

the devil's arithmetic

the devil's arithmetic is a powerful and thought-provoking historical novel that brings the realities of the Holocaust to life for readers of all ages. In this comprehensive article, we will explore the plot, main characters, themes, historical context, and educational impact of "The Devil's Arithmetic." Whether you are a student, teacher, parent, or literature enthusiast, this guide provides a thorough understanding of the book's significance and enduring relevance. We will also discuss the novel's author, Jane Yolen, and examine how the story connects the past and present through its unique narrative structure. By the end, you'll have a detailed grasp of why "The Devil's Arithmetic" remains a vital resource for learning about history, empathy, and the importance of remembering.

- Overview and Plot Summary of The Devil's Arithmetic
- Main Characters and Their Roles
- Major Themes in The Devil's Arithmetic
- Historical Context and Accuracy
- Educational Value and Classroom Use
- Jane Yolen: The Author Behind The Devil's Arithmetic
- Frequently Asked Questions

Overview and Plot Summary of The Devil's Arithmetic

"The Devil's Arithmetic" is a historical fiction novel published in 1988, written by Jane Yolen. The story follows Hannah Stern, a modern Jewish girl living in New York who is indifferent to her family's traditions and the stories of the Holocaust. During a Passover Seder, Hannah is transported back in time to 1942 Poland, where she assumes the identity of Chaya Abramowicz. Suddenly, Hannah finds herself living through the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp, experiencing firsthand the suffering, courage, and resilience of those who lived through the Holocaust.

The narrative uses time travel to bridge generations, making the history personal and immediate for both Hannah and readers. Through her journey, Hannah learns the importance of memory, heritage, and empathy. "The Devil's Arithmetic" is praised for its compelling storytelling and its ability to

educate young readers about the Holocaust in an accessible yet respectful manner.

Main Characters and Their Roles

Hannah Stern / Chaya Abramowicz

Hannah Stern is the protagonist of "The Devil's Arithmetic." Initially, she is portrayed as a typical adolescent, disconnected from her family's Jewish traditions and the historical weight of the Holocaust. After her journey back in time, she becomes Chaya Abramowicz, a young girl living in a Polish shtetl. Through the transformation, Hannah learns compassion, bravery, and the importance of remembrance.

Gitl

Gitl is Chaya's caring and strong-willed aunt in the past timeline. She becomes a maternal figure to Hannah, offering guidance and comfort amid the chaos and terror of the concentration camp. Gitl's resilience and leadership serve as an inspiration throughout the story.

Shmuel

Shmuel is Chaya's uncle, known for his optimism and courage. He is engaged to marry Fayge, and his character adds depth to the portrayal of family bonds and hope even in the darkest times.

Rivka

Rivka is a fellow prisoner who helps Hannah navigate life in the camp. Her wisdom and survival strategies are crucial for the group's endurance. Rivka's role highlights the importance of community and mutual support.

Supporting Characters

- Fayge: Shmuel's fiancée, whose story adds emotional layers to the narrative.
- Commandant Breuer: The Nazi officer who oversees the camp, embodying the

cruelty of the regime.

- Other prisoners: Each contributes to the depiction of diverse experiences within the camp.

Major Themes in The Devil's Arithmetic

The Importance of Memory

A central theme of "The Devil's Arithmetic" is the significance of remembering the past. Through Hannah's journey, the novel explores how personal and collective memory shapes identity and ensures that the tragedies of history are never forgotten. The Seder ritual itself serves as a metaphor for the transmission of memory across generations.

Identity and Transformation

The novel examines how identity is influenced by culture, history, and personal experience. Hannah's transformation into Chaya allows her to empathize with her ancestors and understand the gravity of their struggles. This shift in perspective is a powerful narrative device that fosters growth and self-awareness.

Survival and Resistance

Survival, both physical and emotional, is a recurring theme. The characters demonstrate resilience in the face of unimaginable adversity, and their acts of resistance—big and small—highlight the strength of the human spirit. The story emphasizes that survival is not just about enduring, but also about preserving dignity and hope.

Legacy and Remembrance

"The Devil's Arithmetic" stresses the responsibility each generation has to honor the legacy of those who came before. By remembering and retelling their stories, the characters ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust endure.

Historical Context and Accuracy

The Holocaust in Literature

"The Devil's Arithmetic"

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