

The Dark Room

Rachel Seiffert

Reading Group Questions

1. What were your first impressions upon reading *The Dark Room*? What kinds of emotion responses did the book inspire?
2. Which of the three sections – ‘Helmut’, ‘Lore’, or ‘Micha’ – did you like best and why? Which character’s perspective interested you the most?
3. What is your opinion on Seiffert’s chosen structure? Do you think that separating the novel into three independent sections works effectively, or do you think that the three-part structure takes away a sense of focus from the book?
4. What, if anything, holds these three parts together?
5. Do you think Seiffert handles the sensitivity of the historical material with appropriate care? Do you think she presents an historically accurate portrayal of events in *The Dark Room*?
6. Would you agree that *The Dark Room* helps to humanise, and foster sympathy towards, ordinary Germans who both lived through the war, and suffered generationally in its aftermath? Or would you say that portraying Germans as victims of Nazism is misleading or problematic?
7. Does it surprise you that Helmut is such a Nazi zealot, given that people with physical disabilities like him were targeting for annihilation by the Nazi regime?
8. What is the significance of Helmut’s photography?
9. What do you make of the relationship between Lore and Thomas?
10. Micha leaves his heavily pregnant partner alone for several days, on more than on occasion, in order to pursue his obsession with uncovering the truth behind his Grandfather’s role in German war crimes. Does he act selfishly and irresponsibly, or do the ends justify the means?
11. Some critics felt that Micha is too forgiving of his grandmother. Would you agree?



12. *The Dark Room* spans three generations and around 70 years. Helmut seems ignorant of the fate of the people he sees being rounded up in the railway station; Lore is forced to confront the crimes of the Nazis; Micha inherits the burden of shame and guilt. What does the novel suggest about the legacy of the Holocaust, as it is passed down from generation to generation?

A Survivors Perspective

Martin Kapel

Holocaust child refugee Martin Kapel's story vividly recalls a scene from *The Dark Room*'s opening section. Helmut bears witness to the forced deportation of Roma Gypsies and Jews, as German soldiers force the condemned victims into overcrowded train carriages to be expelled from the borders of Germany. Martin was 8 years old when he and his family suffered a similar fate. They were forcibly expelled from Germany and deported to Poland. This would later be known as the 'Polenaktion' – the process by which the Nazis secretly and forcibly deported Polish citizens back to Poland. Martin and his family were considered to be illegal immigrants and were forced to live in the Jewish section of Krakow, due to the rampant antisemitism in Poland at the time. Although the fate of the deportees in *The Dark Room* is unknown, the method through which they were expelled pertains to Martin's own experience, with the Nazi's vile prejudice affecting both parties in similar ways.



<https://holocaustlearning.org.uk/stories/martin-kapel/>