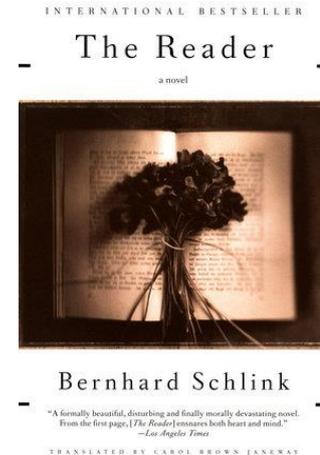


The Reader

Bernhard Schlink

Reading Group Questions

1. Who is 'The Reader'?
2. Hanna constantly refers to Michael as 'kid' – does she use his innocent adolescence to pursue him? Is Michael yet another victim of Hanna?
3. Might Michael's lack of a mother-son relationship contribute to his infatuation with Hanna?
4. The delayed revelation of Hanna's criminal past is an interesting technique: do you think it is important that we build a personal rapport with Hanna before this revelation?
5. Why do you think Hanna was illiterate, and what does it perhaps imply about her past and/or becoming a guard in a concentration camp?
6. Michael visits the site of the concentration camp at Stutthof. What is the significance of this visit?
7. Is there a deeper meaning to Hanna's illiteracy, and to her teaching herself how to read and write?
8. Though Michael tells Hanna that he has moved on with his life, he still sends her audiotapes. Why do you think he does this?
9. In what ways is Hanna revealed to be a morally detestable person? Does she have any morally redeeming characteristics? Or is it problematic to look for traces of morality in a concentration camp guard?
10. Do you think Hanna deserved the amount of prison time she got? Do you think there is a moral justification for rehabilitating and releasing Nazi war criminals?
11. In Schlink's eyes, what does the second generation need to do in order to redeem the faults of their parents' generation?
12. Why do you think Hanna decided to end her life so close to being released? What did you think of the ending of the story, and how did it make you feel?



Iby Knill

The fact that many of the crimes of the Holocaust were perpetrated by women is often overlooked, or even forgotten. But Iby Knill, a survivor of Auschwitz, has some vivid memories of female concentration camp guards.

Iby was one of many Jewish prisoners rescued by American soldiers from a death march in 1945. She recalls a cruel female guard who had mocked the suffering of the Jewish women, and especially their lack of hair. Iby describes how, after being liberated, the prisoners tied this woman to a chair in the middle of the village and shaved off all her hair in revenge. That guard's job was no different from what Hanna Schmitz did in *The Reader*, and Bernhard Schlink's novel is a reminder that many women played a part in the Holocaust.



<http://holocaustlearning.org.uk/stories/iby-knill/>