

Classroom Resources



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NOTES BY:

Sue Warren and Jemma Myors

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Running with Ivan

Suzanne Leal

BOOK SUMMARY

Yearning to escape the new family he never wanted, thirteen-year-old Leo Arnold is transported to wartime Europe where he must draw on his courage to save himself and those around him.

From award-winning author Suzanne Leal comes a gripping timeslip novel inspired by true stories.

Thirteen-year-old Leo Arnold hates his life. He doesn't want a new school, a new house or a new family. And he definitely doesn't want to be sharing a room with his new stepbrother, Cooper.

What Leo wants is to be somewhere else, far away. So when he uncovers an old music box and turns the key, he is astonished to find himself in Prague, surrounded by whispers and fears of a second world war. A war that ended decades ago.

In Prague, Leo meets Ivan, a Czech boy, and the two become friends. But when World War Two finally erupts, the unimaginable becomes real and the boys are imprisoned. Fearing the worst, Leo and Ivan frantically search for an escape. A search that sends them running.

Running against time.
Running for their lives.

KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

- ACELT1608
- ACELT1613
- ACELT1620
- ACHASSI125

THEMES

- Grief & Loss
- WWII
- Family
- Identity

Recommended Reading Ages: 10+

Resources Created For: Upper Primary

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Before Reading

1. As a class, examine the cover of *Running with Ivan* and discuss where and when they think the novel might be set:
 - a) Is it set in Australia? What clues are there to this?
 - b) Will the novel be set in recent times?
 - c) What aspects can they identify as to the setting e.g., architecture and construction, boys' clothing, Jewish star.
 - d) What techniques have been used to convey the period?
2. As a class or in small groups, have students create an anchor chart of what they already know about World War II, Hitler, and the Holocaust.
3. Do the class know much about Czechoslovakia during WWII?
 - a) Locate Czechoslovakia (as it was) on a world map. Have students conduct some research to virtually explore Prague and other locations mentioned. Look at older as well as contemporary maps to see how this part of Europe has changed from the 1930s.
 - b) A box of non-fiction books about WWII and Czechoslovakia may be useful to refer to as the class work their way through the novel.

During Reading

1. Ask students to create Character Profiles for Leo, Ivan, Cooper and Sandy using the '5Ws and an H' method to capture information on:
 - a) their behaviour and personality
 - b) their similarities and differences
 - c) important events they're involved in.Encourage students to use quotes from the novel as well as their own words.
2. Why is Leo finding his new family structure so difficult in the opening few chapters?
 - a) How does he feel about the different members of his family?
 - b) How much has changed for Leo, particularly compared to his stepbrothers?
 - c) How does Leo's grief over his mother's death affect his ability to feel part of this new family?
 - d) Is Leo's father offering Leo as much support as he should?
 - e) What role does running play in Leo's ability to cope with all the changes in his life?
 - f) Sandy is also without her mother, although in a different way to Leo. Does this help Leo and Sandy become friends?
3. Pages 14-15: Discuss how Principal O'Brien intimidates Leo and Cooper in different ways.
 - a) How does this impact on their attitudes towards each other?
 - b) Contrast this with Mr Sheridan's welcome to Leo on pages 19-20. How does he make the boy feel more at ease?
4. What techniques are used to communicate that the Mandls are a wealthy family? (pages 62, 71, 74, 95)

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5. How is the reader shown the effect that Hitler is having on the German people? (pages 74, 76, 98)
6. Pages 87-91: what can we deduce about the relationship between Cooper and Troy and their father?
 - a) How would the interaction between Cooper (and Troy) and their father impact on their attitudes towards the other members of their family?
7. On page 114, there is a meaningful and revealing interaction between Leo and Greta. Leo is so agitated he is physically ill. What reason/s are there for him to become so disturbed?
8. Leo refers to the room in the garage as his 'hideaway' on page 117. What are the connotations of this word, and what do they reveal about how he feels about the rest of his home?
9. Why does the music box not work when Leo tries to wind it up on page 153?
 - a) What is the author's purpose here?
10. Throughout *Running with Ivan* there are several different bedrooms described: the room Leo has to share with Cooper; the hideaway room at the back of the garage; Ivan's bedroom; Greta's hotel bedroom; the crowded dormitory room.
 - a) How do these all differ?
 - b) What mood is set by each?
 - c) How does this add to the narrative?
 - d) How do students regard their own bedroom – A sanctuary? A private space? A place to be avoided?
11. Analyse the purpose of running as a motif throughout the narrative. Provide at least three quotes from different parts of the novel in your response.
12. Olinda tells Ivan and Leo about Jewish people being sent to Poland for 'work' but is puzzled why the old people, who don't or can't work, are also sent? Why is the warehouse full of clothes and suitcases? What is the truth of these transports?
13. The filmed opera, in which Leo sees Olinda in the documentary, is a real propaganda film. Students can watch this clip to see some of the entire film. It is also a fact that many of the children, probably all in the choir, were sent to Auschwitz. Students might know that this is also the camp in which Anne Frank died. Why would the Nazis go to such lengths to deceive the Red Cross? (pages 213-224)
14. There have been many books, including historical fiction, written about the war and the Holocaust, from the point of view of children or with child characters. This one differs from many of these in that the historical narrative begins well before the war and the reader is able to track the mounting unease and anxiety before the war begins.
 - a) Where is this tension first identifiable in the novel?
 - b) Plot the events that increase this tension onto a timeline, providing quotes for each event.

Language and literacy

1. Ask students to keep a list of the German words used in the novel. Create a shared vocabulary wall/space where these words and their meanings can be easily seen.
 - a) Compare German words with their English equivalents. Why do students think some of these words are quite similar?

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New vocabulary. Use the table below to create a glossary of unusual or unfamiliar words. Add any others you find to the table:

Word	Page	What I think it means	Dictionary definition	Synonym
Gesticulated	3	Use your body to help you talk	to make or use gestures, esp. with the hands and arms, as in adding nuances or force to one's speech, or as a substitute for speech	Motioned Signaled Signed
Speckled	19			
Swastika	21			
Profusion	22			
Glum	31			
Gloating	38			
Chancellor	60			
Hallucination	63			
Tentatively	93			
Endeavour	121			
Communiqué	143			
Mustering	151			
Buoyed	156			
Wistfulness	160			
Perplexed	166			
Extension: Use your new words in sentences.				

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After Reading

1. *Running with Ivan* is told from the point of view of Leo. Using the information collected in students' character profiles, ask them to compose three diary entries by Ivan, Cooper or Sandy at significant points in the novel that involved them.
 - a) What did they think and feel about what happened?
 - b) How and why might they have understood what happened differently?
 - c) Encourage students to use some of the new vocabulary they collected from the novel in their responses.
 - d) Ask students to make sure that every entry evokes at least three of the five senses, and that all five senses are covered across the three diary entries.
 - e) Extension: In pairs, have students who wrote as the same character share their writing with each other.
 - (i) What is similar and what is different about what they have written?
 - (ii) Ask students to explain, with reference to the novel, their choices about how these characters reacted to these events.
2. While some of the historic events in *Running with Ivan* are quite well-known, many, particularly those that take place in Czechoslovakia, are not. As a class, create a display to share with the rest of the school. In small groups ask students to create a poster sharing information on:
 - a) Prague: Then and Now
 - b) Adolf Hitler
 - c) The Nuremberg Rallies
 - d) Rainer Maria Rilke
 - e) Music Boxes
 - f) Theresienstadt Ghetto
 - g) Jewish Councils
 - h) Benjamin Murmelstein
 - i) Auschwitz
 - j) Jewish Refugees
 - k) Other events or topics of particular interest.
3. Discuss the parallels between Leo and Ivan. Consider: Leo's grief over his mother's death and the grief and loss he witnesses from the Holocaust including Ivan's losses; Ivan's relationship with Greta; Leo's with Julia. How do these commonalities in their experience help Leo understand and come to terms with his own situation?

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About the Author

Suzanne Leal is the author of novels *The Teacher's Secret*, *Border Street* and *The Deceptions*, for which she won the Nib People's Choice Prize and was shortlisted for the Davitt Awards and the Mark and Evette Moran Nib Literary Award. A senior member of the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal and facilitator at community, corporate and literary events, Suzanne is the host of Thursday Book Club, a relaxed, friendly book club connecting readers online. www.suzanneleal.com

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