***Number the Stars***

***Chapter 1***

***Brief Summary:***

Ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen races her best friend, Ellen, down the residential streets of Copenhagen on their way home from school. Five-year-old Kirsti, Annemarie's younger sister, becomes irritated because she can't keep up with the older girls. As Annemarie and Ellen round a corner, they are ordered to halt by two German soldiers holding rifles. Kirsti is not frightened; the German soldiers have been in Copenhagen for three years now, and, to Kirsti, they seem a normal part of the landscape.

Annemarie, however, remembers the days before Germans patrolled the streets with their guns. She recognizes one of the soldiers, having passed him on the street many times before. She has privately nicknamed him "the Giraffe" because of his long neck. However, this is the first time she's ever been stopped by the soldiers, and she's frightened. They demand to know the girls' names, and Annemarie tells them politely. After a few more questions, the soldiers let the girls go.

On their way back to their apartment building, Ellen and Annemarie resolve not to tell their mothers of the incident, wanting to spare them worry. However, Kirsti has already told the story to her mom and Mrs. Rosen, Ellen's mother, by the time Annemarie enters the kitchen. Mrs. Johansen comments in a low voice to Ellen's mother that the soldiers must be on edge because of the recent activities of the Resistance movement.

Mrs. Johansen keeps up with the Resistance movement through an illegal newspaper, *De Frie Danske* (*The Free Danes*), which Peter Neilsen brings to the apartment occasionally. As soon as Annemarie's parents finish reading the paper, they burn it, but sometimes Annemarie hears her parents talking about the news they learn from the paper. She knows the Danish Resistance fighters are brave people, who are determined to undermine the Nazis in any way possible.

Mrs. Rosen insists that Annemarie and Ellen walk a different way to school the next day to avoid the soldiers. Annemarie reminds her that there are soldiers on every corner, but Mrs. Rosen tells her it's safer to avoid soldiers, who will remember the girls' faces. Mrs. Rosen further advises them to blend in with the crowd. Kirsti wishes for a cupcake, but her mother can only give her plain bread. Mrs. Johansen tells Kirsti there will be no more cupcakes until the Germans are gone.

***Brief Analysis:***

Lois Lowry has chosen challenging subject matter for her young audience - the Holocaust. As a society, we want our children to feel secure, happy and at peace while they're growing up. We would, perhaps, rather protect them from becoming too aware of the evils in the world, yet we cannot protect them from everything. Certainly the Nazis gave no thought to sparing the sensibilities of the millions of innocent children they killed. In order to prevent such tragedies in the future, it is important that our children be taught the lessons of history - how damaging prejudice can be, and, by contrast, how friendship and courage can empower a nation.

Lois Lowry has selected age-appropriate subject matter, fictionalized from the actual history of the Holocaust. Her story focuses on doing right by our friends and neighbors, and on the necessity of finding courage beyond our years or experience. She tells the story from the perspective of a child who actually lived such events, in order to communicate to the children of today that their safety and peace of mind are gifts to be appreciated.

Annemarie is ten years old, and the book is targeted towards children about that age. Kirsti, the five-year-old sister, represents the utter innocence of the very young. Kirsti is too young to realize she should be afraid of the soldiers. At the opening of the novel, the Nazis have occupied Denmark for three of the five years of Kirsti's existence, and she remembers no other way of living. Her young thoughts are preoccupied with the food shortage and the absence of the sweets, which she remembers vividly, although it's been more than a year since she tasted a cupcake. In contrast, Annemarie is old enough to start realizing that there are dangers in the world and matters more important than cupcakes.

***Critical Study:***

Number the Stars opens with a street scene in Copenhagen. Annemarie, her younger sister Kirsti, and her best friend Ellen Rosen race home from school. On the way, two German soldiers stop them. Annemarie is disgusted by the fact that the soldier's Danish is so poor after three years of occupation. The soldiers interrogate the girls. Annemarie does most of the talking. The soldiers let the girls go, warning them not to run any more because it makes them "look like hoodlums." In silence, the girls walk home as quickly as possible. They reach the building where their families live, careful to avoid notice by another pair of soldiers on their corner. As they part, Ellen admits that she was scared and Annemarie says she was, too. They agree not to tell their mothers about the incident.

In the Johansen's apartment, Mrs. Johansen and Mrs. Rosen are waiting for their daughters to arrive. The women are drinking what they call coffee, which is actually only herbs in water because of the rationing. Kirsti gets to the door first and tells her mother what happened, exaggerating the story. Both mothers are concerned. Mrs. Johansen explains to Mrs. Rosen that the soldiers are "edgy because of the latest Resistance incidents." Annemarie pretends not to be listening to the discussion. Her mother whispers that their friend Peter Neilsen has brought the illegal Resistance newspaper, De Frie Danske (The Free Danes). The girls are to take a different route to school from now on. Mrs. Rosen leaves to talk to her daughter Ellen.

The girls are hungry, but there is little to eat. They have bread, but no butter. Kirsti longs out loud for a cupcake. Mrs. Johansen gently explains to her daughter that there is no sugar and there will be none until the war ends and the soldiers leave.

***Summary in Detail:***

[Annemarie Johansen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/character-analysis/#Annemarie_Johansen) and [Ellen Rosen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/character-analysis/#Ellen_Rosen), both 10 years old, are running home after school. They are followed by Annemarie's five-year-old sister, Kirsti. They have a girls' race at school the following week, and Annemarie wants to practice. Annemarie is ahead when she is stopped by two Nazi soldiers. They ask why she is running, and she starts to explain. The soldier asks what's in her backpack, and when she tells him, he asks if she's a good student and if Ellen is. One of the soldiers strokes Kirsti's hair and says she reminds him of his daughter. Then the soldiers tell them to go home but not to run.

At their apartment building Ellen and Annemarie decide not to tell their mothers, but Kirsti already has. [Mrs. Johansen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/character-analysis/#Mrs._Johansen) says to Mrs. Rosen the soldiers "must be edgy because of the latest Resistance incidents." The mothers talk about the news in the illegal paper, *De Frie Danske* (*The Free Danes*). Annemarie thinks about the Resistance movement. They speak a little more—Mrs. Rosen asks the girls to walk a different way, and they talk about the lack of butter. There is no butter for bread, and there are no cupcakes, which Kirsti wants. Mrs. Johansen says there won't be until "the war ends" and "the soldiers leave."

***Analysis in Detail:***

The first chapters set the tone of the book. The reader will find it useful to remember this novel was written for teenagers and children, many of whom will not yet be familiar with the extent of the German occupation or the horrors the Nazis inflicted on Europe. In the novel [Lowry](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Number-the-Stars/author/) describes the difficult reality of trying to continue on with the business of normal life while under occupation by a foreign army.

The majority of the story is set in 1943. By this time the Danes were actively resisting the occupying forces. The narrator explains the Danish population and Resistance movement "damaged German trucks, and bombed their factories. They were very brave. Sometimes they were caught and killed." Despite all of this Ellen and Annemarie are still children who must go to school. They talk about school things. Annemarie wants to win "the girls' race this week." Life continues on despite the war that rages all around them. Kirsti, for example, is only five. Her sense of "normal" is only that of life under German occupation. The main characters, Annemarie and Ellen, have memories of life before the war.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

Ten-year-old [Annemarie Johansen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) wants to race her best friend [Ellen Rosen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/ellen-rosen) home from school through the streets of their Copenhagen neighborhood, but Ellen wants to walk. When Annemarie pleads, though, insisting she needs to practice for an upcoming race at school, Ellen acquiesces, and the two take off down the sidewalk. Annemarie’s little sister [Kirsti](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/kirsti-johansen), who has been walking with them, asks them to wait up, but the older girls don’t even hear her.

***Analysis Part 1:***

This passage establishes just how close Ellen and Annemarie are. Even though Annemarie’s little sister Kirsti is with them, Annemarie is much more interested in Ellen’s attention and company.

***Summary Part 2:***

As [Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) and [Ellen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/ellen-rosen) arrive at the corner, they run smack into two German soldiers who are stationed at the end of the block wearing shiny boots and holding rifles. The soldiers demand to know why the girls are running and ask what they’re carrying in their backpacks. Both Ellen and Annemarie insist that they are just schoolgirls having fun on their way home. One of the soldiers tries to touch [Kirsti](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/kirsti-johansen)’s blonde hair, stating that she reminds him of his own daughter back in Germany, but Kirsti pulls away from him. After a tense moment, the soldiers send the girls home—but warn them not to run the rest of the way there.

***Analysis Part 2:***

The fun, carefree energy of the opening passage is dashed here as the truth of the girls’ lives is thrown into relief—they live in Nazi-occupied Copenhagen, and the threat of soldiers stationed on every street corner harassing them—or worse—is omnipresent.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen), [Ellen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/ellen-rosen), and [Kirsti](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/kirsti-johansen) arrive back at the apartment building where they all live. Ellen tells Annemarie how scared she was, face-to-face with the soldiers, and Annemarie admits that she, too, was frightened. Kirsti, though, seems to have forgotten about the incident already, and chatters about school and homework. To the five-year-old Kirsti, the soldiers are “simply part of the landscape.”

***Analysis Part 3:***

The Nazis have been in power in Copenhagen so long that Kirsti is used to them—but for Ellen and Annemarie, they represent the upheaval of the happy, peaceful lives they once knew.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Ellen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/ellen-rosen) and [Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) agree not to tell their mothers about the incident, for fear of upsetting them. Ellen goes into her apartment on the second floor, and Annemarie and [Kirsti](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/kirsti-johansen) head up to their apartment on the third floor. Kirsti bursts in the door and begins telling her mother all about their encounter with the soldier—Annemarie’s mother [Mrs. Johansen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-mama) is sitting with [Mrs. Rosen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters) at the kitchen table. The women are having “coffee,” as they do most afternoons, though there hasn’t been coffee in Copenhagen “since the beginning of the Nazi occupation.” The women drink hot water and herbs now, but still enjoy one another’s company.

***Analysis Part 4:***

As Annemarie and Kirsti return home, Lowry uses Mrs. Johansen and Mrs. Rosen’s afternoon routines alongside their daughters’ to show that the adults, just like the children, are still trying to cling to normalcy and old comforts even in the face of fear and danger.

***Summary Part 5:***

Hearing [Kirsti](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/kirsti-johansen)’s story, [Mrs. Rosen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters) becomes frightened, and asks where [Ellen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/ellen-rosen) is—[Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) assures her that Ellen is safe downstairs. As Kirsti continues talking about the encounter, [Mama](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-mama) goes over to the window and looks down at the quiet street. She comments that the soldiers may be “edgy because of the latest Resistance incidents,” and cites an article she’s read in an illegal Resistance newspaper about nearby bombings. Annemarie knows that her parents support—but are not directly involved in—the Resistance, a group of “very secret” Danes who are “determined to bring harm to the Nazis” by any means possible, even at the risk of their own lives.

***Analysis Part 5:***

Annemarie’s knowledge of the existence of the Resistance—but her ignorance as to many of the details of their operations—shows that she is just on the cusp of being old enough to know certain things.

***Summary Part 6:***

[Mrs. Rosen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters) heads downstairs to talk to [Ellen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/ellen-rosen), urging [Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) to walk to school a “different way” tomorrow—she says it’s important for the German soldiers to never learn the girls’ faces, and for one to always be “one of the crowd.”

***Analysis Part 7:***

Mrs. Rosen knows that anonymity is an important tool, and that hiding in plain sight is the surest way to avoid trouble with the Nazis. As a Jewish woman, she cannot risk confrontation or provocation, and neither can her daughter.

***Summary Part 8:***

[Annemarie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/annemarie-johansen) asks if there’s anything to eat for a snack, and [Mama](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/mrs-johansen-mama) tells her there’s some bread, though they can’t spare any butter. [Kirsti](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/number-the-stars/characters/kirsti-johansen) sighs and says she wants a “big yellow cupcake with pink frosting,” but Mama laughs at her daughter’s fancy. Kirsti asks if there will ever be cupcakes in Copenhagen again—Mama tells her there will be, but only after the war is over and all the soldiers leave.

***Analysis Part 8:***

Though the harsh reality of the present is all around her, Kirsti continues to dream of luxuries she can only barely remember.