

# Peachtree Pointers

☞ SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS ☞

PEACHTREE PUBLISHERS, LTD. 1700 Chattahoochee Avenue Atlanta, Georgia 30318

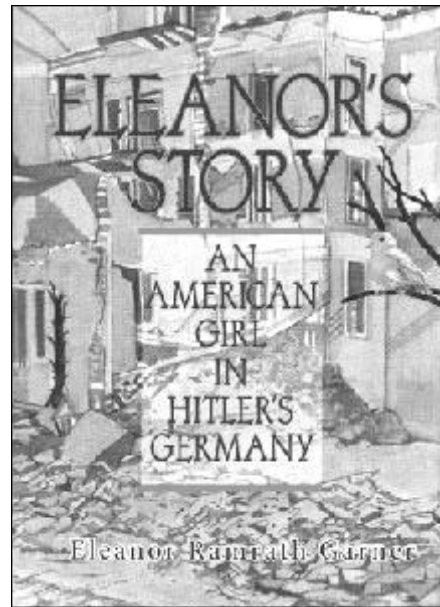
## Eleanor's Story: An American Girl in Hitler's Germany

By Eleanor Ramrath Garner

ISBN: 1-56145-193-2 / Hardcover / \$14.95  
6 x 8 1/2 / 268 pages / 24 black & white photos,  
3 maps, Prologue, Epilogue, Author's Note / Memoir,  
Young Adult Nonfiction / October 1999



A Freestone Publication



### About the Book

During the Great Depression, when she is 9, Eleanor's family moves from America to Germany, where her father has been offered a good job. But the war breaks out as her family is crossing the Atlantic. They are trapped in Germany for the duration of the war.

Eleanor struggles to keep her American identity despite the turbulence and upheaval around her. She fervently hopes for an Allied victory, yet for years must try to survive under the Allied bombs shattering her neighborhood. Her family faces separations, threats from the Gestapo, bombings, starvation, the final fierce battle for Berlin, and the terrors of Soviet occupancy. Her family finally is able to return to the United States in 1946, when Eleanor is 16.

This compelling story immerses us in the daily struggles of surviving World War II in Germany. It puts a human face on the horrors of war and reminds us that each casualty of war is a person, not a number.

### Praise and Awards for Eleanor's Story

"Stunning.... This powerful coming-of-age tale is told with intensity and...freshness.... It all coalesces into a must-have memoir."

—*Booklist* (starred review)

"Outstanding.... [Garner is] a sensitive and intelligent woman with a gift for recalling her fears, childhood conflicts, triumphs, and losses. There is an immediacy and power in her recollections."

—VOYA

- ★ Children's Book Award 2000, International Reading Association
- ★ Teacher's Choice Award 2000, International Reading Association
- ★ A Best Book for Young Adults 2000, YALSA/ALA
- ★ Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People 2000, National Council for Social Studies/Children's Book Council
- ★ Young Adults' Choice 2001, International Reading Assoc.
- ★ CBC/Combined Book Exhibit 2001
- ★ CBC/Not Just for Children Anymore! 2001
- ★ New York Public Library/Books for the Teen-Age, 2000
- ★ San Diego Book Award 2000

## Themes

- World War II, Nazis
- Economics, Great Depression
- Family Relationships, Friendship
- Courage
- Different cultures/Adaptation and assimilation

## A Note from the Preparer

This autobiographical account of Eleanor Garner's youth as an American is a unique view of World War II Germany. Students will find horrible wartime ordeals juxtaposed among the universal experiences of growing up. As you work with students reading, sharing, writing, talking, and thinking about this story, be prepared for laughter, nods of agreement, tears, and joy.

Events and experiences in this story will influence students from grades 5 through 12. Please adapt the suggestions for class discussion to suit the needs and abilities of your students.

## Before You Read

To understand where Eleanor's story begins, students need some understanding of geography and the history and economics of post-World War I and the Great Depression.

■ On a map of the eastern United States, find Philadelphia; Stratford, New Jersey; the Poconos. On a map of Germany before World War II (see map in the book), find Münster, Berlin, Bremerhaven, Eslohe.

■ Interview grandparents and others in their seventies and eighties. What was the Great Depression like? What happened when parents lost their jobs? What attitudes did Americans have toward Germany and Hitler in the late 1930s?

■ To prepare students for the major life-altering events of the story, ask students: What would you do if your parents announced you were moving to a country across the ocean—one that speaks another language and has a culture very different from your own? What is the most frightening thing that has happened to you? How would you feel if your parents could do little to help?

■ Encourage students to find a synopsis of the effects of the Treaty of Versailles on the German economy during the 1920s. What was the situation in Germany that prompted Hitler to rise to power? (See the Prologue to the book.)

## As You Read

The book divides itself into four parts. Discuss the following questions and issues as you read each part. Also, to help students keep a chronological sense of the story, begin a time line and update it as students read. On one side of the line, record events in Eleanor's life (age, school, location); on the other, list major events in the 1930s and '40s that affect her life.

### Childhood in the States: Chapters 1–2

■ Are there American youngsters with immigrant parents in your classroom or community? How are they treated, parents and children?

■ If you have moved, what do you miss most about your old community? If you haven't moved, what would you miss most? What do/would you miss least? What treasures would you bury? (Choosing four items based on remembering a specific time or place could be a class or small-group project, with each group specifying the time and place.)

■ How would you respond to the news of war if you were captain of the *SS Hamburg*?

### Adjustment to Germany: Chapters 3–6

■ Imagine you are living in a place where you can understand the language but cannot read or write it. What would worry you the most? How would you adjust in school?

■ What if you discovered that your good manners were perceived as bad manners in your new culture?

■ Would you like to go to an all-girls or all-boys school? Why or why not?

■ Have you ever experienced divided loyalties?

■ Eleanor discusses the importance of Hitler Youth. What organizations (public and private) in your school or community have similar purposes

to the Hitler Youth? (This is a challenging question designed to urge students to move beyond rote responses to Nazi and neo-Nazi organizations.) How would the Hitler Youth of the 1930s compare to Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts of today? What recent events have made you aware of or changed your attitude toward public or private youth groups?

■ Compare and contrast school curriculum and atmosphere in wartime Germany with students' experiences of today.

#### Horrors and Reality of the War: Chapters 7–11

■ "Childhood Lost," the title of Chapter 7, offers a variety of discussion avenues. Before and after reading the chapter, what does the title mean? Many teens have already lost their childhoods. Think and write to discover the sorrows and joys of leaving your child-self behind. (If your students have not yet left the security of childhood, they can interview older siblings or relatives.)

■ How does Eleanor face violent death so frequently and not go berserk?

■ Eleanor finds escape and solace in reading. What books or stories have been important to you and why?

■ Two themes stand out in this section: the attempt at normalcy in abnormal conditions and the importance of identity papers. Both are related to events/experiences probably outside the realm of most contemporary teens. What have been the most dramatic events in your life? How did those around you act or react? What papers or records are vital to you?

■ Both Frank and Eleanor face decisive moments in relationship to the safety and dignity of others, Frank on the subway and Eleanor in the castle. How do you react to teasing of unpopular students, to jokes that slur persons or groups that are different from you?

#### Endings and Beginnings: Chapters 12–16

■ Before and after reading these chapters, ask students to describe what happens when a war is

over. What is life like amid the ruins? How does it change from wartime patterns? What do the citizens and refugees need? What do the community and national leaders need to do to bring life back to near-normalcy? Does anyone really win in a war?

■ After reading about Eleanor's experience of the robin and the spring colors, students will now understand the cover. What modern-day experiences have you had that are (or would you expect to be) similar to this (beauty where there is ugliness, hope after utter despair)?

■ What are the endings at this point in Eleanor's life? What are the beginnings? How have you experienced the push/pull of growing up, the desire to be free of parental supervision mixed with an awareness of the need for parental support?

■ Two emotional responses seem to be constant for wartime survivors: survivor's guilt (Why did I live?) and post-traumatic stress. How did Eleanor experience these responses in Germany and after she returned to the United States?

■ Eleanor and Frank return to Stratford and to their old house. After a nostalgic look, she decides it's time to go. Where or what does she mean?

### After You Read: Interdisciplinary Connections

#### Language Arts

■ What can you learn about Eleanor from her poetry, both her own and what she quotes? What poetry would you write/choose to represent your life and attitudes? How does Eleanor use simile, metaphor, figurative language to give depth to her experiences?

■ What role did books play in Eleanor's life? in her family's lives? How might the books have influenced her parents' attitudes about the war and the Nazis?

Social Studies: Experience, Purpose, and Outcome of War; Mass Communications; Propaganda; Nazism; Dictators, Facism

■ *Teen experience of WW II:* How do Eleanor's experiences compare with those of other teens in World War II? (The obvious comparison is Anne Frank. Students can dig deeper and find narratives by German youth, survivors of the camps, teens and soldiers in Allied armies for comparative purposes. See suggested readings on page 7 of this guide.) How is Eleanor's experience unique?

■ *Experience of war:* Of the wars you have read about, watched in movies or on TV, or studied, what are some universal experiences of war? Over the centuries, what has changed in the experiences of war, from the soldiers' and the citizens' perspectives?

■ *Purpose of WW II:* How does World War II differ in purpose from other wars? Why is it being discussed so much today?

■ *Outcome of WW II:* Looking at the maps in the book, how do Germany's borders differ before and after the war? Why did the Allies divide Germany, and what was the long-term outcome of that division?

■ *Mass media:* What media have been used over the centuries to promote, inform the public about a war? Why does a government inform the public about a war? What mass media did Eleanor see, listen to, and watch?

■ *Propaganda:* What's the purpose of propaganda? How was it used in World War II Germany, England, America? What messages were the governments trying to convey? What are some present-day political and commercial messages/propaganda (e.g., in advertisements: thin is beautiful, men must be macho, etc.)?

■ *Nazism:* What does *Nazi* stand for? What were the beliefs of the Nazi party? How did it become a political party? How did Adolf Hitler come to power? How did the Nazi party come to power? Why did the Nazis hate the Jews and

other non-Aryans? Could a similar movement gain power today? If so, where and why? How would or should other governments respond? What was Eleanor's family's experience with the Nazis?

■ *Dictators:* What is a dictator? How was Hitler a dictator? What other countries had dictators during WW II? What leaders in the world today are dictators? What is/was life like under those dictatorships? How do/did other countries respond to those dictatorships?

■ *Facism:* What is facism? How does it relate to a dictatorship? How and why did facism rise and fall?

Sciences: Nutrition; Public Health; Natural Resources; Technology

■ *Nutrition:* Eleanor mentions food often and the importance of food to survival. Using nutritional guidelines, compare the food that was available to her family with the food necessary for good health. Investigate and report on the various diseases related to nutritional deficiencies. What natural or man-made situations in the world today cause the citizens to suffer from malnutrition?

■ *Public Health:* Why is clean water important to public health?

■ What is the public sewer system for? What happens if it does not work or is broken?

■ What diseases thrive and spread during a war or a natural disaster? Why? What needs to be done to control them?

■ What pestilence thrives and spreads during a war or a natural disaster? Why? What needs to be done to control them?

■ *Natural resources:* What are natural resources? What value do they have to civilians and military? How does the presence of natural resources influence the strategies of war? What role did natural resources play in WW II for Germany, for the Allies?

■ *Technology:* What kinds of technology (in WW II, today) are used to destroy life or

property? What are some different kinds of bombs (land mines, chemical, conventional, atomic/nuclear)? What must citizens/countries do to defend against them? How can/should these technologies be used for peaceful purposes?

#### Arts: Visual, Performing

■ **Visual:** The author stresses color, its lack during the war, and its importance in her life today. What colors are important to you? What impact do various colors have on people?

■ What kinds of art are used today as therapy? Why?

■ **Performing:** How did theater and music play a part in the revival of Berlin?

■ Find recordings of Gretel's prayer from the opera *Hansel and Gretel*, excerpts from *The Magic Flute*, examples of Wagner from *The Ring Cycle*, the German national anthems from World War II and today, and jazz from the mid-1940s. Listen to these selections while reading the sections where they are mentioned. Find a piece of music to "illustrate" a piece of your own writing.

■ What is your favorite music today? Why is it meaningful to you?

■ What kinds of music help identify specific eras? How does the choice or preference of music characterize (what does it say) about that era?

#### Religion/Faith/Spirituality

*Note: These broad questions are intended to address Eleanor's spirituality and how it helped her to survive the war. In general terms they might help students to think about their own spirituality. The questions are not intended to promote one faith over another. Discussion of these issues depends on the age, experiences, and maturity of your students.*

■ How did Eleanor's faith or spirituality influence her survival? How have you seen faith influence the outcomes of other life stories you are familiar with?

■ What is the difference between religion and spirituality? What does faith mean?

■ What is the role or purpose of faith, of religion? How does Eleanor's spirituality change as she grows and experiences the depths of the war? How does her spirituality or faith differ from what she learns from the Catholic Church?

■ Do you believe in angels? If so, how are you comforted by them?

■ What did her mother mean when she talked of food for the soul?

#### Personal Integrity

*Integrity* is a word that is often misunderstood. If students check a dictionary or thesaurus, they may find such synonyms as *virtue, honesty, honor, principle, trustworthiness*. Many of these are words that students can apply to situations in their own lives. Often more interesting than synonyms, and more revealing, is the derivation of a word. *Integrity* is related to a math word, *integer*, a single number. The actions and values of a single person of integrity are consistent and support that individual's belief in what is right. Many of the people Eleanor encounters in Germany are able to maintain their personal integrity despite the difficult circumstances that face them everyday; some do not. The following are suggested discussion or writing prompts to further a conversation of integrity.

■ Is Eleanor's father a person of integrity? Is her mother a person of integrity? Support your answer with specific examples, either from the family's time in the United States or in Germany.

■ What was the level of integrity of the ship captain during the family's voyage to Germany in 1939? What was his primary responsibility: the ship or his nationality? Does his changing the colors of the ship reflect integrity or lack of integrity? (This question cannot be adequately discussed without agreement about the definition the students will be using, and without students researching the ship. Was it commercial or military? Who or what owned the ship? Who employed the captain? What were the international maritime rules about the nationality of a ship?)

■ The persons influencing the events of the 1930s and 1940s are indirectly referred to in the

book, but their personal integrity or lack of it certainly impacted Eleanor's life. Brainstorm two to five people of import in Germany and the United States from 1930 to 1945. Decide on their level of integrity, and support your answers with historical facts. (The number and choice of people will vary considerably depending on the level of students involved.)

■ Can a person have integrity if the values they are reflecting are generally judged to be evil? Although this appears to be a closed-ended question, thoughtful complete answers will have to include the students' definitions of *integrity*, *evil*, and *values* and how those ideas influence history. Discussion of this question may seem purely semantic but addresses some of the historical issues that underlie the reality of Eleanor's experiences.

■ Consider the situations in these books where the main characters had to make a decision, particularly one involving the difference between what they are supposed to say versus what they want or know is right to say.

■ How do the characters in this book choose? How do they decide when they must listen to their hearts? How do we, ourselves, make decisions when we disagree with decisions or policies of the authorities or of the government? How do we know when to trust our hearts, listen to ourselves, and make a risky decision?

## The Holocaust

The stories that perhaps most influence our understanding of World War II are those from the Holocaust. Students from late elementary school through high school—and indeed into college—hear and process these stories in a variety of ways. Students in any classroom will have a varying degree of knowledge and understanding of this dark and heroic time in world history. For all classrooms, it may be appropriate to begin discussion by having students find the definition of a holocaust. Depending on the age and experience of your students, the following questions may help guide the class discussion.

■ How does great destruction by fire relate to World War II? What kinds of things did Eleanor see that would apply to the definition of a holocaust?

■ How have you heard this word used, especially when it is capitalized? What happened in the Nazi death camps that led historians to use the word *Holocaust* to describe the treatment of prisoners, particularly Jews, by the Nazis during the war?

■ What groups did the Nazis target? Why? What actions did the Nazis take against the Jews and other target groups in the 1930s? How did the Nazis' actions escalate as the war years passed?

■ Among the stories of the Holocaust are many examples of citizens throughout Europe who struggled, individually or collectively, to save Jews and others from the atrocities committed by the Nazis. (See the recommended reading list below.) Discuss some of the stories and address the motives and integrity of each rescuer involved. Compare the stories with each other and with the times that Eleanor and her family encountered Nazi prisoners.

■ When or where did Eleanor or her family see any signs of the Holocaust? How was it possible to live in Germany during WW II and not be aware of the genocide? Think about how we today find out about events around us. How would living under a dictator influence the reliability of those sources? (Refer to the Social Studies topics above.)

Once your students have a basic understanding (appropriate for their age) of the concentration camps and the "final solution," here are some cross-curricular ways to explore the topic in depth.

■ *Photos and Poetry*: ELEANOR'S STORY contains several family photos; Holocaust material often includes photos. Create a collection of photos using Eleanor's photos, Holocaust victims of the same age, and some of yourselves and your friends. Find some poems—or better, write some—to describe the events in Eleanor's life, the horrors of WW II, and/or the world you live in now. (The content and approach to this type of assignment would vary considerably with the age, experience, and maturity of the students involved.)

■ *Music and Art*: Ironically, music and art not only survive but also help people sustain

themselves in the most desperate of conditions. Depending upon the age of the students, either teachers or students might look for books that connect these subjects to the history of the Holocaust. (See the recommended reading list. Teachers will have to decide what material in these and other books is suitable for the students they teach.)

### See Also

- *I Never Saw Another Butterfly: Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp, 1942–1944*, edited by Hana Volavkava
- *Playing for Time*, Fania Fenelon

## Culminating Activities

## Notes

Early in the book (page 8), Eleanor states: “After that, though, I kept my stories in a safe place inside me and didn’t share them with anyone....” The world is richer for her sharing of this story. How do the stories we hear, read, and know influence our understanding of our history and our world?

## Recommended Reading

Many books could be used as companion volumes to *ELEANOR’S STORY*. These titles relate to other teens’ experiences in World War II as well as in other wars. Have a group of students each read a different title and compare the experiences of the main characters with Eleanor and with each other.

### Upper Elementary School

- *The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark*, Carmen Deedy
- *Number the Stars*, Lois Lowry
- *No Pretty Pictures*, Anita Lobel

### Middle School

- *The Diary of a Young Girl*, Anne Frank
- *Alicia: My Story*, Alicia Appleman-Hurman
- *Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution*, Ji-Li Jiang
- *Zlata’s Diary: A Child’s Life in Sarajevo*, Zlata Filipovic

### High School

- *Parallel Journeys*, Eleanor H. Ayer et al.
- *Tales from a Child of the Enemy*, Ursula Duba

## About the Author

**Eleanor Ramrath Garner** is a freelance copyright and permissions editor for textbook publishers. As a longtime student of Jungian psychology, Eleanor has written fiction and nonfiction articles on religion and psychology. She also pursues journal writing and poetry. This is her first book.

Eleanor is an exhibiting fine artist. She seeks to paint in full, vivid color, having vowed never to let dull, lifeless gray come into her life again.

Eleanor and her husband, Louis, live in San Diego. They have two sons and four grandchildren. In her spare time she enjoys gardening, hiking, and traveling.



Photo by Dick Snyder

## Additional Freestone Books for Young Adults: Award Winners and Nominees

**HERO** by S.L. Rottman  
**ROUGH WATERS** by S.L. Rottman  
**HEAD ABOVE WATER** by S.L. Rottman  
**CHARLIE'S STORY** by Maeve Friel  
**HOGSTY REEF** by John Dowd  
**RARE AND ENDANGERED** by John Dowd

**MISFITS, INC., NO. 1: THE VANISHING  
CHIP** by Mark Delaney  
**MISFITS, INC., NO. 2: OF HEROES AND  
VILLAINS** by Mark Delaney  
**MISFITS, INC., NO. 3: GROWLER'S HORN**  
by Mark Delaney

**Peachtree Pointers for ELEANOR'S STORY was prepared by Carol Reinhard,  
Valley High School, West Des Moines, Iowa.**



**Freestone**  
an Imprint for Young Adults from

### **PEACHTREE PUBLISHERS**

1700 Chattahoochee Avenue, Atlanta, GA30318  
phone (404) 876-8761 / (800) 241-0113 sales phone  
fax (404) 875-2578 / (800) 875-2578 sales fax  
<http://www.peachtree-online.com>

11/01

Peachtree Pointers order no. 1-56145-193-2TG. Copyright © 1999 by Peachtree Publishers, Ltd. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for the printing of complete pages, with the copyright notice, for instructional uses and not for resale. **Requests for permission to make copies** of any part of the work should be mailed to Permissions Department, Peachtree Publishers, Ltd., 1700 Chattahoochee Ave, Atlanta, GA 30318.