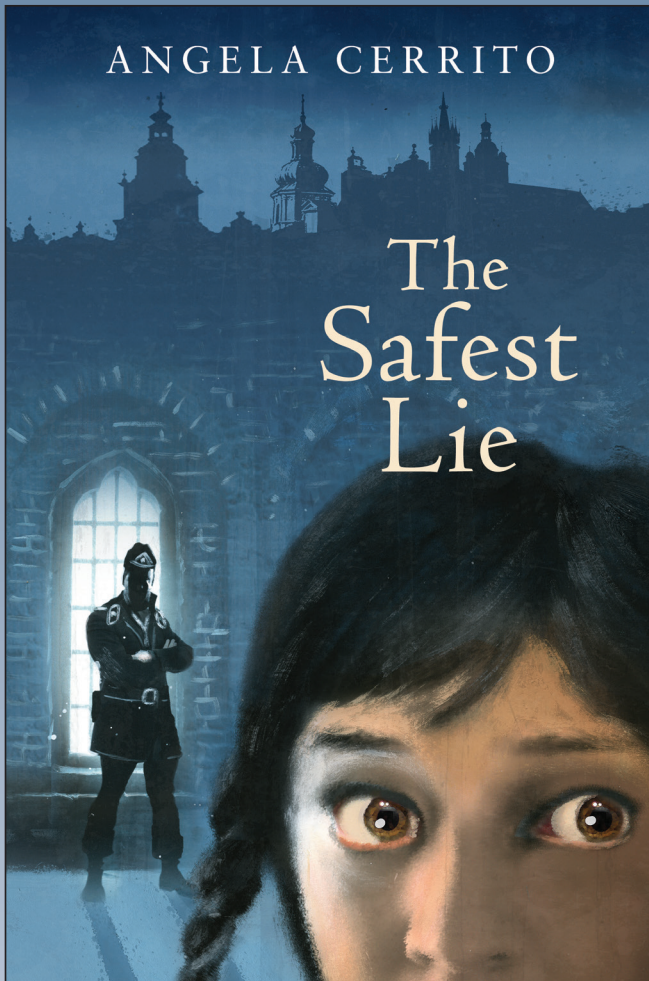


Holiday House Educator's Guide

Common
Core
Connections
INSIDE



HC: 978-0-8234-3310-0 • \$16.95 • E-book available

THE SAFEST LIE

ANGELA CERRITO

“Masterfully captures the powerful and courageous story of a Jewish girl in the Warsaw ghetto and the real-life hero Irena Sendler, who tries to save her. Heartfelt and harrowing.”

*—Ruta Sepetys, author of
Between Shades of Gray*

Grades 4 up

ABOUT THE BOOK

This powerful historical novel is a suspenseful and deeply moving account of the sacrifices endured, the dangers faced, and the heroism demonstrated by survivors and victims of the Holocaust.

Set in Poland during World War II, this is the story of nine-year-old Anna Bauman and her parents who lived in the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw for two years when Jolanta (code name for the real-life World War II Resistance spy Irena Sendler) notifies them of a plan to get the children to safety. The Jewish children are given new names, false papers and a new religion. Anna becomes Anna Karwolska and is first smuggled to an overcrowded Catholic orphanage and finally to a loving Catholic family in the country. As Anna becomes a part of their family, she struggles between remembering her new identity and forgetting her old one. Anna's story is that of the thousands of rescued children who not only lost their families but their Jewish heritage because many were just too young to remember.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Read aloud *Irena Sendler and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto* by Susan Goldman Rubin, illustrated by Bill Farnsworth. Or, read about Irena Sendler on the following website: www.auschwitz.dk/sendler.htm. Then have students write a tribute to Sendler that might have appeared in newspapers on the day she died at the age of 98.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Informational Text: Key Ideas & Details RI. 4-7.1, RI. 4-7.2; Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-7.2

Questions for Classroom Discussion

- ☆ At the beginning of the novel, the Bauman family had been in the Warsaw ghetto for two years. How is the ghetto different now from when they first arrived? Discuss the health and safety issues that threaten their existence. The German soldiers are their greatest fear. How do they also fear other ghetto inhabitants?
- ☆ What is the purpose of Mrs. Rechtman's youth circle? At what point is it obvious that Jolanta is working with Mrs. Rechtman to protect the children? Mrs. Rechtman refuses to go to the safe house that Jolanta has found for her outside the ghetto. Debate whether the loss of her own family makes Mrs. Rechtman so determined to see the children to safety.
- ☆ Jolanta and others working in the Resistance movement use code words to communicate with children and their families. For example, *homework* is the code word for food. What other code words are used in and outside the ghetto?
- ☆ Describe Anna Bauman. What special qualities does Jolanta recognize in Anna? Explain why Jolanta wants to meet Anna's parents. What is the note that Jolanta passes to Mrs. Bauman? Explain how the note represents hope for Anna. How does Anna's mother prepare her for life outside the ghetto? Explain why a new identity is necessary for Anna's survival. Anna is issued a new school uniform. Why does she say it feels like a costume to her? How does it hide her true identity?
- ☆ Anna's grandmother always said, "The truth is in sight. The lie is behind the eyes" (p. 12). What truth is in sight for the Baumans and all those who live in the ghetto? How does this truth give Mr. and Mrs. Bauman the courage to let Anna go?
- ☆ Anna realizes, "Being another person isn't just about remembering. It's about forgetting" (p. 35). Discuss the things that Anna must remember to keep herself safe. What must she forget? Anna says, "Grandmother would want me to be Anna Karwolska" (p. 72). How does this knowledge give Anna courage?
- ☆ How does Klara, a girl at the orphanage, bully Anna? Debate whether Klara is as frightened as the other girls at the orphanage. Discuss how fear might cause girls like Klara to act mean. At what point does Klara change the way she treats Anna?

- ☆ Fifteen girls from the orphanage are sent to live with families. Klara doesn't want to go. Discuss why Sister Maria allows her to stay. Why is Anna so surprised to discover that the other girls at the orphanage are Jewish like her? How does the orphanage prepare them to live the "safest lie"?
- ☆ Describe Sophia, Stephan and Jerzy. Discuss the courage it takes for them to have Anna in their home. Sophia makes Anna a dress. Why does this bring Anna to tears? How does being part of a family again make Anna miss her parents? Discuss Anna's thoughts when she discovers the photo of Lidia, Sophia's daughter. Sophia tells Anna that the Germans took Lidia. How does this knowledge make Anna feel sad, but safe?
- ☆ Anna discovers Zina, a teenage girl, and Jozef, a small boy, hidden in a shed in the churchyard. Explain what Anna means, "He (Jozef) has more hope, and more hunger, than he has fear" (p.106). How is it Anna Bauman rather than Anna Karwolska that helps them? Why does Anna tell Jerzy about Zina and Jozef? How does she know that she can trust him with this secret?
- ☆ At what point does Anna realize that Jerzy doesn't work for a tailor? Discuss the term *underground newspaper*. How does the newspaper "bring hope" and "save lives"? Jerzy says, "It's dangerous if people don't know the truth" (p. 144). How is knowledge safer than ignorance?
- ☆ Throughout the novel Anna remembers bits of a poem that her father recited to her. Why is finding the poem so important to her? Sophia locates the poem in a book and presents it to Anna. Why does Anna want Sophia to read it aloud to her? Explain why the poem causes Anna to tell Sophia all of her secrets, including her true identity. Why is Anna surprised that Sophia, Stephan and Jerzy had always known that she was Jewish?
- ☆ Anna wonders if Papa's poem and the strip of faded cloth that her mother used to tie her braids is the only thing that she has left of her parents. Explain what Jakub means by "even if we don't find them. The poem and the cloth. That's not all there is" (p. 175).
- ☆ The novel is about fear, courage and survival. How is it also about lost identity? Anna knows her true identity. How does Chaim represent the children who were too young to remember? Explain how their return to Warsaw is especially traumatic.
- ☆ Discuss the qualities of a hero. Irena Sendler didn't consider herself a hero, but author Angela Cerrito says that she will always be a hero to her. How do the characters of Jolanta and Mrs. Dabrowska embody the heroic qualities of Irena Sendler? What other characters in the novel might be considered heroes?

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 4-7.1, RL. 4-7.2, RL. 4-7.3; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration. SL. 4-7.1, SL. 4-7.2, SL. 4-7.3; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 4-7.1; Knowledge of Language L. 4-7.3.

Curriculum Connections

LANGUAGE ARTS

- ☆ Cerrito uses simile to create certain images in the minds of readers. For example, when Anna realizes that she should practice being Anna Karwolska, she says, “It’s like carrying something heavy a great distance” (p. 49). Find other examples of simile in the novel. Then have students write similes that describe Anna’s feelings in the following circumstances:

The day she leaves Sophia, Stephan and Jerzy’s home

Seeing the ruins of Warsaw upon her return

Her reunion with Jakub

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 4-7.5.

- ☆ Discuss the title of the novel. Remind students that an acrostic poem begins with a spine word that is written down the left side of a page. The letter on each line becomes the first letter of the word on that line. Have them consider every part of Anna’s story and write a three-stanza acrostic poem using The Safest Lie as spine words.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 4-7.4.

- ☆ Write an essay that Anna might write titled “My Brother Jerzy.” Encourage peer editing for clarity, spelling and grammar.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-7.3; Production & Distribution of Writing W. 4-7.5

ART/LANGUAGE ARTS

- ☆ Ask students to select a scene from the novel and create a two-page graphic novel spread. Suggest one of the following scenes: Anna being smuggled out of the ghetto; Anna taking blank pages from books; Anna’s discovery of Zina and Josef; Mr. Goren taking Anna away; Anna’s return to Warsaw and reuniting with Jakub.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-7.3

SOCIAL STUDIES

- ☆ Ask students to read about Janina Dawidowicz’s life in the Warsaw ghetto on the following website: www.bbc.com/news/magazine-18924842. Then have them write a brief paper that compares her story with that of Anna Bauman.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Informational Text: RI. 4-7.2; Integration of Knowledge & Ideas RI. 4-7.9; Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-7.1.

- ☆ Anna likes the songs and prayers of her new religion. She asks, “But which one, which religion, is right?” (p. 41). Auntie tells her, “I know it is right that the world has both religions” (p. 41). Tell students that there are twelve classical world religions: Baha’i, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shinto, Sikhism, Taoism and Zoroastrianism. Divide the class into six groups and ask them to research two assigned religions. Then have them develop a short PowerPoint that outlines the basic beliefs of each religion. After each group has presented, lead the class in a discussion about why religious tolerance is important in the world in which we live.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 4-7.6; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 4-7.8

- ☆ Instruct students to read about the Days of Remembrance on the following website: www.ushmm.org/remember/days-of-remembrance. Then have them plan a Days of Remembrance Ceremony much like the one Cerrito refers to on page 178. Ask students to write and deliver an oral tribute that Anna Bauman might write to one of the following characters: Jolanta, Mrs. Dabrowska, Mrs. Rechtman, Sophia, Stephan, Jerzy or Uncle Tomasz.
Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-7.3; Production & Distribution of Writing W. 4-7.4; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 4-7.1; Knowledge of Language L. 4-7.3; Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 4-7.4

DRAMA

- ☆ Read personal stories of those who survived the Jewish ghettos: www.ushmm.org/exhibition/personal-history/theme.php?th=ghettos#content. Then have students stage a dialogue between Anna or Jakub and one of these survivors. If possible, film the dialogues for a class documentary titled “Never Forget.” Include images of the Warsaw ghetto taken from Google Images.
Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 4-7.9; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 4-7.1; Knowledge of Language L. 4-7.3; Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & ideas SL. 4-7.5.

VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE

- ☆ Ask students to jot down unfamiliar words and attempt to define them taking clues from the context. Such words may include: *growl* (p. 19), *induced* (p. 30), *decisive* (p. 85), *occupation* (p. 93), *quarantined* (p. 131), *confiscate* (p. 134), *confirm* (p. 146), *liberated* (p. 160), *retrieve* (p. 161), *sabotage* (p. 171) and *contagious* (p. 171).
Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 4-7.4.

Internet Resources

Yad Vashem

www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/stories/sendler.asp

The official website of Yad Vashem details the work of Irena Sendler.

The Jewish Virtual Library

www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/irenasendler.html

Offers a biography of Irena Sendler.

www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Zegota.html

Features a brief article about Zegota.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005069

Offers an article about the Warsaw ghetto.

The Warsaw Ghetto

www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVhoqCc_ARo

This video documents life in the Warsaw ghetto.

Related Titles of Interest

The Anne Frank Case: Simon Wiesenthal's Search for the Truth

by Susan Goldman Rubin, illustrated by Bill Farnsworth

HC: 978-0-8234-2109-1 / PB: 978-0-8234-2308-8 • Ages 10 up

The Cat with the Yellow Star: Coming of Age in Terezin

by Susan Goldman Rubin and Ela Weissberger

HC: 978-0-8234-2154-1 • Ages 8–12

Fireflies in the Dark: The Story of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and the Children of Terezin

by Susan Goldman Rubin

HC: 978-0-8234-1461-1 • Ages 8–12

The Grand Mosque of Paris: A Story of How Muslims Rescued Jews During the Holocaust

by Karen Gray Ruelle and Deborah Durland DeSaix

HC: 978-0-8234-2159-6 / PB: 978-0-8234-2304-0 • Ages 8 up

Irena Sendler and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto

by Susan Goldman Rubin, illustrated by Bill Farnsworth

HC: 978-0-8234-2251-7 • Ages 6–10

A Picture Book of Anne Frank

by David A. Adler, illustrated by Karen Ritz

HC: 978-0-8234-1003-3 / PB: 978-0-8234-1078-1 • Ages 4–8



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANGELA CERRITO was born in Dearborn, Michigan, and has lived in Oregon, Georgia, China, Italy and Germany. She attended Pacific University, where she received a BS in social work and an MS in physical therapy. She currently works as a pediatric physical therapist in Germany. Her first novel, *The End of the Line*, was a YALSA Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers and a VOYA “Top of the Top Shelf” selection.

The Safest Lie evolved over eleven years. The author first learned about Irena Sendler in 2004 and knew immediately that she wanted to write about her. She applied for and was awarded the Kimberly Colen Memorial Grant from the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI), which made it possible for her to conduct research in Warsaw, Poland, where she finally met her hero, Irena Sendler.

Guide prepared by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

Key to the Common Core State Standards

ADAPTABILITY NOTE *The activities within this Educator's Guide can easily be adapted to conform to the listed Common Core Standards in the entire 4 and up grade range.*



READING: LITERATURE

Key Ideas & Details

- RL. 4-7.1** Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
- RL. 4-7.2** Determine a theme of a story from details in the text.
- RL. 4-7.3** Describe in depth a character, setting or event in a story.

READING: INFORMATIONAL TEXT

Key Ideas & Details

- RI. 4-7.1** Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- RI. 4-7.2** Determine a central ideas of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

Integration of Knowledge & Ideas

- RI. 4-7.9** Integrate information from two texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

SPEAKING & LISTENING

Comprehension & Collaboration

- SL. 4-7.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussion (one on one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade level topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing for their own clearly.
- SL. 4-7.2** Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats, and evaluate the motives behind its presentation.
- SL. 4-7.3** Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas

- SL.4-7.4** Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant descriptive details to support main ideas.
- SL. 4-7.5** Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, sound) and visual displays in presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.

LANGUAGE

Convention of Standard English

- L. 4-7.1** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Knowledge of Language

- L. 4-7.3** Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading or listening.



Vocabulary Acquisition & Use

- L. 4-7.4** Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade level reading and content.
- L. 4-7.5** Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meaning.

WRITING

Text Types & Purposes

- W. 4-7.1** Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
- W. 4-7.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization and analysis of relevant content.
- W. 4-7.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details and well-structured event sequences.

Productions & Distribution of Writing

- W. 4-7.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.
- W. 4-7.5** With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting or trying a new approach.
- W. 4-7.6** Use technology, including the internet, to produce and publish writing.

Research to Build & Present Knowledge

- W. 4-7.7** Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.
- W. 4-7.8** Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; take notes and categorize information, and provide a list of sources.
- W. 4-7.9** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.