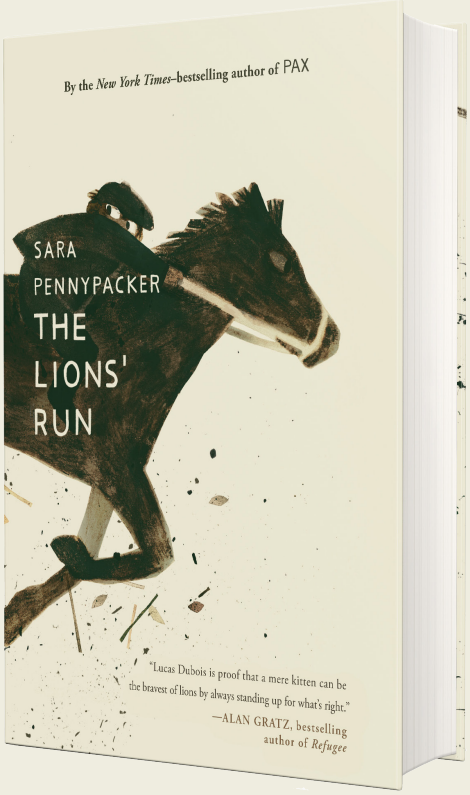
A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR
THE LIONS' RUN

Ages 8–12 · HC 9781250392817 · eBook 9781250392800



ABOUT THE BOOK

In the orphanage Lucas Dubois is called Petit Éclair, a name that reminds him of his cowardly reputation—a reputation he longs to shed. Living in the grip of the French occupation, with German soldiers controlling every aspect of life, Lucas doesn't have much of a chance to be brave. But after he rescues a litter of kittens from certain death, Lucas slowly begins to see himself differently. When he meets Alice, a British girl and the daughter of a horse trainer, taking small risks to do the right thing becomes a part of his everyday life. Once he is recruited to be a courier for the French Resistance, Lucas must make a decision that will be the ultimate test of his courage, and will change him and the lives of the people he cares about forever.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SARA PENNYPACKER is the author of several acclaimed novels for middle-grade readers, including the #1 *New York Times* bestselling *Pax* (long-listed for a National Book Award) and *Pax, Journey Home*; the Clementine series (a Boston Globe–Horn Book Award Honor) and its spin-off series, *Waylon!*; and *Summer of the Gypsy Moths*, *Here in the Real World*, and *Leeva at Last*. She divides her time between Cape Cod and Southern California.

ABOUT THE GUIDE

The Lions' Run, set in occupied France in 1944, tells the story of Lucas Dubois, an orphan who becomes a courier for the French Resistance. Lucas and the people in his small village witness and endure the harsh, cruel ways of their German occupiers: severe food rationing, restrictions on movement, and other daily injustices. Most horrifying of all, there is a Lebensborn is located not far from the abbey where Lucas lives, a "home" where pregnant French girls wait to give birth to babies that will be taken from them and sent to Germany as part of Hitler's plan to create the future of Aryan military might. It is important to prepare readers before engaging with these historical facts. Spend time presenting the historical terms, introducing key figures, and explaining critical events to provide the proper context so readers can fully engage with the text.

HISTORICAL TERMS, PEOPLE, AND EVENTS

World War II: https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/World-War-II/353934
German occupation of France: https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/child-memories-occupation-and-liberation-paris
Nazi Party: https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-nazi-party-1
French Resistance: https://kids.kiddle.co/French_Resistance
Heinrich Himmler and the Gestapo: https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/goebbels-himmler/

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Write the word *bravery* on a white board, Smart board, or poster paper. Ask students to brainstorm what the word means to them. Record their ideas about the word to create a concept web. Next, pose the question: What might keep a person from being brave, even if being brave is the right thing to do? Give students time to think about it and write a short response. After sufficient time, bring them together to share their responses. Keep a list of their ideas for later use. Students will revisit this list after reading *The Lions' Run*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. On page 8, Lucas offeres Marcel and Claude his prized fishing lure in exchange for the kittens. What does this act tell you about Lucas's character? After Lucas tries and fails to bury the dead kitten, he looks upon its surviving siblings and realizes "He was their solid" (page 9). What does this phrase mean? Why do the branches hitting Lucas's face as he pedals toward the abandoned barn feel like "a penance deserved"?
2. Lucas is mockingly referred to as Petit Éclair, which in English would mean a small pastry, but the word *éclair* in French means "lightning bolt" (page 12). How does this name, at first a label of shame, become a badge of honor and bravery? Against the context of the war and the German occupation, why would Lucas feel he was "too soft"? How does this label fuel his desire to be brave? Why is Madame Garnier's nickname for Lucas, Little Termite, so appropriate?
3. When Lucas meets Felix, he experiences a profound emotional reaction: "Felix's cheeks lifted and his lips curved. That gummy smile loosened something inside Lucas that he hadn't known was tight" (page 26). What is the "something" inside Lucas that loosened? Why do you think he has this reaction to a baby's smile?
4. Throughout the story, the author builds suspense in both subtle and forceful ways. For example, on page 27 the phrase "spring was treacherous that way" foreshadows that deception might occur in this season, or put more simply, something bad may happen. In what other ways, either with language or action, does the author create a sense of suspense or use foreshadowing over the course of the story?
5. Discuss the Nazis' cruelty to animals and how Lucas is a counter to this cruelty. How does his care and protection of the kittens foreshadow his care and protection of Felix?
6. When Alice describes to Lucas that she would have figured out ahead of time a way to escape Marcel and Claude, she mutters bitterly, "First rule of being a girl." When asked to elaborate, she says, "You're not as big, not as strong. So if you're going to start something, you better know where the door is and you'd better be able to run" (page 33). Discuss the treatment of girls in the story. Why do the Nazis at the Lebensborn treat the pregnant girls so well? How do you think they would be treated if they weren't carrying babies the Nazis planned to steal?
7. On pages 38–39, you learn that Lucas suspects that Madame Bernard is "hiding Jewish children". Based on what you know from your pre-reading work, why would Jewish children need to be hidden? Discuss the meaning of antisemitism. By buying the nougat, Lucas shows his empathy for the children he suspects are being hidden from the Nazis. What is empathy and how is it, in this case, related to bravery?
8. Discuss the character Madame Garnier. Why do you think Lucas feels happy around her? How does his admiration for her inspire him to take risks and act courageously? In what specific ways does she show that she truly cares about

Lucas? When Lucas diverts the soldier's attention from the scrap of paper (page 46), he saves Madame Garnier, whose participation in the French Resistance would have surely been revealed. Lucas decides he acted not out of courage but out of fear. In this case, what is the difference?

9. What is an assumption? What assumptions do characters make about one another that turn out to be incorrect? On page 127 Lucas realizes he's made an assumption about Alice based solely on her being rich, and wonders if his assumption is just as bad as "people assuming things about him because he was poor." What do you think Lucas realizes at this moment? Consider common assumptions that people make in their daily lives. How can you work to avoid making assumptions about people you don't know or *think* you do know?
10. Reread chapter 31. How is Lucas's decision and plan to brighten the lives of those children being hidden by Madame Bernard an act of bravery? How is the drawing left by the children a symbol of freedom?
11. The author's use of language and vivid imagery enhances and deepens the story. For example, to describe what the villagers felt under the occupation she writes, "The German occupation was like a filthy, heavy blanket over the town" (page 163). How does this simile help you understand what it was like to live in this town at this time? What other examples of powerful language can you cite that helped you better relate to the emotions and challenges of the characters?
12. Alice is a character who has a certain degree of agency in her life, yet at the same time, she is held back by the conventions and expectations of how girls and women should behave. On page 165, she says to Lucas, "Because *I* should be the one to decide when I smile. The *only* one. If I'm not in charge of my own feelings, what do I have?" Why do you think a request to smile is so upsetting to Alice?
13. Reread chapters 37 and 38 (pages 170–74). Discuss the inhuman and cruel treatment perpetrated by the Nazis in these two chapters. Discuss the following lines:
    a. "But Lucas knew that for the rest of his life, he would see it: the Gestapo working like machines, as if they were hauling out nothing more than garbage; the desperate children and the old woman, thrashing uselessly against them; the silent onlookers, including himself, doing nothing" (page 172).
    b. ". . . it's one thing to know about brutality, and another to witness it" (pages 173–74).

    Describe what you imagine to be Lucas's thoughts and feelings as the Jewish children and Madame Bernard were "hauled away" by the Gestapo. Next, describe your own thoughts and feelings as you read these pages.
14. Reread chapter 51 (pages 226–31). In this chapter, Lucas comes to a realization of what bravery really is. Using the pre-reading responses, discuss your own personal definitions of bravery. What connections can you make between your understanding of it and what Lucas is discovering about himself and his ability to be courageous? Share your written responses and compare what you wrote to Lucas's experiences in the story.
15. On page 242, Marcel responds to Lucas referring to himself as Petit Éclair by saying, "No . . . Petit Lion, I think." Why does Marcel refer to Lucas as a "little lion."
16. Discuss the meaning of the common adage "Two wrongs don't make a right." By stealing the baby, Lucas commits a crime to correct a crime. How does his action relate to the adage? Do you think Lucas was justified in his action? Why or why not?

ACTIVITIES

Working Out the Answers. As you read *The Lions' Run*, keep a journal of questions that you might ask Lucas or one of the other characters if you had the chance. At the conclusion of your reading, choose three questions to share with the class. Work out your answer to one question in a one-page written reflection.

Hope Is a Dangerous Thing. On page 37, Lucas tries to ignore rumors about the Allies coming to rescue France. (During World War II the Allied powers were composed primarily of the United States, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain. The Allies fought against the Axis powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan.) After reading *The Lions' Run*, take a deep dive into the history of World War II. Research pivotal aspects of the war, such as the German invasion of Poland, the

Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Blitz, the D-Day invasion of Normandy, and the Allied liberation of France. After concluding your research, present your findings to the class.

Note: With sensitive and potentially upsetting topics such as the Holocaust and the nuclear bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, consider having grade-level and developmentally appropriate conversations about these important events. See the beginning of the guide for suggested resources.

Coded Messages. On page 114, Alice explains to Lucas that the Allies were broadcasting coded messages from London to France to aid the Resistance effort. Have students experiment with sending coded messages similar to what the Allies in Great Britain constructed during the war. As Alice says, "It isn't what they say as much as the amount of stuff, especially the personal messages." Write personal statements that have a double meaning. Exchange messages with classmates and try to crack the codes.

Consider Bravery. Throughout the story the author includes examples of vivid figurative language, such as the following simile on page 120: "Maybe bravery was like a muscle, something you trained little by little to strengthen." Identify some examples of figurative language in the story. Choose one example and create a visual representation of its meaning. Go on an art walk through your classroom to view all students' work.

Drawing Freedom. In chapter 32 Lucas discovers a drawing left for him by the Jewish children who were being hidden by Madame Bernard: "Inside was a roll of paper. He unfurled it to find a drawing. Three birds with crimson and orange and yellow feathers soaring off a green-leafed branch into a wide open sky" (page 147). Re-create this scene based on the above description. After all students have had a chance to complete a drawing, discuss how each artist interpreted the description.

VOCABULARY

collateral damage, author's note to the reader
penance, page 10
malice, page 20
defiance, page 21
convalescent, page 22
resentment, page 35
privilege, page 35
Aryan, page 56
broodmare, page 60
armistice, page 71
conscripted, page 71
indignant, page 75
concentration camp, page 95
appalled, page 139
prejudice, page 161
welfare, page 217
devastation, page 222

This guide was created by Colleen Carroll, a literacy specialist, the author of the How Artists See series, and the director of curriculum and instruction at an independent day school in the New York metropolitan area. Learn more about her at about.me/colleencarroll.