



Colorado Book Club Resource

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR NUMBER THE STARS BY LOIS LOWRY

1. Uncle Henrik tells Annemarie that it is easier to be brave if you do not know everything. Do you agree? Does ignorance of the full danger make a person more courageous, or just less terrified?
2. At the beginning of the book, Annemarie wonders if she could ever be as brave as the people in the fairy tales. By the end, she has faced Nazi soldiers and a dark forest alone. What was the specific moment she stopped "feeling" like a child and started acting like an adult?
3. Peter is a member of the Resistance who takes immense risks. How did your perception of him change when you realized the full extent of his "secret" life?
4. The book opens with the famous line that all of Denmark is King Christian X's bodyguard. How does the "national identity" of the Danish people contribute to their decision to save their Jewish neighbors?
5. The historical rescue of the Danish Jews involved thousands of people keeping a secret. How were the Johansens able to maintain a sense of "normalcy" in their apartment while hiding Ellen?
6. The chemically-treated handkerchief is a small but vital piece of technology in the book. It represents the "ingenuity" of the Resistance. How does this symbolize the theme that "small things" can defeat "great evils"?
7. Annemarie and Ellen's friendship is the heart of the story. How does the Star of David necklace act as a symbol of their bond? Why was it so important for Annemarie to yank it off Ellen's neck when the soldiers arrived?
8. We learn that Annemarie's older sister, Lise, died before the book began. How does the memory of Lise's death hang over the Johansen family's decisions? Does it make them more or less willing to help the Rosens?
9. By the end of the book, Ellen and her family are safe in Sweden, but they have lost their home. What does "home" mean to someone who has had to flee for their life?
10. The title comes from Psalm 147:4: *"He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name."* In the context of the Holocaust, where people were often stripped of their names and given numbers, why is this title so significant? What does it say about the value of an individual life?



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A Historical Note

It is a historical fact that Denmark saved over **95%** of its Jewish population during the Holocaust.



The rescue of the Danish Jews in October 1943 is one of the most remarkable stories of the Holocaust. When the word got out that the Nazis planned to round up the Jewish population, the Danish people mobilized almost overnight.

The Logistics of the Rescue:

The Vessels: Most of the 7,200 people who escaped were carried across the Øresund (the sound between Denmark and Sweden) in small wooden fishing boats exactly like the one pictured. Some were also moved in rowboats, kayaks, and even tugboats.

The Distance: At the narrowest point, the trip to Sweden is only about 2.5 miles (4 km), but in the dark and under the threat of German patrol boats, it felt like an eternity.

The Hiding Places: In *Number the Stars*, Ellen and the others are hidden under the floorboards of Uncle Henrik's boat. In reality, fish were often piled on top of these secret compartments to create a smell that would discourage Nazi inspectors from looking too closely.

The "Secret Weapon": As mentioned in the book, Swedish scientists and Danish doctors developed a chemical (cocaine and rabbit blood) to put on handkerchiefs. When the German dogs sniffed the handkerchiefs, the mixture temporarily numbed their sense of smell, preventing them from detecting the people hidden below deck.

Knowing that these were simple, everyday fishing boats—not warships or armored vessels—how does that change your view of the bravery of the fishermen? They weren't just risking their lives; they were risking their only means of making a living.

Discussion questions generated by Gemini AI.



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