ABOUT THE BOOK

It’s 1944, and eighteen-year-old Rose Justice, a Pennsylvania poet and pilot, has graduated from high school early to join the war effort. Her British uncle, a high official in the Royal Engineers, has made it possible for Rose to join the British Air Transport Auxiliary as a pilot. She takes her job ferrying Allied planes around Great Britain very seriously, but she wishes she could do more.

To her great satisfaction, Rose is soon selected for a special transport mission to Paris. During this seemingly straightforward trip, Rose makes a fateful decision that puts her behind enemy lines. The Nazis remand her to Ravensbrück, the notorious Nazi concentration camp for women, where she might have expected preferential treatment as an American pilot. Instead Rose is numbered as a French political prisoner and treated brutally. These humiliations and horrors are small compared to what she later endures—and what she learns others have endured. A group of mostly Polish women known as the “Rabbits” were subjected to horrific medical experimentation at Ravensbrück.

The Rabbits’ determination to survive and tell their story to the world helps save Rose’s life. She escapes with Róža, one of the Rabbits, and Irina, a Soviet pilot. They steal a plane and land safely in Allied territory, but then are separated. Without their bravery and their friendship, Rose is devastated. She works to recover her health and her sense of self by writing her story. But Rose has so many other stories in addition to her own to tell.

COMMON CORE ALIGNMENT

This guide is aligned with the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards (CCR) for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language. Discussion questions and activities in this guide include a reference for the CCR strand and standard that is addressed. To scaffold and further support instruction, please reference grade-level appropriate Common Core State Standards.
PRE-READING

Read the first chapter aloud to the class. As you read, stop and “think aloud” about certain points that may be confusing for students (new vocabulary, historical references, etc.) and that cause you personally to pause and question or reflect. Encourage students to use the same strategy while reading to help them monitor their understanding and read with purpose.

Discuss diary and journal writing. Have students explain the distinguishing characteristics of journals, diaries, and blogs and identify significant contributions to this genre. Ask students to offer reasons why they or others record their private thoughts in writing, how this exercise can benefit the writer, and how it can affect readers.

Tell students they will be keeping a response journal while reading Rose Under Fire. You may choose to regularly offer students text-dependent writing prompts that focus on vocabulary, key details, patterns of writing, or what’s uncertain or unstated. The journal can also be used for posing questions, for analysis, and for reflecting and relating what they have read to their own lives. Before students start the book on their own, have them make a journal entry that reflects on their school and leisure reading experiences and discusses the roles that both nonfiction and fiction have played.

(Writing: Range of Writing: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.10)
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Rose badly wanted to come to England, and her uncle Roger, who holds a powerful position in the Royal Engineers, makes it possible. But why did she, a teenager fresh from her Pennsylvania high school, want to come? What was her motivation to come and fly for the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA)? (Reading: Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1)

2. Fellow pilots Maddie and Felicyta give Rose looks that say Ignorant American Schoolgirl. Why is it important to the story that Rose is an American? (Reading: Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1)

3. What does Rose learn about Nazi attitudes and practices during her registration at Ravensbrück? How does this differ from her earlier encounter with the Luftwaffe? (Reading: Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1)

4. Rose’s Luftwaffe letter of recommendation helps provide her with a “skilled job” in the Siemens factory, which is an improvement after life in quarantine. Though Rose can do the job, she refuses, and she is severely punished. What was the work Rose rejected? Would you have done it? Why or why not? (Reading: Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3)

5. We know poetry is very important to Rose, and she feels it saves her life and her sanity. Examine occasions in the book when poetry rescues Rose, and discuss the value of memorizing a poem to carry with you everywhere. How do someone else’s words become part of your life? (Reading: Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1; Reading: Craft and Structure: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4)

6. Little acts of rebellion bring small hopes to the women of Ravensbrück. Which character do you think excels at subverting orders and best illustrates this type of defiance? Why? (Reading: Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1)

7. In Ravensbrück, the Rabbits ruled and commanded fierce loyalty from the inmates. Why were the Rabbits so important in the concentration camp? (Reading: Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1)
When they first meet, Róža and Irina are venomously at odds. Why? When they have a common enemy, why would prisoners turn against one another? And what was it that, as Rose says, “set you at war with yourself”? (Reading: Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3)

Why does Rose’s Kolonka Anna share the death list with Rose? Why does Rose believe she can do something to save her camp family? Irina is not on the list, yet she springs into action to help. Why do they all risk so much for others? (Reading: Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3)

Though Rose is no longer behind camp walls, she’s still trying to escape her prisoner mentality. When Rose arrives in Paris, she is scared to look back through her journal at her life before Ravensbrück. Why? Compare the pilot Rose to Rose the concentration camp survivor. What other iterations of Rose do we meet in the book? (Reading: Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3)

The refrain in the book is *tell the world*—the actual refrain of the prisoners held at Ravensbrück. Rose promises to tell the world of the atrocities against the Rabbits, but finds she can’t even tell her mother. Why does she have a change of heart and decide to speak out? (Reading: Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2)

History is not served if we remember war as a black-and-white battle between good and evil. What are your impressions of the Kolonka Anna Engel? What should her fate be? (Reading: Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3)

Justice in the aftermath of war is highly subjective. Rose wants more than retribution. What does her verse “Fight with realistic hope, not to destroy all the world’s wrong, but to renew its good” mean? Is her wish realistic? (Reading: Craft and Structure: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4)

Though *Rose Under Fire* is a work of fiction, it is based on the memories of real people who suffered and witnessed the horrors at Ravensbrück. Has this novel changed the way you regard human suffering or think about conflict and war? What will you do to “tell the world”? (Reading: Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3)
CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS
READING, WRITING, AND RESEARCHING

Teachers should thoughtfully assess the maturity and critical thinking skills of students before engaging in these activities. Expect a great deal of emotional response and prepare for discussion about truth and hope, remembering and surviving, good and evil, survivors and witnesses, friendship and survival, heartache and death, bravery and defiance, torture and brutality, and the dehumanizing effects of war.

While the complexity of the literature makes the book useful in teaching elements such as setting, character, dialogue, the epistolary format, imagery, poetry, voice, and theme, students and teachers would both benefit from an English Language Arts and History cross-curricular collaboration. Elizabeth Wein offers fictionalized access to a certain point in World War II history, but also pushes the reader to see the bigger picture. Students will be anxious to make those historic explorations and dig into the facts.

IGNORANT AMERICAN SCHOOLGIRL

In her first months in England, Rose says, “It’s so strange to be here at last, and so different from what I expected.” She discovers she’s unfamiliar with or ignorant about many things—including concentration camps. But what would Rose know? She admits that in the United States her time was filled with swimming, basketball, school, and helping at home.

But what might Rose have read or heard about the war that could have helped inform her expectations? Have students work in small groups to research what kind of information was available to Americans in 1943–44 about the war in Europe, especially about Hitler’s Final Solution, concentration camps, and mass executions. Have them identify and compile at least ten primary sources that a real-life Rose potentially could have encountered, such as local or national newspaper or magazine articles, interviews, speeches, newsreels, or radio broadcasts, that would have made her less of an Ignorant American Schoolgirl.
You can further extend the activity by asking students to search and compile similar resources focusing on the 2013 chemical weapons attack in Syria. Have students review and compare the information and the sources of the news stories to those they found from the 1940s, keeping these questions in mind:

- What is the role of the news media?
- Are the amounts or types of information presented in the 1940s significantly different from those presented in 2013?
- Based on your exposure to these news stories alone, if you were sent to Europe in 1944, would you know what to expect? What if you were sent to Syria in 2013?

Student groups should present their written findings and make their conclusions to the whole class.

(Reading: Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1; Reading: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7; Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9; Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1; Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4; Language: Conventions of Standard English: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.2; Language: Knowledge of Language: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.3; Language: Vocabulary Acquisition and Use: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.4)

WHAT'S A PICTURE REALLY WORTH?

While trying to hide Róża, Rose, Irina, and others are cornered by armed soldiers. Rose wonders in her journal, “What did it look like as the troop leader slowly raised his gun? I wish I had a picture of us all. I wish there was a picture of it on the front page of the New York Times. No one will ever believe me. Except—the picture wouldn’t tell you the whole story, would it?”

Photographs can be very useful when analyzing historical events, providing concrete, visual evidence. But are the thousand words they’re worth words of truth?
Provide each student with a photograph relating to Ravensbrück. Have them examine the photo and answer as many of the following as they can:

- Describe what is literally happening in the picture—without feelings, beliefs, predictions, or using prior knowledge.
- What is the photographer trying to convey?
- What is the setting?
- Who took the picture?
- When and why was it taken?
- What other questions does the image raise?
- What emotions does the image evoke?
- Who saved this photograph? Why?
- Interpret the photograph and make speculations about its message.
- Find out the story behind the picture.
- Determine if the photograph is propaganda, journalism, or just a snapshot?

Have students provide an informative and detailed summary of the photograph. Encourage students to go beyond making the very obvious conclusions and support their thinking with evidence found in the image or other facts they’ve researched. The description should be written to help someone who has not seen the image to visualize it.

Have students exchange and read one another’s written descriptions. Then provide the photograph so students can compare their mental image generated by the summary with the actual picture. Students should offer their feedback to help one another clarify or edit photograph summaries before presenting their photographs and the stories behind them to the class.

Discuss how images in a collection gain meaning from their proximity to one another and help tell a larger story. Develop a classroom display of the photographs and summaries.
Resources for photographs

• The Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the University of Minnesota features images and resources from the Florida Holocaust Museum exhibit Women of Ravensbrück–Portraits of Courage (chgs.umn.edu/museum/exhibitions/ravensbruck)

• The Jewish Virtual Library: Ravensbrück Photographs (www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/ravepictoc.html)

• If you search Ravensbrueck, you also get results in the photo archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (www.ushmm.org/research/research-in-collections/overview/photo-archives)

(Reading: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7; Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9; Writing: Production and Distribution of Writing: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5; Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1; Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4; Language: Vocabulary Acquisition and Use: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.4)

DRAWN FROM HISTORY

In Ravensbrück Rose finds women of different nationalities and social backgrounds reduced to mere numbers to be counted. While they suffer in inhumane conditions, they strive to maintain their identities quietly but defiantly by offering classes, sharing recipes, and making art.

Wein’s writing and meticulous research makes these women seem so real you feel you could find them in the pages of history. In her afterword, Wein explains that while the book is fiction, “it is based on the real memories of other people.” In both the afterword and in “Rose Under Fire: The ‘Technical Details’ (Background Research and Links)” on her website (www.elizabethwein.com), she shares some of the real-life inspirations for her characters.

Ask students to choose a character from Rose Under Fire who inspires them. Based on what they know about the character’s nationality, background, involvement in the war, etc., have students research a real-life counterpart. Students will then
use this information to compare and contrast the real person with the fictional character in a multimedia presentation, such as a narrated and illustrated slideshow, focusing on women’s wartime roles.

(Reading: Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3; Reading: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7; Writing: Text Types and Purposes: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.3; Writing: Production and Distribution of Writing: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5; Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9; Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3)

**END OF DAYS**

With her letter to Rose, we know that Lisette survived Ravensbrück. But how she was liberated from the camp is left to the reader’s imagination.

Have students conduct independent research on the “White Buses” action of the Red Cross, the death march, and the liberation of Ravensbrück by the Soviets in April 1945. Using the facts they uncover, ask students to write the story of Lisette’s liberation. Encourage them to use the literary forms in *Rose Under Fire*—poetry, journal entries, letters—to tell Lisette’s journey to freedom.

Give students the opportunity to share their writing with the class. Have students evaluate their classmates’ offerings to see if they meet the standards for quality historical fiction—historically accurate, authentically described locale and social conditions, etc.

(Reading: Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3; Reading: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7; Writing: Text Types and Purposes: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.3; Writing: Production and Distribution of Writing: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5; Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9; Writing: Range of Writing: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.10; Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3)
**TRUTH**

Rose learns about the medical experiments on the Polish Rabbits from Róža only to realize that she’s actually heard their story before—on the radio. But she dismissed it as propaganda because “it was so absolutely awful that I couldn’t believe it.”

The concept of truth and telling it to the world is central to *Rose Under Fire*. But what if the truth is told and nobody believes it? When Rose talks with her mother, she hears, “The Red Cross keeps coming up with people who say they’ve been freed from these awful places. We don’t believe any of it for a second.”

People thought it was exaggeration. They simply couldn’t comprehend such horrors on such a massive scale. Knowledge of the Holocaust is not easy to bear. The temptation by many is to forget or ignore it.

Encourage students to learn, remember, and tell the world. Suggest projects such as these:

**Make a memory wall.**

Have students research and commemorate the life stories of individuals who died during the Holocaust or were victims of Nazi terror. Students should create a memorial that remember the past, but also informs, instructs, and inspires for the future.

*(Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9; Writing: Range of Writing: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.10; Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2; CCSS. ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3)*

**Engage with eyewitnesses through oral history.**

Have students reach out to a survivor, liberator, or eyewitness in your community. To help them prepare, share with them the interviews high school students at the Urban School of San Francisco conducted (www.tellingstories.org/holocaust/index.html).
Remember through recipes.
Talking and exchanging recipes fosters a spirit of community, much as it did in a number of concentration camps. Encourage students to collect recipes and stories from concentration camp survivors and their families and create a cookbook and/or host a special celebration featuring their stories and foods.

TO A YOUNG POET
Edna St. Vincent Millay, Pulitzer Prize–winning poet and feminist, devoted herself to creating propaganda verse and poetry with a political aim before and during World War II. Millay included stirring poems against fascist Spain, Nazi Germany, and imperialistic Japan in Huntsman, What Quarry? In Make Bright the Arrows: 1940 Notebook, she sought to raise the American consciousness and rally Americans to the aid of the oppressed. But it is Millay’s more lyrical and playful work that fortifies Rose—even though Millay signed Rose’s copy of Make Bright the Arrows and wished her good luck in England.

In “Counting-out Rhyme,” Millay delights in playing with words and the sound of language. The poem is a chant, meant to be heard and to call up images, but not necessarily to be understood. Read Millay’s “Counting-out Rhyme” aloud. Have students comment on its structure and repeating patterns and how the repetition strengthens the poem. You might also discuss alliteration, assonance, consonance, slant rhyme, and eye rhyme before introducing any of the following activities.
Read aloud Rose’s “Counting-out Rhyme” and the version of “The Subtle Briar” with the counting-out rhyme of the Rabbits’ names. Ask students to share their thoughts on Rose’s uses of the form. Using Millay’s “Counting-out Rhyme” as a template, have students write poems of their own entitled “Counting-out Rhyme” and read them aloud to the class.

(Reading: Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3; Reading: Craft and Structure: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5; Production and Distribution of Writing: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4)

The counting-out rhyme is a living tradition among children in many cultures, used most often to figure out who will be “it” in a game. Ask students to share aloud any examples they might remember from their own childhoods. How do these differ from Millay’s “Counting-out Rhyme” and Rose’s? Have students write about the significance of Millay’s poem and the symbolism of counting-out rhymes in the book.

(Writing: Text Type and Purpose: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2; Writing: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5; Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3)

To bring even more student attention to the words, sounds, and structure of poetry, have them take inspiration from Rose and memorize a poem. Let them choose the poem, knowing it will become part of their lives and something they will always have with them. Have them practice delivering their poems and provide an opportunity for student recitation.

(Reading: Craft and Structure: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4; Writing: Text Types and Purposes: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.3; Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.6)

Resources
- A brief biography of Edna St. Vincent Millay from the Poetry Foundation (www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/edna-st-vincent-millay)
- The poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay from OldPoetry.com (www.oldpoetry.com/Edna_St._Vincent_Millay_poems)
ACCLAIM FOR *ROSE UNDER FIRE*

⭐ “A young American pilot ferrying planes during World War II is captured by the Nazis in this companion to Printz Honor–winning *Code Name Verity* (2012).”
   – *Kirkus Reviews* [starred review]

⭐ “Once again Wein has written a powerful, moving story.”
   – *The Horn Book* [starred review]

⭐ “Readers will connect with Rose and be moved by her struggle to go forward.”
   – *School Library Journal* [starred review]

⭐ “Wein excels at weaving research seamlessly into narrative and has crafted another indelible story about friendship borne out of unimaginable adversity.”
   – *Publishers Weekly* [starred review]
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ELIZABETH WEIN was born in New York City, grew up abroad, and currently lives in Scotland with her husband and two children. She is an avid flyer of small planes and is the editor of the Scottish Aero Club’s newsletter. She also holds a PhD in Folklore from the University of Pennsylvania. (www.elizabethwein.com)

ALSO BY ELIZABETH WEIN

★ “This novel positively soars [with] its warm, ebullient characterization; its engagement with historical facts; its ingenious plot and dramatic suspense; and its intelligent, vivid writing.”
—The Horn Book [starred review]

★ “A carefully researched, precisely written tour de force; unforgettable and wrenching.”
—Kirkus Reviews [starred review]

★ “If you pick up this book, it will be some time before you put your dog-eared, tear-stained copy back down. . . . Both crushingly sad and hugely inspirational, this plausible, unsentimental novel will thoroughly move even the most cynical of readers.”
—Booklist [starred review]
Rachael Walker (www.belleofthebook.com) created this guide. She consults on a wide variety of educational programs and multimedia projects with a special focus on children’s literacy, and develops educational materials and reading resources for children, parents and teachers.

Many more discussion guides can be found on the Disney • Hyperion website at www.disneybooks.com