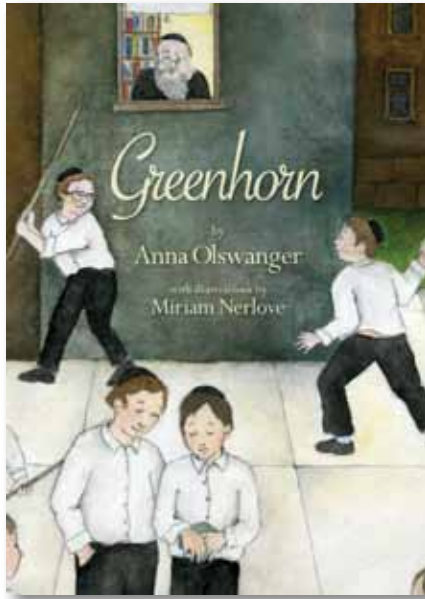


Discussion Guide

Greenhorn

by Anna Olswanger

with illustrations by Miriam Nerlove



Juvenile Fiction/Historical/Holocaust

48 pages

Reading Level: Grades 5–8

NewSouth Books, 2012

Synopsis

Daniel, a young Holocaust survivor, arrives at a New York yeshiva in 1946 to study and live. He is carrying a small box, his only possession. Daniel rarely talks, but the story's narrator, a stutterer taunted by the other boys, comes to consider Daniel his friend.

What's in the box is a mystery. Daniel never lets it out of his sight, but he won't talk about it, either. The boys at the yeshiva are impatient with his secret. Only Aaron, the stutterer, reaches out to Daniel, and through their friendship, Daniel is able to let go of his box. Together, each boy finds his "voice."

Based on a true story, *Greenhorn* gives human dimension to the Holocaust. It poignantly underscores our flawed humanity and speaks to the healing value of friendship.

THEMES:

Belonging, Self-Discovery, Family, Friendship, Disabilities.

This *Greenhorn* Discussion Guide for families is based on questions prepared by Marcia Weiss Posner, Ph.D., librarian and program director at the Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County, New York. Additional input from Ann Malaspina.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the meaning of the word “Greenhorn?” What is the history of this word and when was it commonly used? Why do you think the author chose *Greenhorn* as the title? Was it a good choice?
2. Was the book believable to you? Did it shock or disturb you?
3. *Greenhorn* is a book about language and its social role. Aaron struggles to speak—he stutters in expressing himself. Daniel, the newcomer to the group, doesn’t speak. How does language help to bridge their different worlds and experiences?
4. How did the stuttering Aaron finally find his voice? How did Daniel find his?
5. No one knew that Daniel could speak English. Do you think that he just learned it? Why did he resist speaking in English? And why did he finally use English?
6. At first, most of the boys were friendly to Daniel, but when Hershel held him down and took away his box, why didn’t they do anything to help Daniel? What might they have done? What does Judaism say about “welcoming the stranger?”
7. Why do you think Aaron was kinder than the other boys to Daniel?

8. When Aaron heard the box fall on the floor from under Daniel's pillow, why did he get out of bed and slip it back? What did Aaron whisper to Daniel? Why did Aaron confess his dream to the sleeping Daniel? And why, if Daniel heard Aaron, did he not answer or acknowledge him?
9. Why was Aaron afraid to share his dream with the other boys? How might they have responded?
10. Why did Rabbi Ehrlich want to bury what was inside Daniel's box? Can we be certain that the box actually contained what Daniel and the rabbi believed it did? If they were mistaken, why would the box and its contents still be important to Daniel? Why did he want to keep the box with him at all times?
11. What did Daniel say to Aaron at the end of the book? Why did he wait to say it?
12. Why do you think Daniel finally agreed to live with Aaron and his family?
13. Would you recommend this book to someone else?

Research Questions

1. What was happening in Europe during the time of the book? How much did the boys know about the restrictions on Jews, Kristallnacht, slave labor camps, and death camps? Why do you think they didn't know about everything that had happened to the European Jews?
2. What was the game of stickball? How was it played? Why do you think the boys at the yeshiva played stickball, rather than baseball?
3. Where did the Yiddish language come from? Why did so many Jews in America speak it? Why would Aaron have spoken it? Why did he presume that Daniel knew Yiddish?
4. What was the *Quiz Kids Show*? What role did the radio play in the lives of Americans in the early and middle twentieth century? What other radio shows might the boys in the yeshiva have listened to?
5. What did sixth-grade boys learn in a yeshiva in the 1940s? What is the Gemara? How did the boys "learn" Gemara?
6. Moishe Oysher was a famous Yiddish movie star. Do you know of other Yiddish movie stars? Why would Yiddish movies and movie stars have been popular with the boys in the yeshiva and their parents?

Web Resources

Children of the Holocaust

www.adl.org/children_holocaust/children_main1.asp

Daring to Resist

www.pbs.org/daringtoresist/synopsis.htm

Holocaust Memorial & Tolerance Center of Nassau County

www.holocaust-nassau.org/index.php

Museum of Tolerance Online

www.museumoftolerance.com/

The Holocaust Explained

www.theholocaustexplained.org/

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

www.ushmm.org/

About the Author

Anna Olswanger is also the author of *Shlemiel Crooks* (NewSouth Books), a Sydney Taylor Honor Book and PJ Library Book. In 2010 a family musical based on *Shlemiel Crooks* premiered at Lincoln Center's Merkin Hall in New York. Anna lives in the metropolitan New York area and is a literary agent with Liza Dawson Associates. Anna's website is www.olswanger.com.

About the Illustrator

Miriam Nerlove is a freelance artist and illustrator. A graduate of Oberlin College in Ohio, she received her master's degree in print-making from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, and worked for a time in the photograph and slide library at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. She currently lives with her family just outside Chicago, where in addition to illustrating, she enjoys writing, music, and painting, and working part-time at a library. More of Miriam's art is at tinyurl.com/9hzoepa.

Ordering Information

Greenhorn

by Anna Olswanger

Illustrations by Miriam Nerlove

Hardcover, \$17.95, ISBN 978-1-58838-235-1

Ebook, \$9.99, ISBN 978-1-60306-159-9

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ALSO BY ANNA OLSWANGER, FROM NEWSOUTH BOOKS

Shlemiel Crooks

Hardcover, \$15.95, ISBN 978-1-58838-165-1

Paperback, \$11.95, ISBN 978-1-58838-236-8

Based on a true story, *Shlemiel Crooks* is an imaginative introduction for young children to the history of Passover, as Pharaoh and a town of Jewish immigrants play tug-of-war with wine made from grapes left over from the Exodus from Egypt. A modern-day parable, *Shlemiel* has a music all its own. Pharaoh's ghost comes back to "pull one over on the Jews," nosy neighbors make a "shtuss" outside, and a talking horse sounds as if it has a "little indigestion." Through the Yiddish-inflected English, young readers hear the language of a Jewish community of another time. The jewel-like illustrations on every page add to the delight.

Praise for *Greenhorn*

“Anna Olswanger’s deceptively simple tale can jump-start a discussion of the Holocaust, as well as the repercussions for those who survived and, indeed, for all humanity. A book to be read by adult and child together.” — *Kirkus Reviews*

“[*Greenhorn*] evinces a fine ear for the rough-and-tumble speech of city kids and an eye for detail.” — *Publishers Weekly*

“*Greenhorn* is a tender, touching celebration of friendship, family, and faith. I must admit I cried at the horror and humanity of this simple story. Read it with your arms around someone you love.”

— KAREN CUSHMAN, author of *The Midwife’s Apprentice* and
winner of the Newbery Medal

“It’s just a tin box. Yet for Daniel it contains a whole world. *Greenhorn* is a short, simple story that deserves a place among the most distinguished works of Holocaust literature.”

— ERIC A. KIMMEL, author of *Hershel and
the Hanukkah Goblins*, a Newbery Honor Book

“*Greenhorn* brings to colloquial life a chilling aspect of Jewish and world history that the world should not be allowed to forget.”

— PAUL ZELINSKY, author of *Rapunzel* and
winner of the Caldecott Medal