need for food.

ILLITERATE: Adjective. Unable to read or write.

JEWISH: Adjective. Someone whose religion and/or culture is Judaism and/or who is descended from Jewish people.

KERCHIEF: Noun. A woman's square scarf often worn as a head covering.

KEROSENE: Noun. An oil used as fuel in lamps or for heating and cooking.

POLAND: Noun. A country in central Europe.

PROTECTOR: Noun. A person who protects someone or something.

RIGHTEOUS: Adjective. Virtuous. Also: being named "Righteous Gentile" or "Righteous Among Nations" is an honour given to non-Jewish people who risked their own lives to save the lives of Jewish People during WWII.

SCROLLS: Noun. Rolls of parchment, papyrus or paper often used for writing a document; an ancient book of text written on such a roll.

SOLDIERS: Noun. A person who serves in an army.

SYNAGOGUE: Noun. A place of worship for those of the Jewish faith.

TORAH: Noun. In Judaism, the law of God as revealed to Moses and recorded in the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures.

UNDERGROUND: Adverb. Below the surface of the earth.

VEGAN: Noun. A person who does not eat or use animal products.

VILLAGE: Noun. A small town in the country.

ZLOTYS: Noun. The basic monetary unit of Poland.