

The Woman Who Heard Color - by Kelly Jones

Discussion Questions

1. What opportunities open up for Hanna when she becomes an employee in the Fleischmann home? How do these allow her to choose a different path from the one she might have taken had she stayed on the farm? Do you believe Hanna is a woman ahead of her times? What role do Hanna's own choices and her early fearlessness play in determining her future?
2. Were you initially suspicious of Isabella's story, and were you surprised by how it all unfolded? Did you find her memories to be a reliable source of information?
3. What was life like for a Jewish citizen in Germany prior to World War II? What was restricted and what were the human costs as Hitler took power? What do you think it was like for Hanna, a Christian with a Jewish husband? How did her marriage affect her relationships with her own family members, particularly her sister Leni?
4. How do you think Hanna felt as a child when she discovered that others did not hear color? Does this condition make her more empathetic with those who might be considered odd or different? Isabella describes her mother's synesthesia as a gift rather than a liability. Do you believe Hanna came to see her blending of the senses as an asset, too?
5. What role should the government play in determining what is acceptable art? Who should decide what type of art is shown in publicly supported museums? Should certain types of art be subject to government censorship?
6. How would you describe Hanna's role in cataloguing the confiscated art? Why does she agree to work with the Nazis in this endeavor, and how does she reconcile her complicity with her feelings of disgust? Does she have a choice? What are the consequences of her decision?
7. Though Hanna leaves Germany in 1939, before the start of World War II, do you see anything in her story, particularly relating to her involvement with the art, that might foreshadow the historical events that follow?
8. Some of those purchasing art at the auction in Lucerne come to save it, others to pick up a bargain. Do you believe these buyers realized the funds would be diverted from the museums to build up Hitler's military strength? Should they have avoided the auction in protest? Why or why not? Do you believe the German museums should be able to reclaim this art?
9. Why is Hanna's legacy so important to Isabella as an adult? How does Lauren play a critical part in preserving Hanna's story, allowing her heroics to live on?

10. At one point in the story, Isabella says, "So much family history is lost just because no one listens . . . Or when it's never even told." Lauren agrees yet has always been reluctant to ask her father about his own history. Do you think Lauren will eventually encourage her father to share more about his childhood and her grandparents' lives?

Do you have family stories that have been told through the generations? Has family history been lost? What is the effect of untold wartime histories disappearing as the World War II generation passes away? What lessons and stories must not be forgotten?