

12 MARCH - 23 MAY 2009



BRIGHTON & HOVE
CITY READS 2009

The
Book Thief

BY MARKUS ZUSAK

ONE CITY. ONE BOOK. A THOUSAND CONCLUSIONS.

WWW.CITYREADS.CO.UK

WHAT IS CITY READS?

Imagine sharing a book with your neighbour, with your hairdresser, with your bus driver and with your friends. Having one book for one city brings readers together.

Last year Brighton & Hove celebrated Val McDermid's modern crime classic *A Place of Execution* with three packed months of events, debates, discussions and collective reads.

Now City Reads 2009 invites you to join us in a citywide read of Markus Zusak's international bestseller *The Book Thief*. From March 12 to the closing event with Markus on 23 May during Brighton Festival, there's a host of special events, workshops, reading groups and film showings focusing on *The Book Thief* and related themes.

WHO IS IT FOR?

City Reads is for everyone: whether you're an occasional reader or a confirmed bibliophile. It doesn't matter what you do, where you live or what you read: City Reads is about opening up the world of words and ideas to everyone.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

It couldn't be simpler. The idea is to get the whole city reading *The Book Thief* between now and the end of May. All you need to do to get involved is pick up a copy from your local library, bookshop or book drop point and start reading...

THE GUIDE

This guide provides everything you need to know about City Reads. It also takes you on a whistlestop tour of Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*, providing background information, reading hints, biographical facts and ideas for further reading. For more up-to-the-minute information visit www.cityreads.co.uk

BOOK RELEASE

Throughout the reading period free copies of *The Book Thief* will be released all over the city. Look for them in cafes and launderettes, on buses and benches.

BOOK GROUPS

If you're part of a book group, or would like to set one up, the City Library Service can arrange for you to borrow a set of *The Book Thief* books to read. E-mail – libraries@brighton-hove.gov.uk

MAILING LIST

To join our free City Reads mailing list e-mail: cityreadsbrighton@goolemail.com

'I was overwhelmed by the response to A Place of Execution. People seemed fired up by the idea of taking part in a reading experience that embraced the whole city.'

VAL McDERMID – CITY READS AUTHOR 2008

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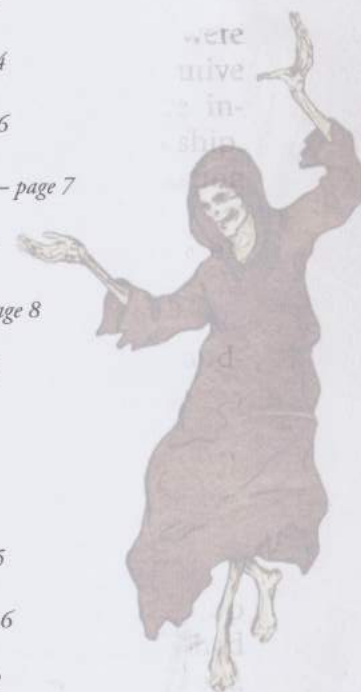
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'It was an extraordinary experience, having a book featured in City Reads... it felt, for a writer, astonishing to have this proper space with readers and audience.'

ALI SMITH – CITY READS AUTHOR 2006

ABOUT THE BOOK



IN WHICH WE SHED SOME LIGHT
ON THE ILLUSTRIOUS CAREER
OF LIESEL MEMINGER

It's JUST A SMALL STORY REALLY,
ABOUT, AMONGST OTHER THINGS:

a girl
some words
an accordionist
some fanatical Germans
a Jewish fist-fighter
and quite a lot of thievery...

It is 1939. Nazi Germany. The country is holding its breath. Death has never been busier. Liesel, a nine-year-old girl, is living with her foster family on Himmel Street. Her parents have been taken away to a concentration camp. Liesel steals books. *The Book Thief* is her story and the story of the inhabitants of her street when the bombs begin to fall. Narrated by Death himself, it is a moving exploration of the power of words and their ability to change lives...



'Unsettling, thought-provoking, life-affirming, triumphant and tragic, this is a novel of breathtaking scope, masterfully told.'

THE GUARDIAN

SYNOPSIS



A BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO THE BOOK THIEF

WHO DID WHAT TO WHOM, WHERE, WHEN AND WHY?
IF YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW THE SCORE, LOOK AWAY NOW...

When nine-year-old Liesel arrives outside the house of her new foster parents, Hans and Rosa Hubermann, she refuses to get out of the car. Liesel has been separated from her parents – 'Kommunists' – and at the burial of her young brother, she finds a gravedigger's instruction manual, which she can't read. So begins a love affair with books and words – and her illustrious career as a book thief.

In the care of the Hubermanns, Liesel befriends blond-haired Rudy Steiner, a young boy obsessed with black Olympian Jesse Owens. She also makes the acquaintance of the mayor's wife, a refugee from her own quiet despair. With the help of her accordion playing foster father, Liesel learns to read. With her new-found skill comes an intense hunger for words and stories. To sate this desire, Liesel turns her hand to thievery. Aided and abetted by the industrious Rudy, she begs, borrows and – where necessary – steals books: from Nazi pyres, from the mayor's library, from the great and good of her adoptive town.

Liesel's small-scale treacheries are put into perspective when THE BIG PICTURE comes calling at the Hubermann household in the shape of Jewish fist-fighter turned fugitive from history Max Vandenburg. With Max secreted in the Hubermann basement and the war marching steadily towards annihilation, the only sanctuary for Liesel, her new-found companion and the good folk of Molching is in the reading, writing and sharing of stories.

Set against a backdrop of war and brutality, *The Book Thief* is a story of hope, friendship and survival. It snatches from the darkest depths of man's folly a spark of humanity and the chance for redemption.

'For a whole community like Brighton to adopt my book in this way is exciting, humbling, and at least slightly terrifying. I can't wait to get up there – I'm honoured.'

MARKUS ZUSAK

SOME BACKGROUND



IN WHICH WE DISCOVER MORE STUFF ABOUT WHY,
HOW, WHERE AND WHEN, THOUGH NOT NECESSARILY
IN THAT ORDER...

WHY?

Markus Zusak grew up hearing stories about Nazi Germany, about the bombing of Munich and about Jews being marched through his mother's small German town:

'One was about a boy being whipped in the street for giving a starving Jewish man a piece of bread. The man sank to his knees and thanked the boy, but the bread was stripped away and both the taker of the bread and the giver were punished... in one moment there was great kindness and great cruelty, and I saw it as the perfect story of how humans are.'

HOW?

From this premise *The Book Thief* evolved and made itself known to the author through a long hard process of trial and error.

'The Book Thief was supposed to be a small book – only a hundred pages or so... At first I thought of a biography, but as a writer of fiction, I knew it wouldn't take long for the itch to imagine to climb out of me and into the story.'

'My first thought was to make it a personal story, about a girl. Then came an idea that I'd had floating in my head for a couple of years about a stealer of books.'

But how to make the book thief's story come to life on the page?

'For more than a year I tried everything... I tried first person, third person, second person, shifting points of view, present and past tense, and none of it gave me what I wanted.'

THEN CAME DEATH...

'Then I stumbled upon the idea of Death narrating the story, and it all made sense. Who is constantly hanging around in times of war? Who would have the opportunity to pick up a story penned by a girl in a bombed German city? Death was the right answer, although there were still a few decisions to be made.'

'Brilliant and hugely ambitious... the kind of book that could be life changing.'

NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

WHEN?

The Book Thief was first published in 2005 in Australia as an adult novel. It then appeared in the US in 2006 as a young adult book, where it went to number one on the bestseller lists. January 2007 saw the joint publication of two UK hardback editions: one for adults, one for teenagers.

- All told the novel took three years to write. A serious page turner, it takes substantially less time to read!
- *The Book Thief* was nominated for a 2006 Quill Book Award in the Young Adult Literature category. It won the 2006 Kathleen Mitchell Award, the 2007 Michel L. Printz Honor book prize and the 2008 Ena Noel Award.
- As of November 2008 it had been on the *New York Times* bestseller list for over 60 weeks.
- It was number 14 in *The Observer's* top 100 bestsellers of 2008.

WHERE?

The Book Thief is set in Nazi Germany during the Second World War. It was written some 2,000 miles away and over half a century later in Sydney, Australia.

It has been translated into 27 languages and published in numerous countries including Germany, Italy, Russia, France, Spain, Brazil, Korea, Japan, Denmark, Holland, Israel, Serbia, Finland, Taiwan and Norway. It is currently colonising Brighton & Hove, England for three months of discussion, debate and reading pleasure...

The boy turned and they collided with... matically. As the ball rolled her grazed knee with one other Klaus Behrig only he cursing. 'Where is she?' he There would be no killing. It was worse. 'Extraordinary, resonant, beautiful and angry.'

SUNDAY TELEGRAPH



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



13 THINGS YOU OUGHT TO KNOW ABOUT
MARKUS ZUSAK – SOME USEFUL, SOME TRIVIAL,
BUT ALL WITH YOUR BEST INTERESTS AT HEART



1

Markus Zusak is not Death
– he cannot harm you!

2

Anyway, he lives in Australia,
which is miles away...

3

He has written four previous books for young
adults: *The Underdog*, *Fighting Ruben Wolfe*,
Getting the Girl and *I Am the Messenger*.

4

He's won loads of awards.

5

He grew up in suburban Sydney and goes in
for Australian stuff like surfing.

6

He was raised on *Dr Seuss* and a series of
books about a strange character called Grug.

7

He has been writing fiction since the age of 16.

8

His three favourite books were, last time
he looked, *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?*
(Peter Hedges), *The Half Brother* (Lars
Saabye Christensen) and *My Brother Jack*
(George Johnston).

9

Movie-wise take your pick from *Amelie*,
The Big Lebowski and *Run Lola Run*.

10

He is a dog person, but has two cats,
Bijoux and Brutus.

11

In 2005, he read 52 books for another book
about the challenge of reading 52 books.
It was called *53 Killers*. Don't ask!

12

If he could meet anyone who has ever lived,
he would probably choose Michelangelo.

13

His favourite number is thirteen. Honest!

BREAKING INTO THE BOOK THIEF



IN WHICH WE GET DOWN TO THE READING BIT
AND DO A LITTLE LIGHT-FINGERED GROUND WORK
ON YOUR BEHALF

City Reads is about enjoying, sharing and celebrating the act of reading. It is also about finding new ways of unlocking a book's secrets. We don't condone wholesale breaking and entering, but armed with a few choice tools of the trade and a fast getaway car, we'll help you make off with the literary spoils...

MAKING HISTORY



'The challenge of a historical novel is not to render a perfect imitation of the past, but to relate history with something new, enrich and change it with imagination and sensuousness of personal experience.' Orhan Pamuk

This observation from the Nobel Prize-winning author of *My Name Is Red* could be a template for Markus Zusak's own approach to writing historical fiction. *The Book Thief* is located in a very specific historic time and place – Himmel Street, Molching, Nazi Germany, WWII. Death sets the scene, foreshadowing the end at the beginning as he observes a young girl kneeling by an abandoned book amongst the rubble of a small German town, 'flung apart one more time'.

As the clock turns back and Liesel finds herself abandoned, displaced, and re-assimilated, words like Communist, Dachau, Nazi and Jew hang in the air, undefined, yet heavy with portent. From here-on-in history makes itself known by degrees. Zusak refrains from dry lecturing and lengthy exposition on what happened, where when and how – the battles, the political manoeuvring. Instead *The Book Thief* wears its history lightly, pieced together from small symbolic events, conversations and relationships. The story is framed from the everyday perspective of an 11-year-old girl going about her everyday life. As a result history is humanised with a rare warmth, humour and curiosity.

As the novel progresses Death brings detail to the picture – short, sharp shocks of reality (Stalingrad; the bombing of Hamburg). And from the moment Max Vandenburg walks into the Hubermanns' lives, the War is brought into sharp focus. Yet History is always rendered on a human scale, with – as Pamuk puts it – 'imagination and sensuousness of personal experience' at its heart.

WHAT ARE WORDS WORTH?



“THE WORDS. WHY DID THEY HAVE TO EXIST? WITHOUT THEM, THERE WOULDN'T BE ANY OF THIS. WITHOUT WORDS THE FÜHRER WAS NOTHING... WHAT GOOD WERE THE WORDS?”

The Book Thief is a novel about words, about their power to incite and destroy, yet also to heal and forge meaning. Hitler used words to assert power, to ostracise and mobilise. By creating Liesel Meminger – an illiterate and initially powerless protagonist who learns to love, hate, hoard and hunger for words – Markus Zusak creates a potent opposition to Hitler's brutalisation of language.

When Liesel first arrives at Himmel Street, it is through her assimilation of the written word that she first begins to find herself. She discovers the innate power of words: to love, to empathise; yet also to hurt and deceive. She learns the games people play with words: how her foster mother Rosa uses them as barbed weapons of love – ‘hurling them across the table’ at her; and how her own love for Rudy can and must be couched in a covert language of playful abuse – ‘*Saumensch; Saukerl!*’. She discovers how terrible that power can become: ‘She sprayed her words directly into the woman's eyes... the injury of words. Yes, the brutality of words.’ Yet also how often words can fall short of meaning (‘They were going to Dachau to concentrate’).

Conversely she acknowledges how writing itself can be an act of defiance (Max whitewashing Hitler's *Mein Kampf* to create a parable about the transformative power of words). How it can even trigger miracles – Hans Hubermann's fortuitous escape from the WWI battlefields; Max's newfound liberty care of a tampered copy of *Mein Kampf*; and Liesel's own dance with death as she composes *The Book Thief* in her bomb-blasted basement sanctuary.

In short: words can become instruments of destruction in the wrong hands, yet it is only by allowing voices to be heard and stories to be told that we live, learn and make moral progress.



IDENTITY PARADE



“GOOD NIGHT, BOOK THIEF”. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT LIESEL HAD BEEN BRANDED WITH THE TITLE, AND SHE COULDN'T HIDE THE FACT THAT SHE LIKED IT VERY MUCH... THAT NIGHT, LIESEL MEMINGER TRULY BECAME THE BOOK THIEF.

All fictions are in a sense about identity: about who we are and what we might become. Are we defined by our religion, our nation, our family, or is it the actions we take and choices we make that shape us? Markus Zusak explores all of these questions in *The Book Thief*.

When Liesel arrives at the Hubermann household, she has lost touch with her sense of ‘self’. Mysterious words like ‘Kommunist’ haunt her dreams. Is that who she is? And if so, what does it signify? As her early history recedes, she becomes a blank canvas of possibility and begins to assume new identities – daughter, friend, fighter, book thief. Rudy too tries identities on for size – flying in the face of the Hitler Youth's Aryan crusade by assuming the role of black athletics hero Jesse Owens.

Words are means of imposing identity. Jew. Communist. Coward. German. Each is loaded with meaning. Max is a Jew, therefore condemned (though he is also a German). Hans is branded a coward by his Nazi son (yet his acts of bravery seem to know no bounds).

A totalitarian regime like Nazism exists by suppressing the individual. It creates collective identities in the cause of the ‘greater’ ideal. Anything that strays from this template – Jew, Communist, Free Thinker – cannot be tolerated. History, too, can be guilty of collective branding: the German nation + WWII = Nazism. Yet *The Book Thief* goes a long way to subverting this, demonstrating how many Germans broke the mould and refused to submit.

Finally, the act of storytelling itself – Markus Zusak's novel; Max's *Word Shaker*; Liesel's *The Book Thief* – is, at its most fundamental level, a process of finding out who we are and what our lives add up to.

After all, despite the usual bonus of rain, summer was beginning to arrive properly. The *Klar* apple would have been ripening. There was more stealing to be done.

‘A high wire act of inventiveness and emotional suppleness.’

THE AUSTRALIAN

EVENTS



☛ MARKUS ZUSAK AT BRIGHTON FESTIVAL

In conversation with Kate Mosse

You've read the book. You've joined a book group. You've discussed it with friends and family. Or maybe you simply want to find out what all the fuss is about. Bring your City Reads experience full circle by joining Markus Zusak live at Brighton Festival for his first ever UK event. In this special 'in conversation' Markus discusses *The Book Thief* with broadcaster and bestselling author Kate Mosse (*Labyrinth*, *Sepulchre*). With a chance to put your own questions direct to the author himself, it's an unmissable conclusion to City Reads 2009.

Sat 23 May | 3pm | Corn Exchange, Brighton Dome | £8
Brighton Dome Ticket Office (01273) 709709
www.brightonfestival.org ♿



☛ MARKUS ZUSAK WORKSHOP (AGE 13+)

Join Markus to pick up some writing tips and hear how he thought up the storyline for his bestselling novel *The Book Thief*.

Sat 23 May | 11am | Jubilee Library | £5 | Limited spaces
Brighton Dome Ticket Office (01273) 709709
www.brightonfestival.org ♿



☛ THE STUFF OF NIGHTMARES – MICHAEL MORPURGO AND MARKUS ZUSAK

Chaired by William Nicholson

Can books, aimed at a young readership, help make sense of shocking events in recent history? Markus Zusak and former children's Laureate Michael Morpurgo (*War Horse*) talk to children's author William Nicholson (*The Wind Singer*).

Sat 23 May | 7.30pm | Charleston Festival | £10
Brighton Dome Ticket Office (01273) 709709
www.brightonfestival.org ♿



EVENTS



☛ FREE CITY READS FILM SCREENINGS AT JUBILEE LIBRARY

Don't miss Jubilee Library's season of films, specially programmed to tie in with many of the themes from Markus Zusak's bestselling novel.

Sat 4 April, 1pm – *The Diary of Anne Frank*

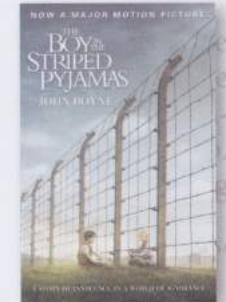
Sun 19 April, 1pm – *The Pianist*

Sun 26 April, 1pm – *Sophie Scholl*

Thu 30 April, 6pm – *The Boy In The Striped Pyjamas*

Sun 3 May, 1pm – *The Boy In The Striped Pyjamas*

Info from Jubilee Library Booklover Store (01273) 294071 ♿



☛ FREE CITY READINGS – LIBRARY COFFEE MORNINGS

Share your thoughts on *The Book Thief* and related subjects at these free library readings / coffee mornings with actress Peta Taylor.

Sat 28 March, 11.30am – Hove Library

Sat 4 April, 11.30am – Rottingdean Library

Sat 18 April, 11.30am – Whitehawk Library

Sat 25 April, 11.30am – Westdene Library

Sat 2 May, 11.30am – Hangleton Library ♿



☛ WARTIME BRITAIN THROUGH THE DIARIES OF MASS OBSERVATION

Mass Observation – a unique survey of everyday life in Britain – was set up on the cusp of the Second World War. Today it is archived at the University of Sussex. Much of the material takes the form of daily personal diaries such as *Nella Last's War*, made into a TV drama as *Housewife 49* starring Victoria Wood. Find out more about these diaries with Professor Dorothy Sheridan (*Wartime Women: A Mass Observation Anthology*) and Fiona Courage (Special Collections, University of Sussex Library).

Thu 16 April | 6.30pm–7.45pm | Jubilee Library | Free
Tickets from Jubilee Library Booklover Store
(01273) 294071 ♿



EVENTS



☛ BRIGHTON BEHIND THE FRONT – GUIDED WALK

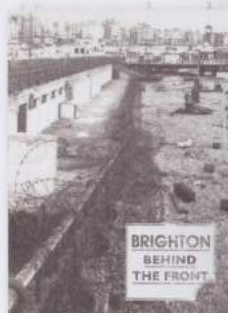
In association with QueenSpark Books

A fascinating exploration of some of Brighton's many WWII locations, with local historian Jackie Marsh-Hobbs. The walk ends with refreshments. Meet on the west side of the Volks Railway Ticket Kiosk, Madeira Drive.

Sat 18 April | 11am–12.30pm | £6 (includes refreshments)

Brighton Dome Ticket Office (01273) 709709

www.brightonticketshop.com



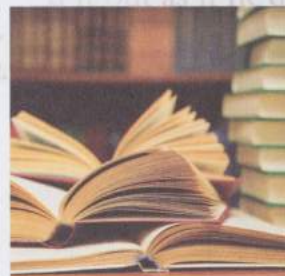
☛ CITY READS BOOK QUIZ AT JUBILEE LIBRARY

Back by popular demand, the City Reads Book Quiz returns to test your literary mettle. With a special round on Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*. Come along and join a team or bring your own. This event always sells out – so book early to avoid disappointment. Wine and soft drinks on sale.

Thu 23 April | 6.45pm | £3.50

Tickets from Jubilee Library Booklover Store

(01273) 294071



☛ WRITING FICTION WITH HISTORY

– WRITING WORKSHOP

Are you fascinated by an old family story, a historical character or a little known historical event? Learn the art of writing fiction in a historical setting with acclaimed Penguin novelist and creative writing tutor Alison MacLeod (*The Wave Theory of Angels*, *Fifteen Modern Tales of Attraction*). Alison will offer practical approaches and ideas for transforming your material into inspiring fiction.

Sat 25 April | 9.30am–1.30pm

Cornerstone Community Centre (Hove) | £20 / £15

Brighton Dome Ticket Office (01273) 709709

www.brightonticketshop.com



TELLING TALES



☛ 'HERE IS A SMALL FACT: YOU ARE GOING TO DIE... PLEASE, TRUST ME. ☛

I MOST DEFINITELY CAN BE CHEERFUL. I CAN BE AMIABLE. AGREEABLE.

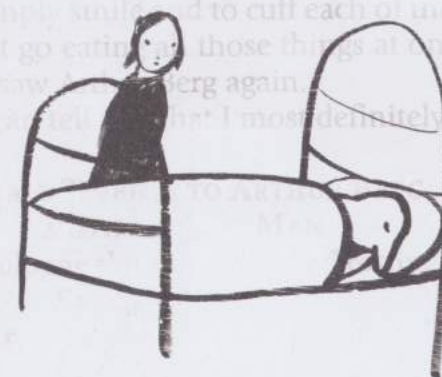
AFFABLE. AND THAT'S ONLY THE 'A'S. JUST DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT NICE.

NICE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ME.'

Your travelling companion throughout *The Book Thief* is none other than Death himself. Not the scythe-bearing skeletal avenger of myth and legend, but Death nevertheless. There can be few literary narrators with more auspicious pedigree, but what role does he play in Liesel's story and can he, as he maintains in his opening gambit, be completely trusted?

We are in Death's hands so to speak. The story he presents us is spliced together from his various encounters with Liesel, and the small black book she drops in the aftermath of the Himmel Street bombing. It is, he assures us, one of a handful of stories he has collected during his rounds, in an attempt 'to prove to me that you and your human existence are worth it'. In his telling, Liesel's story becomes a sort of parable by which to convince himself, and us as readers, of our own essential worth, against, it has to be said, overwhelming evidence to the contrary. 'On the surface unflappable, unwavering; below unravelled, untied and undone', Death is at the end of his tether. *The Book Thief* is his pick-me-up, a talisman by which he and we can perhaps find true salvation.

From this premise, his seemingly random asides, interjections, commentaries and observations, which punctuate the narrative, can be seen as strategic road signs that steer us towards his ultimate goal: our own moral redemption. Arch manipulator or detached observer, whichever way you look at it, at the helm of *The Book Thief* is one of the most memorable literary navigators of our age.



TOP 10 UNUSUAL NARRATORS



Death isn't the only narrator with an unorthodox CV. From Virginia Woolf to Alice Sebold authors have channelled their ideas and stories through every conceivable (and occasionally inconceivable) medium, including cockroaches and ornamental ashtrays!

☛ **THE LOVELY BONES – ALICE SEBOLD**
Coming-of-age tale from beyond the grave as teenage murder victim Susie Salmon struggles to hold on to the earthly realm.

☛ **THE LAST WITCHFINDER – JAMES MORROW**
Enlightenment adventure and philosophic inquiry refracted through another book – Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica*.

☛ **THE COCKROACHES HAVE NO KING – DANIEL EVANS WEISS**
A cockroach-eye-view on sex, slovenliness and Middle American urban living.

☛ **MY NAME IS RED – ORHAN PAMUK**
Timely East meets West parable from multiple perspectives including a dog, a gold coin, a corpse and the colour red itself!

☛ **THEN WE CAME TO THE END – JOSHUA FERRIS**
Savagely funny take on workplace culture from a first person plural collective point of view.

☛ **HISTORY OF THE WORLD IN 10 1 / 2 CHAPTERS – JULIAN BARNES**
From Noah's Ark to the wreck of the Medusa, history gets a postmodern going over with a woodworm at the helm.

☛ **THE FAMISHED ROAD – BEN OKRI**
Spirit child Azaro bridges the gap between the supernatural and the corporeal in his Booker Prize-winning epic.

☛ **THE COLLECTOR COLLECTOR – TIBOR FISCHER**
A priceless piece of Sumerian ceramics recounts its own 6000 year history passed from collector to collector across the ages.

☛ **TINY DEATHS – ROB SHEARMAN**
Oblique narrators get no more strange than a girl reincarnated as an ornamental ashtray. Short stories with a twist... and some!

☛ **FLUSH – VIRGINIA WOOLF**
Social comment and canine whimsy collide in the arch modernist's literary underdog.



TAKING A CHANCE



☛ 'SHE LAY BACK DOWN, LEANED ON HIM, AND TOGETHER THEY SLEPT, VERY MUCH IN MUNICH, BUT SOMEWHERE ON THE SEVENTH SIDE OF GERMANY'S DICE.'

The Book Thief explores the strange twists of fate on which all our lives hinge. Death – the great leveller – takes the reins of the narrative, yet he does not control destiny. He is simply there to pick up the pieces when it all goes to hell in a handcart. Why is one house on Himmel Street flattened by the Allied bombings while another remains untouched? Why does Liesel's brother die so young, yet she manage to outwit Death?

In the world of *The Book Thief* chance seems to rule the roost. Hans Hubermann escapes death twice, each time by a fortuitous coincidence: first, during World War I on account of a random handwriting exercise; second, a war later, over a last minute seat swap with the hapless Reinhold Zucker. Liesel herself owes her longevity to chance – if Isla Herman hadn't presented her with the little black notebook would she have escaped the bombs in her basement refuge? And, when Rudy fails to hear the conclusion of a pivotal kitchen conversation, a tragic catalogue of events unfolds:

'If he had intervened, it might have changed everything:

☛ THREE POSSIBILITIES ☛

1. ALEX STEINER WOULDN'T HAVE SUFFERED THE SAME PUNISHMENT AS HANS HUBERMANN
2. RUDY WOULD HAVE GONE AWAY TO SCHOOL
3. AND JUST MAYBE, HE WOULD HAVE LIVED.'

This cosmic dance with Fortune doesn't mean that there is no cause and effect, no consequences to our earthly actions. Part V of *The Book Thief* is divided into seven rolls of the dice. Each episode is contingent on the luck of the throw. Yet the dice here is loaded. It has a seventh face:

'It lands. It stares you in each eye, miraculous and loathsome... just bad luck, that's what you say. Yet deep down you know that this small piece of changing fortune is a signal of things to come. You hide a Jew. You pay. Somehow or other, you must.'

'A moving novel that will make many eyes brim.'

INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

A MATTER OF STYLE



‘OF COURSE, I’M BEING RUDE. I’M SPOILING THE ENDING, NOT ONLY OF THE ENTIRE BOOK, BUT THIS PARTICULAR PIECE OF IT... I DON’T HAVE MUCH INTEREST IN BUILDING MYSTERY. MYSTERY BORES ME. IT CHORES ME. I KNOW WHAT HAPPENS AND SO DO YOU...’ DEATH

Théodore Adorno famously argued that ‘writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric’. Whatever the truth of such a statement, writers, poets, artists and filmmakers have continued to create fictional dialogues with the Holocaust for over half a century. The question remains how an event of such magnitude can be most effectively and sympathetically rendered.

In *The Book Thief* Markus Zusak takes a decidedly oblique approach. Stylistically, his novel is anything but orthodox. First, it is narrated by Death – all seeing and omnipresent. Death presents the story of the book thief – Liesel Meminger – as he finds it: a palimpsest of stories scribbled in the pages of a small black notebook. The format is traditional enough: prologue, chapters, part titles, epilogue. It even echoes the picaresque structure of early 17th and 18th-century novels – Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews*; Cervante’s *Don Quixote* – in which each chapter précis the events that arise in the ensuing pages:

PROLOGUE
A MOUNTAIN RANGE OF RUBBLE
IN WHICH OUR NARRATOR INTRODUCES:
HIMSELF – THE COLOURS – AND THE BOOK THIEF

Yet thereafter it dispenses with tradition in favour of more postmodern games – diversions, casual asides, plot spoilers, excerpts, observations, definitions, questions – presented as textual stepping stones by which to navigate the narrative. A narrative that switches back and jumps forward; leaves you hanging and then hurls you up against the hard facts of the matter. A narrative that, in its quest to find new ways of telling tales, throws into the mix a graphic novel, an illustrated fable and a host of stories within stories.



‘Elegant, philosophical and moving. A work to read slowly and savour. Beautiful and important.’

KIRKUS REVIEWS

TOP 10 WAR NOVELS FROM ‘BEHIND THE LINE’



One of the most refreshing things about *The Book Thief* is its representation of the Second World War from the German perspective. For further insight into the war experience ‘behind the line’, try the following:

THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PYJAMAS
– JOHN BOYNE

Two boys, worlds apart, yet thrown together by history, confront the terrible truth of the ‘Final Solution’ in this bestselling book and film.

THE TIN DRUM – GÜNTER GRASS

The schizophrenic horrors of Nazism are refracted through the magic realist lens of this Nobel Prize-winning German author / playwright.

GOODBYE TO BERLIN
– CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

An ex-pat-eye-view on Bohemian Berlin and the gathering storm before and during Hitler’s rise to power.

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT
– ERICH MARIA REMARQUE

WWI trench warfare from the German front line in one of the most famous anti-war novels of all time.

FRIEDRICH – HANS PETER RICHTER

A powerful exploration of terror and betrayal in war-torn Germany from the viewpoint of a 16-year-old Jewish boy.

AIMEE AND JAGUAR – A LOVE STORY, BERLIN 1943 – ERICA FISCHER

Passion and persecution played out on Berlin’s mean streets between a middle-aged German mother and her fugitive Jewish lover.

DAS BOOT
– LOTHAR-GUNTHER BUCHHEIM

Gripping German U-boat drama and anti-war classic turned Oscar-nominated movie milestone.

THOSE WHO SAVE US – JENNA BLUM

Looking back across the decades, a heartbreaking truth is revealed about a family’s liberation from Nazi Germany.

THE READER – BERNARD SCHLINK

The gulf between the pre- and post-war German experience is examined through sex, love, reading and the discovery of guilty secrets.

TRAITOR – GUDRUN PAUSEWANG

A moving account of one girl’s refusal to accept Nazi ideology and the subsequent fallout from this heartfelt conviction.

‘Ambitious, readable and exceptionally good.’

THE WORD

THE BIG PICTURE



‘AS TIME PROGRESSED, A CLEAR DISTINCTION DEVELOPED BETWEEN TWO VERY DIFFERENT WORLDS – THE WORLD INSIDE 33 HIMMEL STREET, AND THE ONE THAT RESIDED AND TURNED OUTSIDE IT. THE TRICK WAS TO KEEP THEM APART.’

Almost 50 million people (military *and* civilian) were killed during the Second World War, including 6 million Jews, murdered in the Nazi Holocaust. How does a fiction writer grapple with the enormity of such events without bowing under the weight of history?

In *The Book Thief* Markus Zusak shifts the focus from the big picture to the minutiae of everyday life. By examining the dilemmas, decisions, kindnesses and betrayals of ‘normal’ people trying their best to cope with history in action, he gets to the human heart of the matter.

These polarities – the ‘personal’ vs the ‘public’; the ‘domestic’ vs the ‘historic’ – run throughout the novel. Rudy paints himself black and tears round the local track in homage to Jesse Owens. Max shadow boxes the Führer in the Hubermanns’ basement. Liesel and Rudy perpetrate small acts of rebellion – stealing apples and books – while the Hubermanns face the very real danger of hiding a fugitive Jew.

This theme of the ‘global’ impinging on the ‘personal’ finds poignant expression in a powerful metaphor. Hans Hubermann returns to Himmel Street with a newspaper tucked beneath his shirt. Once home, he discovers that ink from the paper has tattooed his skin with the headline:

HITLER TAKES POLAND!

As the novel moves towards its denouement and the war closes in, the two worlds inevitably collide. By mapping out this gradual transition from the small-scale victories of Liesel’s own world to the overarching spectre of war, the sting in the tale is made ever more potent.



BOOK GROUPS



One of the most rewarding ways of taking part in City Reads is in a book group. Here’s a few handy hints on joining in.

- If you are already member of a book group, choose *The Book Thief* as your monthly book during March, April or May.
- Set up your own special City Reads book group. For useful advice on starting out visit www.bookgroup.info; www.readinggroupchoices.com; www.readinggroupguides.com; www.whichbook.net
- Join an established book group – there are numerous throughout Brighton & Hove. Brighton & Hove Libraries run book groups in many of their libraries across the city. To join, e-mail: libraries@brighton-hove.gov.uk. For details of groups in a community library near you, visit www.citylibraries.info/information/reading_groups.asp. For other book groups in your area visit www.bookgroup.info.

BOOK GROUP TIPS

WHEN? – meet once a month. This should give you plenty of time to read your chosen book and not too long for interest to flag.

WHERE? – book groups at home can be cosy and intimate, but may end up more chit-chat than book-talk. Public places like libraries or bookshops may be a little more formal but can help focus readers’ minds. Pubs / bars can create a great atmosphere, but watch out when book-talk becomes booze-talk!

WHAT? – good areas for discussion include: characterisation, storyline, themes, setting, time, style, language, suspense. Don’t be afraid to open up the debate: if the book triggers wider themes, run with it...

HOW? – try getting one person to summarise the book in a few choice words to get the ball rolling. Nominate someone to ask questions and prompt discussion if conversation lulls. Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak: it’s all about debate and discussion, not monologue.

CITY READS 2009 BOOK GROUP COMPETITION

Visit www.cityreads.co.uk for a chance for your book group to join Markus Zusak for an exclusive book group session over afternoon tea during Brighton Festival (May 22).

Q & A



IN WHICH WE DISCOVER WHAT MAKES MARKUS ZUSAK
TICK, HOW HE GOES ABOUT THE WHOLE WRITING BUSINESS
AND WHY FAILURE IS A PRE-REQUISITE TO SUCCESS

ON STARTING OUT

'I wanted to be a writer when I was 16 and read the right books for me. It was that feeling of turning pages and not even realising it – I was so immersed in the world of each book. That was when I looked up from the pages and thought, "That's what I want to do with my life."

ON ADVICE TO NEW WRITERS

'Don't be afraid to fail. I fail every day. I failed thousands of times writing The Book Thief, and that book now means everything to me. Failure has been my best friend as a writer. It tests you, to see if you have what it takes to see it through.'

ON THE ART OF WRITING

'I find writing extremely difficult. I usually have to drag myself to my desk, mainly because I doubt myself. And it's getting harder because I want to improve with every book. Sometimes I guess it's best just to forget there's an audience and just write like no one will ever read it at all. The best ideas come to you when you're sitting down, working. That's when most of the breakthroughs occur – simply by doing the work.'



ON WRITING ROUTINES

'Basically I have two routines. The first one is the non-lazy routine, where I get up and work from about 7am and aim to finish by 11.30. That usually sees me through till noon or 12.30 (with some time-wasting in between). Then I'll take a long break and do a few more hours in the afternoon.'

The lazy routine usually starts at 10am and I'll write longer into the afternoon.'

ON THE LONELY ROAD

'I think to be a writer you have to enjoy being alone. I was alone as a teenager and was always drawn to characters in books and films who were at the fringes. It comes down to the difference between loneliness and aloneness.'

ON PERSEVERANCE

'It took seven years to get published and there were countless daily failures, but I'm glad those failures and rejections happened. They made me realise that what I was writing just wasn't good enough – so I made myself improve.'

Some material from this Q & A was taken from a Guardian interview, March 2008 by Sarah Kinson.

OTHER RESOURCES



IN WHICH WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR UNDIVIDED
ATTENTION, AND OFFER UP A FEW CHOICE RESOURCES
AS A FOND ADIEU

BOOK GROUPS

www.bookgroup.info | www.readinggroupchoices.com | www.readinggroupguides.com
www.whichbook.net | www.citylibraries.info/information/reading_groups.asp

THE BOOK THIEF

www.randomhouse.com/features/markuszusak/index.html
www.thebookthief.co.uk | www.meettheauthor.com/bookbites/1310.html

THE HOLOCAUST

www.holocaustsurvivors.org/fcit.usf.edu/HOLOCAUST (A teacher's guide to the Holocaust)
www.ushmm.org (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo – (Online history of the war.)

For more information on this project contact Sarah Hutchings or Max Crisfield, City Reads Project Managers:
sjhutchings@gmail.com | max@maxcrisfield.co.uk



City Reads steering committee

Max Crisfield – Freelance arts copywriter, editor and project manager
Sarah Hutchings – Freelance literature programmer and project manager
Joanne Harvey – Reading and Leisure Manager, Brighton & Hove Libraries
Liam Browne – Literature Programmer, Brighton Festival
Dymphna Flynn – Producer, BBC Radio 4 Bookclub



EVENTS



📖 **MARKUS ZUSAK AT BRIGHTON FESTIVAL**
In conversation with Kate Mosse.

A compelling conclusion to City Reads 2009.
Sat 23 May, 3pm
Corn Exchange, Brighton Dome, £8
(01273) 709709 | www.brightonfestival.org

📖 **MARKUS ZUSAK WORKSHOP (AGE 13+)**
Informal writing workshop with the author
of *The Book Thief*.

Sat 23 May, 11am, Jubilee Library, £5
(01273) 709709 | www.brightonfestival.org

📖 **THE STUFF OF NIGHTMARES –**
MICHAEL MORPURGO AND MARKUS ZUSAK
Can books aimed at young readers help
make sense of shocking events in history?

Sat 23 May, 7.30pm
Charleston Festival, £10
(01273) 709709 | www.brightonfestival.org

📖 **FREE CITY READS FILM SCREENINGS**
AT JUBILEE LIBRARY

Sat 4 April, 1pm – *The Diary of Anne Frank*
Sun 19 April, 1pm – *The Pianist*
Sun 26 April, 1pm – *Sophie Scholl*
Thu 30 April, 6pm
– *The Boy In The Striped Pyjamas*
Sun 3 May, 1pm
– *The Boy In The Striped Pyjamas*
Jubilee Library Booklover Store (01273) 294071

📖 **FREE CITY READINGS – LIBRARY**
BOOK THIEF COFFEE MORNINGS WITH
PETA TAYLOR

Sat 28 March, 11.30am – Hove Library
Sat 4 April, 11.30am – Rottingdean Library
Sat 18 April, 11.30am – Whitehawk Library
Sat 25 April, 11.30am – Westdene Library
Sat 2 May, 11.30am – Hangleton Library

📖 **WARTIME BRITAIN THROUGH THE**
DIARIES OF MASS OBSERVATION

The everyday lives of British people during
WWII in focus with Fiona Courage and
Dorothy Sheridan MBE.
Thu 16 April, 6.30pm–7.45pm
Jubilee Library, (Free)
(01273) 294071

📖 **BRIGHTON BEHIND THE FRONT –**
CITY READS HISTORY WALK

On foot exploration of wartime Brighton
with local historian Jackie Marsh-Hobbs.
Sat 18 April, 11am–12.30pm
£6 (includes refreshments)
(01273) 709709 | www.brightonticketshop.com

📖 **CITY READS BOOK QUIZ**
AT JUBILEE LIBRARY

Bring a team and test your literary mettle –
includes special round on *The Book Thief*.
Thu 23 April, 6.45pm, £3.50
(01273) 294071

📖 **WRITING WITH HISTORY**
(CITY READS WRITING WORKSHOP)
Learn the art of writing fiction in a historical
setting with novelist / creative writing tutor
Alison MacLeod.
Sat 25 April, 9.30am–1.30pm
Cornerstone Community Centre (Hove)
£20 / £15
(01273) 709709 | www.brightonticketshop.com

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www.maxcrisfield.co.uk
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www.harrisonandco.com