

Number the Stars by Lois Lowry

Subjects: World War, 1939–1945—Denmark—Juvenile fiction; World War, 1939–1945—Jews—Rescue—Juvenile fiction; Friendship—Juvenile fiction

Awards: Newbery Medal Winner, Horn Book Fanfare, Sydney Taylor Award

Book List: Europe

Props: Locket



Annemarie Johansen lives in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark. Today, she and her best friend Ellen are racing home from school, around tight corners and through the narrow crowded streets of the city—practicing for the big athletic meet coming up this Friday.

(Use German accent for soldiers) “Halte!” a voice shouts at them. It is a German soldier, two of them actually—wearing metal helmets and tall shiny boots. Carrying heavy rifles and wearing the large Nazi emblem of a swastika on their sleeves. The soldiers questioned the girls, but most especially Ellen. “What are your names? Why are you running? What is in your packs? Are you good students?” Finally they let the girls continue on their way. But Annemarie and Ellen are frightened by the experience, most especially Ellen. Because she is a Jew.

Annemarie has always been Ellen’s best friend, but she never thought about the differences between them. Not until now. For ever since the Nazis invaded Denmark, occupying their cities and towns, the Jews have been treated differently, and Ellen’s family, the Rosens, is no exception. They can no longer own property or run their own businesses. They are not allowed to use public transportation or even to own bicycles, so they must walk everywhere. And they must always wear the yellow Star of David on their arms whenever they are out in public, a signal to all that they are different. They are Jews. But what frightens Ellen and Annemarie even more than the soldiers are the rumors that the Nazis have begun taking lists of names at all of the local synagogues—and the Rosens’ names are on one of those lists.

“But why?” Annemarie asks her parents. “Why do they want those names? Her father answers, “they plan to arrest all Danish Jews. They plan to take them away. And we have been

told that they may come tonight to grab people from their homes.” Annemarie has heard about the concentration camps and she knows that if Ellen is taken away to one of these, she will never see her friend again. “We have to help them!” she cries, and her father tells her that they cannot take all three. “One person we can hid,” he says, “but not three.” And so the Johansens agree to let Ellen stay with them for the night. “If anyone should come,” he says to the girls, “you are sisters. Go now and get your nightgowns. It will be a long night.”

Hours later the girls are awakened by loud pounding on the apartment door. Annemarie peeks out of her bedroom and sees soldiers forcing their way into her living room. “Where are the Rosens?” they demand to her parents. “We understand that you are their friends.”

“I assume they are at home, sleeping.” Annemarie’s mother replies angrily. “It is four o’clock in the morning after all.” The soldiers inform them that the Rosens are not at home sleeping. The Rosens have evidently disappeared. And they are probably hiding right here in the Johansen’s apartment.

“Then search the apartment if you wish,” says Annemarie’s father. “There is no one her but my wife and I, and our two daughters.” Annemarie can hear the soldiers tromping about in her living room in heavy boots. She hears doors being opened and then slammed shut. Then—just as her own bedroom door is flung open by three Nazi soldiers—she notices something gleaming in the beam of one of the soldier’s flashlights. Something large and shiny around Ellen’s neck. It is her friend’s necklace, a gold chain with the Jewish Star of David hanging from its center. *(Hold up book)* *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry.