YA book club

Read. Discuss. Repeat.

The Book Thief
Discussion Questions

1. What did you think about Death as the narrator? Did his observations add to or detract from the story for you? Do you think he is a sympathetic character?
2. What are Death's feelings for each victim? Describe Death's attempt to resist Liesel. Death states, "I'm always finding humans at their best and worst. I see their ugly and their beauty, and I wonder how the same thing can be both." What is ugly and beautiful about Liesel, Rosa and Hans Hubermann, Max Vandenburg, Rudy Steiner, and Mrs. Hermann? Why is Death haunted by humans?
3. Why does Death say that he is "haunted by humans?" What does that mean?
4. Did it bother you that Death periodically "spoils the plot," by revealing to readers that something bad is about to happen? Why do you think the author had his narrator give the story away?
5. Why does Liesel steal *The Grave Diggers Handbook* when she can't even read it? Why does she think she needs to hide it at the Hubermann's house?
6. Describe Hans and Rosa Hubermann. Why did they take Liesel in?
7. Liesel and Hans bond pretty quickly, but it takes longer for Liesel to warm up to her foster mother. What changes her opinion of Rosa Hubermann?
8. Compare and contrast the lives of Liesel and Max Vandenburg. How does Max's life give Liesel purpose? At what point do Liesel and Max become friends? Max gives Liesel a story called "The Standover Man" for her birthday. What is the significance of this story?
9. Describe Liesel's friendship with Rudy. How does their friendship change and grow throughout the novel? Death says that Rudy doesn't offer his friendship "for free." What does Rudy want from Liesel?
10. Abandonment is a central theme in the novel. How does Liesel equate love with abandonment? At what point does she understand why she was abandoned by her mother? Who else abandons Liesel in the novel?
11. Courage is another important theme in this book. Which of the characters do you think showed the most courage? Why?
12. The night Liesel visits Frau Hermann's library and destroys a book, she is angry at the words. She thinks, "without them, there wouldn't be any of this. Without words, the Fuhrer was nothing. There would be no limping prisoners, no need for consolation or worldly tricks to make us feel better. What good were the words?" What does she mean? What is the author trying to say about the power of books?

About The Author
Markus Zusak

I always had stories in my head. So I started writing them."
--Markus Zusak

Markus Zusak is the author of *Fighting Ruben Wolfe*, *Getting The Girl* and *I Am The Messenger*. He received the Children's Book Council of Australia's Book of the Year Award for *I Am the Messenger*. He lives in Sydney, where he "writes, occasionally works a real job, and plays on a soccer team that never wins". When asked about *The Book Thief*, he explains, "I wanted to write something very different than what I'd done before. The idea of a book stealer was in my head when I was writing *I Am The Messenger*, but it wasn't ready to be written. The original idea was set in the present in Sydney, which didn't feel quite right. Then I thought about writing of the things my parents had seen while growing up in Nazi Germany and Austria, and when I brought the ideas together, it seemed to work, especially when I thought about the importance of words in that time, and what they were able to make people believe."

In a 2006 interview with Publishers Weekly Zusak explained that the initial inspiration for *The Book Thief* were two stories he was told as a child. The first was of a tale his mother told of Munich being bombed. "Everything was red, like the sky was on fire. That was a memory that I could see really clearly as a child, a very visual image," he says. The second story was of a teenage boy who took pity on an emaciated Jew being forced through the streets, and offered him some bread. Both were whipped by a soldier who witnessed this act of compassion.

In his acknowledgements Zusak mentions many people but ends with "special thanks to his parents, Lisa and Helmut Zusak - for the stories we find hard to believe, for laughter, and for showing me another side."

The Book Thief was published in September 2005 in Australia to wide acclaim, and was positioned as Zusak's adult debut. In the USA, Random House have chosen to publish it as a young-adult novel, which Zusak is comfortable with saying, "For a teenage audience, it's clearly for sophisticated readers. You just hope it gets into the right person's hands, whatever their age".

Biography found at http://www.bookbrowse.com/biographies/index.cfm?author_number=1275