***Number the Stars***

***Afterword***

***Summary:***

* In the Afterword, the author explains that her book is a novel inspired by real events, including the histories of her friend Annelise and a Resistance fighter named Kim Malthe-Bruun.
* Many of the events discussed in the book really happened. Here are some examples: the King riding around Denmark by himself; the young boy saying that all of Denmark would guard the King; the Danish military destroying their own ships; the local rabbis warning Jews of the coming danger from the Nazis; and even the use of altered handkerchiefs to ward off Nazi dogs.
* The author explains that "almost the entire Jewish population of Denmark—nearly seven thousand people—was smuggled across the sea to Sweden" (Afterword.11).
* The author shares the story of Malthe-Bruun, who remained hopeful even up to his execution by the Nazis, and recommends that people today must keep working on his dream to "create an ideal of human decency" (Afterword.19).
* Pretty inspiring ending, if you ask us.

***Brief Summary:***

In an Afterword to the reader, the author describes the research process she underwent prior to writing *Number the Stars*, and delineates for the reader which events in the story were based on actual history. First off, she credits her friend, Annelise Platt, who grew up in Copenhagen during the time of the German occupation and who helped Lois Lowry understand what the experience had been like from a child's point of view. The daily deprivation, the lack of food, clothing, electricity, etc., had all been part of Annelise's experiences. It was from Annelise that the author learned how courageous the Danish people had been under the leadership of their beloved king, Christian X, who did indeed like to ride out alone to greet his people. The story of the boy who told the German soldier that all of Denmark was the king's bodyguard is a true story documented in writing.

Historically, Denmark surrendered to Germany in 1940. The story is set in 1943, just past the halfway point of the occupation. In August of 1943, the Danes did, indeed, sink their entire naval fleet, and Annelise was woken by the lights and explosions. Also true was the part where the rabbi warns the Jewish people of Copenhagen, during synagogue services on the New Year of the Jewish High Holidays, that the Germans were coming for them. The author reveals that the rabbi had been tipped off by a courageous German official who committed treason by revealing the Nazi's plans to the Danish government, who, in turn, warned the leaders of the Jewish community. The German's name was G.F. Duckwitz, and the author hopes his courage in taking a stand against the Reich will be remembered.

In the weeks following the Jewish New Year, nearly the entire Jewish population of Denmark - seven thousand strong - was smuggled across the ocean to Sweden. The handkerchief, which Annemarie smuggled to her uncle was also a legitimate part of history. Swedish scientists created a mixture of rabbit's blood, to attract the dogs' attention, and cocaine, to temporarily numb their sense of smell. The Danish boat captains used these handkerchiefs to prevent the discovery of their hidden human cargo.

Even the character of Peter Neilsen was based on a real-life young man named Kim Malthe-Bruun, a member of the Danish Resistance, who was captured and executed by the Nazis when he was twenty-one years old. The letter he wrote to his mother on the night before his execution sums up, for the author, what she hopes her story will tell people, "'you must not dream yourselves back to the times before the war, but the dream for you all, young and old, must be to create an ideal of human decency, and not a narrow-minded and prejudiced one. That is the great gift our country hungers for..."' (p. 137).

***Brief Analysis:***

Given the historical subject matter of the book, it is highly appropriate and welcome that the author chooses to divulge what details were based on fact. It is said that truth is stranger than fiction, and with regards to the Holocaust, no fictionalized version could possibly be more horrible or more awe-inspiring than the reality. By discussing the reality of events, the author provides a valuable lesson to her young readers. For history is too easily forgotten; for example, there are groups of Neo-Nazi youth who refuse to believe that the Holocaust ever occurred. Again, denial comes into play because who would willingly choose to believe that the German people could have or would have systematically set out to murder millions of innocent Jews. In modern-day Germany, to protect against such cultural denial, the government has a law in place that makes it a crime to deny the Holocaust. America, based on our Constitution, would never restrict free speech in such a manner, making books such as Number the Stars, which teach our children about history, even more important.

And yet, Lois Lowry's book does not sufficiently educate its readers on the horrors of the Holocaust. Certainly as a children's book author, she must have carefully considered how much information to give her readership, just as Uncle Henrik's character carefully censors some of the more painful details when he talks to Annemarie. One cannot say she is wrong for withholding some pertinent facts - such as what the Germans were really doing to the Jews whom they "relocated" - but one must consider the possibility that she is underestimating her audience by not telling them the whole truth. The Germans certainly didn't spare children from death or torture because they were young and innocent. Any child who grew up during this era had no choice but to deal with some very hard realities, and by not being more open about historical truth, Lois Lowry may rightfully be attempting to preserve the very peace of mind we fought World War II, to create. However, denial of tragedy often leads to repetition of tragedy, and so this book might be more beneficial to its target audience if educators and parents pair it with other historical works, a trip to the Holocaust Museum, and/or a thoughtful discussion about the context of the story.

But denial aside, Lois Lowry's subject matter is both heart-warming and hopeful. Many countries turned their Jewish population over to the Nazis in the hopes that everyone else would be spared. This is one of the saddest truths about the Holocaust, that neighbor turned against neighbor to save their own lives at the expense of their humanity. To read a true story, in which the people of Denmark work together to save their Jewish friends and neighbors, is to be reminded that dark times can also bring out the best in people. In the face of so much darkness, we must have hope in order to carry on and to heal. Stories such as this one help bring about healing by reminding the descendents of the Holocaust Jews that the entire world was not against them, as it must so often seem, but that in reality many courageous people put their lives on the line to help.

The Holocaust was such an unmitigated tragedy that even today it can render people hopeless about the future of our species. The sheer number of atrocities committed against the Jews and others, and the sheer number of people from all over the world who condoned, assisted, and committed these atrocities can seem overwhelming. So it is truly inspiring to realize - in stories like this one, in the case of Oscar Schindler, or in the case of Werner Heisenberg - how much difference a single person can make to protect us all against the tide of evil. Humanity need not feel helpless in the face of overwhelming evil as long as we have faith that the right person will be in the right place at the right time to help make things right in the end. If we should find, as did Oscar Schindler, Werner Heisenberg, G.F. Duckwitz, and Annemarie Johansen that we are the right person in the right place at the right time, hopefully stories such as these will inspire us, in that moment, to do the right thing.

***Critical Study:***

In the Afterword to Number the Stars Lowry explains how much of the story is true. Annemarie is a fictional character, but Lowry was inspired to create her by real stories that come from a friend of Lowry's, Annelise Platt (the novel is dedicated to her) who was a child in Denmark during the years of the war. Lowry was impressed by the stories of the Danes' bravery and devotion to their king.

Lowry goes on to outline some of the historical facts Number the Stars centers around. King Christian X was the king of Denmark when it was taken over by Germany in 1940. The country was too small to fight back without losing many people. Soldiers were all over Copenhagen. King Christian, however, did continue to ride his horse through the streets daily, without a bodyguard. Lowry adapted the story Mr. Johansen tells about the young man and the soldier from a document that survives from the World War II era. The Danes did sink their own navy in 1943. And on the Jewish New Year of 1943, the rabbi of the Copenhagen synagogue did warn those gathered that the Germans had their names. The rabbi had been given this information by one of the German officials, G.F. Duckwitz. Lowry commends this official for his action. A majority of the Jews were then hidden and helped to Sweden. It is also true that the handkerchief could have existed. Swedish scientists created a mixture of cocaine and rabbits blood that would temporarily kill dogs' sense of smell.

Lowry did research on the Danish Resistance. She found that most of the members were very young people, many of whom were killed by the Germans. During her research she discovered the story and photograph of a young man named Kim Malthe-Brunn. On this young man, Lowry based the character of Peter Neilsen. Lowry was struck by the letter that Malthe-Brunn sent to his family the night before he was shot. She includes in the Afterword a piece of that letter. It calls for dreams of creating "an ideal of human decency, and not a narrow-minded and prejudiced one."

By adding an Afterword to her novel, Lowry connects Number the Stars directly to the historical reality of World War II. She gives credit to the sources of her inspiration, demonstrating her respect for the people who actually experienced the events that the fictional characters of Number the Stars experience. An Afterword like this one is important to a novel based so heavily on historical fact. For the reader, the information that Lowry offers provides a dimension that the novel would not have had on its on—it makes real the struggles, risks, and deaths of a fictional group of people. In this way, the Afterword to Number the Stars acts as a memorial to all the real people who inspired the fictional characters of the novel.

***Critical Analysis:***

This is a note from the author detailing which parts of the novel are true. [Lowry](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/author/) informs readers the inspiration for Annemarie's character was "Annelise Platt, to whom the book is dedicated, who was herself a child in Copenhagen during the long years of German occupation." Lowry said she was moved and very interested by Annelise's descriptions of the suffering and sacrifices her family and neighbors endured during the German Occupation in Denmark and by Platt's descriptions of the heroism of the people of Denmark during that time. What Annelise Platt told Lowry was her inspiration for writing *Number the Stars*. Lowry details the aspects of the reality of the story setting, the deprivations, and the Danish devotion to their king. She also discusses the reasons behind the quick Danish surrender to the Nazis and notes the truth about the Danes' feeling they were all King Christian's bodyguards is true as well.

The details of the rescue of the Jews are also historically accurate. G.F. Duckwitz, a German diplomat living in Denmark, passed on the warning to the local rabbi that Germans were about to round up Danish Jews on Rosh Hashanah. The rabbi then passed it on to his community. Lowry writes, "[the Jews] fled the first raids. They fled into the arms of the Danes, who took them in, fed them, clothed them, hid them, and helped them along to safety in Sweden."

Lowry further explains the chemical-laden handkerchief was historically accurate as well. Swedish scientists designed it because the Nazis were using dogs to locate Jews hidden on ships. Apparently, the chemists created a powerful powder composed of dried rabbit's blood and cocaine. The cocaine acted to temporarily deaden the sense of smell of the dogs.

The final aspect she addresses is the character of [Peter Neilsen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/character-analysis/#Peter_Neilsen). She writes, "I came across an account of a young man named Kim Malthe-Bruun, who was eventually captured and executed by the Nazis when he was only twenty-one years old." She discusses him and includes an excerpt of a letter written by him to his mother the night before he was killed.

[Lowry](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/author/)'s book relies heavily on historical facts, events, and people. She has taken an episode of hope that occurred during a time of great darkness and written about it. As part of that, Lowry has added a chapter at the close to discuss some of the historical details for readers.