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## 2016-2017 BIC Teaching Guide

Marta Moore Editor

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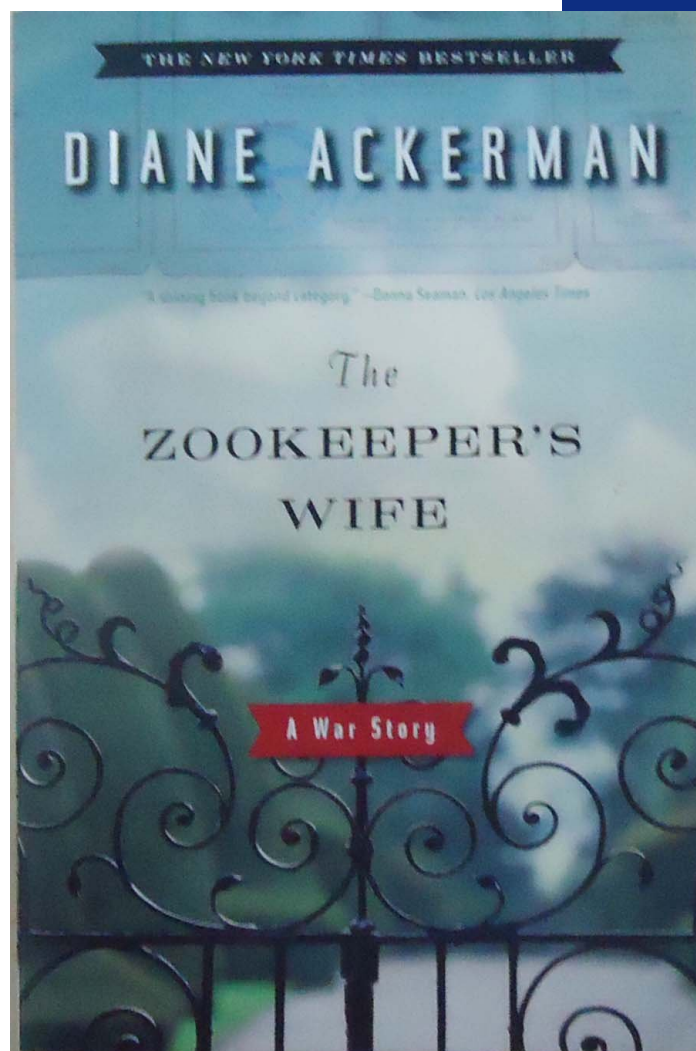
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# BOOK-IN-COMMON TEACHING GUIDE

2016-2017

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Collin College Book-in-Common Committee



# 2016-2017 BOOK-IN-COMMON

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# GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT *THE ZOO KEEPER'S WIFE*

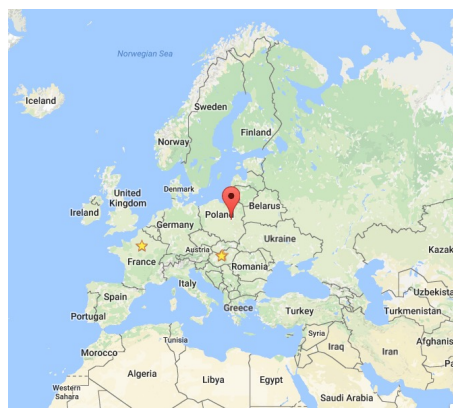
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Poet, essayist, and naturalist, Diane Ackerman is the author of two dozen highly acclaimed works of nonfiction and poetry, including *The Zookeeper's Wife* and *A Natural History of the Senses* — books beloved by millions of readers all over the world. In prose so rich and evocative that one can feel the earth turning beneath one's feet as one reads, Ackerman's thrilling observations urge us to live in the moment, to wake up to nature's everyday miracles.



Ms. Ackerman has received a P.E.N. Henry David Thoreau Award for Nature Writing, honorary doctorate from Kenyon College, Guggenheim Fellowship, Orion Book Award, John Burroughs Nature Award, Lavan Poetry Prize, as well as being honored as a Literary Lion by the New York Public Library. In 2016, she was elected to the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. She also has the rare distinction of having a molecule named after her —dianeackerone— a pheromone in crocodilians. She has taught at a number of universities, including Columbia and Cornell. Her essays about nature and human nature have been appearing for decades in *The New York Times*, *Smithsonian*, *Parade*, *New Yorker*, *National Geographic* and many other journals. She hosted a five-hour PBS television series inspired by *A Natural History of the Senses*.

## GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING



**PHOTOGRAPH: THE ZOO KEEPER'S WIFE, ANTONINA ZABINSKI**



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND WRITING PROMPTS

## GLORIA COCKERRELL — STUDY GUIDE

1. Choose two situations that you consider to be critical to the story presented in *The Zoo Keeper's Wife*.
  - a. In what ways are they critical? Are they more critical to the Zabinski family or to the general situations of the war itself? Explain. If they are critical to both, explain. What makes you think as you do?
  - b. How would the two critical situations you chose have been different if technology for use by ordinary people had been the same as what we have now?
2. List in order the pets that Ry has throughout the story.
  - a. Is there any significance to the types of animals that he chooses for himself or are chosen for him? Explain your answer.
  - b. Does Ry **need** to have pets? Why or why not?
3. How is Ry's own personality shown in the characterizations that Antonina gives of his pets? Do you think that she attributes any characteristics to the animals that she actually sees in Ry? Explain and support your answer.
4. The experiences of the Zabinski family during the war differ from those of others because of their connection with the zoo.
  - a. How does their position as owners of a zoo influence the various opportunities that they have to hide and protect people from the Germans? (Once you give your answer, choose at least three opportunities, and explain them in detail.)

- b. What **political** considerations are given to the Zabinski family because of their ownership of the zoo, and why?
- 5. Why did Antonina and Jan endanger themselves and their friends and family to help people who were not even of the same ethnicity as they? What do you think causes people in general to help others, even at their own peril?
- 6. Who is the main character of *The Zookeeper's Wife*, and what makes you think as you do?
- 7. Are there any coincidences related in the story?
  - a. If so, what are they, and what are their effects?
  - b. What do you think caused these coincidences, and how, if at all, did situations change as a result of the coincidences?
- 8. Why is the book titled as it is? Explain, but be sure to support your points.



## WILL BRANNON -- BOOK IN COMMON 2016 QUESTIONS

### Question 1.

How does Diane Ackerman's *The Zookeeper's Wife* compare to traditional war stories present in popular culture? How does Ackerman's narrative meet your personal expectations for what a war story should be? Provide specific examples to support your response.

### Question 2.

Diane Ackerman's *The Zookeeper's Wife* portrays the human capacity to commit extreme acts of compassion and sacrifice while also portraying the human to perpetuate heinous crimes against innocent people. What does Ackerman seem to suggest about human nature? Provide specific examples from the novel to support your response.

### Question 3.

We live in a world increasingly saturated by mass media and thanks to social media, information is almost instantly available. How might contemporary mass media, including social media, have impacted the events depicted in Ackerman's novel if the novel's story was transposed to a contemporary setting?

### Question 4.

Heroism is a term that can be defined in various ways. What examples of heroism can you identify in *The Zookeeper's Wife*? What contributes to the heroism displayed in these situations? What conclusions can you draw about the nature of heroism?

### Question 5.

Despite its somber depiction of the horrors of World War II, Ackerman portrays the enduring power of love in her book. What examples of acts of love can you identify in *The Zookeeper's Wife*? What do these examples suggest about possible themes conveyed by the book?

## JOAN KENNEDY – STUDYGUIDE

### A CLOSE READING:

1. Why does Poland's geographical position serve as a place where invading forces meet? Who were the invaders during World War II?
9. Why does Poland's geographical position serve as a place where invading forces meet? Who were the invaders during World War II?
10. Describe the zoo and the home (villa) of Jan and Antonina Zabinski. Why was it called "The House Under A Crazy Star? (Ch. 2)
11. Discuss Ackerman's literary style for presenting the information about the Zabinski's story.
12. What was Antonina's "special gift?" (Ch. 1) How did this gift assist her in difficult situations? (Ch. 35)
13. Discuss the brief history of the Nazi expansion during World War II. (Ch. 3)
14. Explain Hitler's "charade" before the German invasion of Poland in 1939. (Ch. 4)
15. What is a "blitzkrieg" that the Germans used in World War II? (Ch. 4) Why was it effective?
16. Who were Mrs. Cadarska and Mrs. Stokowska? What service did they provide? (Ch. 5)
17. Describe the conditions of "life under siege." (Ch. 5)
18. What did Hitler authorize his Nazi leaders to do at the beginning of the German occupation of Poland? (Ch. 6)
19. What was the "Decree for the Combating of Violent Acts? (Ch. 6)
20. Describe what the Polish Resistance accomplished to combat the Nazis in Poland. (Ch. 6)
21. Who was Lutz Heck and what role did he play in zoo management during World War II. (Ch 7 & 9)
22. Explain the Nazi obsession for "racial purity" when applied to animals like horses, bison, and cattle. What was their plan? (Ch. 8)
23. The Nazis launched many projects to establish "racial purity." Which groups did they target? Who were some of the Nazi leaders who pursued racial purity and what were their programs? (Ch. 8)
24. How did the pig farm that Jan Zabinski created serve to assist him in helping people under siege? (Ch. 10-11)
25. Describe Hitler's "Final Solution." (Ch. 12)
26. Define the term "collective responsibility" with reference to life at the zoo. (Ch. 14)
27. Who was Heinrich Himmler and what role did he play during the Warsaw Uprising? (Ch 24)
28. How did Dr. Mada Walter's "Charm School" (Institut de Beaute) assist Jews?

29. What is a “psychosis of fear” that prevailed among people under siege and stress. (Ch. 28)
30. Explain the meaning of “resettlement in the east” that the Nazis instigated. (Ch. 20)
31. Why was Janusz Korczak revered as a martyr by the Poles and designated one of the “Thirty-Six Just Men” by the Israelis? (Ch. 20)
32. What was Zegota? How did it function? (Ch. 21)
33. What was the Home Army? What role did it play in the Warsaw Uprising as well as during the Nazi occupation? (Ch. 31)
34. Ackerman describes the personality traits of rescuers who assisted Jews and others during World War II. What are these traits? (Ch. 35)
35. What is Bialowieza? (Ch. 1, 8, & 36)

### **GENERAL DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH:**

1. Why did the Zabinskis choose to assist Jews during World War II? What tactics did they use?
2. Why is education a threat to totalitarian governments? Antonina posed the following question: Why was it that “animals can sometimes subdue their predatory ways in only a few months, while humans, despite centuries of refinement, can quickly grow more savage than any beast?” (Ch. 27) Explore the possibilities of why this was true for Nazi Ideology. Examine how this occurred during World War II.
3. Governments have pursued genocide multiple times during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Research other historical acts of genocide.
4. Explore the human need to survive during the most difficult challenges and time. Examine the Polish resilient spirit in resisting Nazi occupation.
5. Research Ghetto life of the Jews and its history.
6. Contrast human empathy in Poland during World War II with its opposite, Nazi Ideology.
7. Explain how Ackerman’s book explores heroism and compassion during the Nazi era.

## KAY MIZELL – STUDY QUESTIONS

### I. QUESTIONS OVER THE PREFACE

1. Author's Note: What sources does Ackerman use for her book that give it authenticity? 11-13
2. Introduction: Recount the folk tale of the Jewish man who pretended to be a lion and explain how it applies to this historical account. 13
3. What is the setting of the book? (Wartime Poland beginning in the summer 1933.; August 24, 1939 war; Rejentowka, Poland)

### II. ALL CLASSES: CENTRAL ISSUE OF THE WORK

**Zoomorphism** assigns a person, event, or a deity with animalistic characteristics while **anthropomorphism** endows animals, objects, or inhuman creatures with human qualities for insights into their functions. Using the index or passages you found, discuss the presence of this contrast in the text quoting passages to illustrate the literary devices, i.e., 239.

### III. COMPARE AND CONTRAST WITH FILMS

Using Ackerman's nonfiction story, compare and contrast the historical context of this text with one or more films about this period, for example, *In Darkness*, *Schindler's List*, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, *Life is Beautiful*, *The Book Thief*, *The Pianist*, *Enemy at the Gates*, *Defiance*, or the forthcoming *The Zookeeper's Wife*.

### IV. FOR ENGLISH 1301 AND 1302

For English 1301: explain the meaning behind these quotations that present the book's themes. For English 1302: determine the argument Ackerman is making and the lines of reasoning that the text presents through characters' and/or authorial comments.

1. "No doubt Hitler's twin imperatives of purifying the bloodline while grabbing territory *felt right* along an ancient nerve in people like Heck, to whom it may even have seemed a diabolical necessary" (92).

36. "Human beings, gifted at subterfuge and denial yet disquieted by morals, disguise such instincts in terms like *self-defense, necessity, loyalty, group welfare*, etc. " (92)
37. "There are many forms of obsession, some diabolical, some fortuitous. Strolling through Bialowieza's mass of life, one would never guess the role it played in Lutz Heck's ambitions, the Warsaw Zoo's fate, and the altruistic opportunism of Jan and Antonina, who capitalized on the Nazis' obsession with prehistoric animals and a forest primeval to rescue scores of endangered neighbors and friends" 321.
- 38. Why was it, she asked herself, that "animals can sometimes subdue their predatory ways in only a few months, while humans, despite centuries of refinement, can quickly grow more savage than any beast? 239, (#23 below)**

## V. ALL CLASSES

1. What will become of them if war begins? 42
  2. What if they turned out to be the lucky ones? 60
  3. When he returned home, what would he find? 62
  4. Where do you suppose they are heading? 67
- 
39. What better totemic symbol for the Thirds Reich? (the bull alongside of the swastika). 83
  40. What will you do with all your rare animals if war comes? 89
  41. Mom, what does it mean? Who is shooting? 96
  42. How many humans will die like this in the coming months? 96
  43. If she couldn't protect the animals in her keeping, how could she protect her own son? 96-97
  - 44. How do you retain a spirit of affection and humor in a crazed suicidal, unpredictable society? 101**
  - 45. How can this barbarity be happening in the twenty-first century?!!!!!! 103**
  46. Where did you go, you bad boy? Did you forget that returning home from school was your chief responsibility? 110
  47. Hiding them [German speaking Jews] posed problems, but who better than zookeepers to devise fitting camouflage? 115
  - 48. Would she be one of those people, Antonina wondered, who vanished because they happened to be on a tram or in a church when Germans chose it at random, sealed off its exits, and killed everyone inside for some real or imaginary insult? 121**
  49. How could you let this happen? 127

50. **How do you concoct apparent normalcy?** 148
51. Who would have imagined that a professor's cavalcade of pinned beetles would have opened the gate from the Ghetto for so many people? 152
52. Who knew that a rabbit could learn to kiss a human, open doors, or give us reminders about dinnertime? 156
53. What if it happens to be playing on the radio? Will I dash for cover? Will I ever be able to stand this song of Menelaus going to Crete? [after the war] 179
54. Will he [Fraenkel] be able to escape and come here? 203
55. Will you agree to have me here? You will be in danger. 203
56. **If not, why do we humanize animals and animalize humans?** 239
57. **Why was it, she asked herself, that "animals can sometimes subdue their predatory ways in only a few months, while humans, despite centuries of refinement, can quickly grow more savage than any beast? Most important question of Ackerman poses**
58. Then what will become of the Guests? 260
59. Do you have your cyanide with you? 262

## VI. ESSAY QUESTIONS ABOUT THREADS OF MEANING

1. Discuss the most pervasive theme of the book, the complex relationship between animals and humans, 20, 24, 25, 26, 34, 39, 40, 46, 53, 55, 59, 72, 81 (interbreeding), 92, 95, 96, 98, 113, 115, 116, 151\*, 155\*, 164-65, 170, 171, 176, 201, 214, caged guests 217, 229, 230\*, 235, 236, 253, 314
60. Some key passages braid together key themes. Relate the themes mentioned on one of these pages: 113- secrecy, bravery in the face of danger, Nazi mentality, and animal and human interaction; 154 re-categorization of Jews and the consequences 239 childhood, veil between humans and animals, and human depravity.
61. Compare and contrast Warsaw before (43, 55), during (under siege 58, 64, 68, 69) and after the war (240, 302, 307 \*, 309, 322; a city crowded with predators and prey)
62. Compare the Jewish Quarter/Ghetto before, during, and after the war. 22, 105, 107, 119\* , 137, 169, 203, 208, 212\*, 242, 310
63. Compare and contrast the zoo before (46, 64), during (61, 62, 98) and after the war. 19, 33, 35, 42 (our animal republic) 46, 47 (evacuation); 66, 72, 74, 75, 93, 113, 259 restored, 305, 308.
64. Characterize war and its effects on the lives of its victims. 41, 42 , 43, 46, 49 (moral outrage), 59, 72, 74, 80, 129 \*, 137, 144, 148, 172.
65. What picture of true heroism and bravery does the work present? Heroism 11, 67, 69, 70, 102

66. What role does the Underground play and how does it conduct its affairs? 71, 93, 261 (see index)
67. The work pictures two realities, before and after the war; the surface and the underground; the evident and the hidden; the inside and the outside.
68. Portray Nazism as Ackerman's work describes it: 38 (deals with the Polish question); 68, 83, 84, 86 (zoophilia) 93 (reinvigorate the human race), 99 (goal of *mor Lebenstraum*—living space) 105, 107, 111, 120, 126, 140, 153. Contrast two realities in the story, for example, life inside and outside of the ghetto 137 or reality and memory
69. Describe the strategies of deceit explored and used in the story. (subterfuge and denial) 93, 113, 147,\* 148, 172, 221, 241 (charm of non-detection)
70. Characterize the Jews and their plight 69, 91, 102, 103, 104, 111, 113, 154-55, 157, 167, 213. Characterize the Jews and their plight 69, 91, 102, 103, 104, 111, 113, 154-55, 157, 167, 213
71. The work weaves in a first-hand accounts as well as historic information. Summarize the history of the period in Poland. 38, 58, 64, 67, 70, 78 129, 156, 158, 168, 169, 257, 277-78, 298
72. Part of the richness of the work is its philosophical insights. Give a reading using some of the astute analysis interlaced in the story. 24, 60, (safety), 121, 131, 147, 156, 160\*, 207, 255
73. Characterize Jan and Antonina 25, 26, 17, 18, 39, 44, 54, 116, 166, 274
74. Why is the work entitled *The Zookeeper's Wife* instead of *The Zookeeper*? 314
75. Characterize the German Heck whose philosophy/vision played a key to the actions of the story. 75, 76 (obsessed with bloodlines); 79, (eugenics), 82 (resurrecting extinct animals); 84 (racial purity, domestication of animals, race policy), 86, 88, 89, 91, 93, 95
76. The text weaves in some Polish to give texture to the story. Write a brief summary of some of the terms used in the story and its contribution. 30, 113, 115
77. Why is the symbol of Warsaw an appropriate symbol of the theme of the book? 323

## **VII. THE USE OF FRESH IMAGES, CLEAR DICTION, AND METAPHORS DEEPENS THE LITERARY VALUE OF THE WORK.**

Consider some of these schemes and tropes. 24 zoological cantata; 26 intimate as a tick; 28 a noisy Eden, 33 olfactory landscape, 40 bungalow to burlesque, 55, 91, 102, 104, 120, 122, 128, 129, 165

Other fresh language or diction:

pronk 30

panoply 37

quilted as verb 48

strudel-like bolts of fabric 56

grandmotherly ladies attracted others like moths to light 57

snatching sleep as though falling down a well 57

feather storm 59

scofflaws 69

like a returning fever 93

"Writing of it, she experienced their suffering twice, as human friend and  
baffled victim." 95

War as "a sort of hibernation of the spirit" 98

The brain as mind theaters full of tragedies and triumphs, 102

Keyhole life 137

Bell-jar politics 156



## DEBRA ST. JOHN – GOVERNMENT QUESTIONS

### DEFINE:

eugenics  
anthropomorphizing  
genetic engineering  
naturalist annihilation  
genocide  
phylogenetic hierarchy  
savages  
sub-human  
race purification

### QUESTIONS:

1. What are the themes of *The Zookeeper's Wife*? What political thoughts did this book give you?
2. Research the "Law for the Protection of Animals" written in 1933 by Nazis. Read the preamble. What was the aim of this law? What was the Nazis' reasoning for elevating the position of animals over some humans?
3. Locate laws regarding the treatment of animals in the United States in the 1930s. What were the aims of the laws?
4. What are the goals of groups such as PETA? What actions have they taken to protect animals?
5. Research the Native American experience
  - a. If the "final solution" of the North American Indian problem was the model for the subsequent Jewish holocaust how do you compare the loss of 120 million between the 1500 and 1800 in North America to the 6 million in Europe in 1945?
  - b. Who coined the term "Final solution" in 1910?

- c. Identify similarities and differences in the Jewish ghettos and the Native American reservations.
  - d. Compare the ideological perspective of Anglo-Americans in the land grab and the partial annihilation of Native Americans and the Nazi ideology regarding the Polish people and the occupation of Poland.
6. Who ordered the creation of the Department of Justice Detention Camps on the eve of Dec 8, 1941? What were the differences between the DOJ Detention Camps and the Wartime Relocation Authority (WRA) camps?
    - a. What was the reasoning for such camps? Was there justification for such action?
    - b. What ethnic groups were placed in camps?
    - c. What was [Executive Order 9102](#)? Who was affected by the Alien Enemies Act?
    - d. Can the United States justify the evacuation, relocation and detainment of
  7. Are there any comparisons that can be drawn regarding the attitude toward resident aliens and Japanese Americans during World War II and the current debate over illegal aliens and Mexican Americans the United States?
  8. Agriculture has already had numerous “successes” in the genetic alteration of produce and animals. Thus, with advances in science closing in on genetically modified embryos, what social, moral and political ramifications can you imagine?

## DALLIE CLARK – HUMANITIES TEACHING GUIDE

1. Reading an introduction to a non-fiction book can provide vital insights to the author's research process. According to Ackerman, what primary sources did she use to research this true story? What originally prompted her to write the story?
2. Choose at least two direct quotations from primary sources that were included by Ackerman. Why are they important to the story? What specific type of documents were quoted by Ackerman?
3. References to the relationship between humans, animals, and nature are frequently discussed in the book. Comment on at least two of the following questions and/or statements:
  - a. How was the zoo a "walking ministry" for Antonina Zabinski? (p. 34)
  - b. Do you agree with Antonina's belief that people need to connect more with their own animalistic tendencies – and that animals long to connect with humans? Why or why not? (p.34)
  - c. As a mother herself, provide an example of how Antonina compared her own protective nature over her son to the animal mothers she encountered during her years at the zoo.
  - d. Antonina's own writings suggest that she wondered why animals are able to set aside their "predatory" instincts in certain situations while civilized human beings descend quickly into savagery. Have you ever wondered this as well? Discuss. (p. 239)
4. Various aspects of architecture and music are referenced in the book. Comment on possible reasons why the author inserted these discussions.
5. Many Warsaw citizens, along with Jan and Antonina Zabinski, exhibited courageous, creative thinking during encounters with the Nazis, which resulted in countless lives being saved. Provide at least two examples of these encounters.
6. How did the Nazis attempt to strip the dignity and humanity from the Jews? Include some of the horrific incidents as well as statistics provided by Ackerman in your discussion.
7. *The Zookeeper's Wife* can be considered as an example of "Literary Non-Fiction." What does this writing genre entail, and why can Ackerman's book fit into this category?
8. A major studio film adaptation of *The Zookeeper's Wife* will be released at approximately the same time the book's author visits Collin College. After reading the book, and then viewing the film adaptation, comment

on at least one scene that closely represents Ackerman's description and at least one scene that differs.

## RYAN FLETCHER -- QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Describe Antonina's connection to animals, to her son, and to those she saved.
2. The zoo changes throughout the narrative. How so?
3. Many of the people saved were artists and intellectuals. What is the role of art in the narrative?
4. What is the role of animals?
5. Characterize Jan. Who is he? How is he portrayed?
6. How is *The Zookeeper's Wife* similar/different from other Holocaust narratives?

# ESSAYS WITH STUDY QUESTIONS

## JULIE SEARS - HUMANS AND ANIMALS: AN ENDURING, COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP

Humans are animals entangled in the web of life, yet our feelings about this situation have been and continue to be complicated (some, to this day, deny that humans are animals).<sup>1</sup> The earliest evidence of human existence on this planet indicates our profound connection to other animals, a vital relationship to which Diane Ackerman's book *The Zookeeper's Wife* attests. Many scholars speculate that early humans viewed animals as life-giving and linked to liminal, sacred spaces. Humans even worshipped animals as spirit beings. We can see these possibilities in the Paleolithic cave paintings of animals, including lions, horses, bison, and rhinos, in Chauvet, France, and in the Neolithic figurine of a seated woman attended by felines from Çatalhöyük, in what is now Turkey.<sup>2</sup> One of the oldest narratives, the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, refers to the "Bull of Heaven" as an awesome force of nature sent by the goddess, Ishtar, to defeat king Gilgamesh and his friend, Enkidu, who was raised by wild animals. Enkidu may represent how humans are themselves only a short, bipedal step away from the other living beings on the earth.

Human/animal hybrids or anthropomorphic animals are most likely present in all cultures. Native American trickster tales detail the exploits of Coyote, Raven, and Rabbit, who can be quite entertaining and provocative in how they flout norms. From

China comes Sun Wukong, or Monkey King; in India there is the elephant-headed Hindu god, Ganesha; the Aztecs worshiped the feathered-serpent deity, Quetzalcoatl; the Celts revered Epona, a horse goddess; and West Africa gives us Anansi, the spider who also assumes human and other animal forms. Enslaved Africans brought tales of Anansi to the Americas. According to Henry Louis Gates, Jr., African Americans transformed the Yoruba trickster, Esu-Elegbara, into the “Signifying Monkey,” whose figurative use of language befuddles the Lion, thereby transmitting a message of resistance against oppression (44-88). Often animals are part of a culture’s origin story, which describes how a people came into being; they also give explanations for natural phenomena or serve didactic purposes, for example, to tell us how we should behave.

Many of us grew up with fairy tales, songs, picture books, and cartoons that continue this theme that we are not so different from other creatures. Perhaps children in particular empathize with clever animals; being not quite “civilized” and not afforded the same rights as adult humans, they may resort to wily behavior to survive. Learning how to act like an adult/human can be a source of both comedy and tragedy. The binary between human and animal is decidedly blurred, for instance, in a Bugs Bunny cartoon in which Bugs, himself a trickster, dresses in drag as Brünnhilde to evade the hunter, Elmer Fudd (one wonders how the leaders of the Third Reich would react to the subversive mélange of Wagnerian operas in *What’s Opera, Doc?*). The plethora of examples of humanity’s fascination with animals, with both their uncanny similarities to us and their intriguing differences, indicates their enduring hold on our imaginations.

So the question arises, what does the way a culture perceives of and treats animals reveal? What does it expose about how we view ourselves as humans?

**A Very cursory, General Survey of Humanity's Relationship to Animals, particularly Wild Animals, in Cultural Artifacts**

The aforementioned *Epic of Gilgamesh* includes an episode in which Gilgamesh and Enkidu set out to conquer a monstrous animal-human hybrid, Humbaba, who guards the cedar forest. They arouse his ire when they chop down the woods of his forest. Humbaba may represent “barbarians” who did not live in the city, the seat of civilization, and occupied places that had resources the Sumerians coveted, or he may symbolize nature, which must be subdued in order for the city to sustain itself. In any case, his death at the hands of Gilgamesh and Enkidu, who appears ready to disavow his wild roots, is a source of some pathos when Humbaba pleads for his life. His pleas are disregarded, and man's superiority over nature is established. Most likely the cedar helps the city of Uruk to thrive, earning for Gilgamesh an enduring name.

In other texts one may see this relationship with nature recur; humanity uses and/or abuses nature and those it associates with “the wild,” perhaps because they compete for the same natural resources. The prevalence of wolves as villains in Western European fairy tales and folk legends, such as that of the werewolf, is indicative of this fear. Farley Mowat's book, *Never Cry Wolf: The Amazing True Story of Life among Artic Wolves*, describes how the author overcame this stigma against wolves, or, as he describes it, “a centuries-old and universally accepted human concept of wolf character,” which he determined to be a “lie” after he began to live among the wolves and

discovered they did not attack when he was vulnerable and alone (76). At least with fear, however, may come respect.

There is plenty of interesting research on how cultures with predominantly Judeo-Christian-Islamic origins regard humanity's relationship to nature. According to the King James translation of Genesis 1, God, who makes humans in his image, establishes for humans the role to both "replenish" the earth and to "subdue" it as part of their "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (57). Depending on how one interprets this passage, humans either have a duty to ensure that nature is well taken care of, especially since it was created by God as part of his divine plan, or they, as separate from and superior to nature, are at liberty to make use of the world as they see fit.

The view that the body is "fallen" and the spirit must free itself from the prison of flesh has been linked to Augustinian Christian belief as well as Cartesian dualism and before that Platonic idealism. Because these beliefs privilege the spirit and the mind over the body, they tend to promote less favorable views of animals, which are thought to lack souls or the ability to think rationally. On the "Great Chain of Being," a hierarchy with God at the top, animals occupy a place below humans. Using our freewill, we should overcome any "animalistic" qualities and rise up to assert our more angelic ones, as humanist thinker Pico della Mirandola advised.<sup>3</sup>

In the Enlightenment period, it appears that nature's role was elevated with the popularization of concepts such as "natural law" and "natural rights," which tie humanity



to a natural system universally accessible by human reason. The emphasis on human reason, however, still separates humanity from the “irrational” beasts.

Western culture’s apparent embrace of all things civilized and rational arguably weakened with the Industrial Revolution. Proponents of Romanticism, such as the English poets William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, exhibited a nostalgia for the wild. Nature is sublime, a source of our true selves and a spur to our imaginations, a place where we might seek refuge from civilization. In America, Thoreau’s experiment at Walden Pond and Whitman’s wish to “turn and live with animals” speak to a longing for the wild. Hints of the environmental movement are evident in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Utopian communities which attempted to get “back to nature.” America, for many, became an image of untrammelled nature with the Wild West representing the last sanctuary from corrupting, civilizing influences. When Huck Finn decides to “light out for the Territory” at the end of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, one can interpret his decision as a rejection of a civilization that countenanced slavery, a peculiar institution which treated some people as not-quite human (Twain 309).

In the meantime, of course, scientific research had been producing new perspectives on animals and nature. At least as early as Aristotle’s classification of animals, in which humans were considered to be “rational animals,” scientists have had an interest in creating categories to understand the differences and similarities between species. Ultimately the theory of evolution gained ascendancy, demonstrating that humans are indeed animals who have evolved from other species and, therefore, are part of a large family. While some found this idea helpful for understanding our origins, others were

worried by the specter of “Nature, red in tooth and claw,” humanity ruled by animal instincts of a most rapacious nature (Tennyson LVI 15). Sometimes termed social Darwinism, the view that we live in a dog-eat-dog world in which survival of the fittest is the only natural law and selfishness is the most basic element of human nature was employed to justify unfair systems. This disturbing perspective persists to this day.

Understanding our family alliances could lead to better treatment of animals, and many naturalists working in the spirit of Darwin have greatly improved the ability of humans to protect and preserve animals in their wild spaces. Some scientific research, however, resulted in suffering of animals as well as humans, who were used in experiments to further their discoveries. Most notoriously, as Ackerman’s book details, some deployed the theory of evolution to advance racist ideas about genetic purity, for example, to control who could “breed” through forced sterilization or even to eradicate “impure” stock.

America was not immune to these theories. Richard Conniff, author of numerous articles on human and non-human cultures, explains how Madison Grant, a central figure in the National Parks movement, promoted eugenics in his book *The Passing of the Great Race*, ideas that ultimately influenced Nazis like Lothrop Stoddard, Karl Brandt, and Hitler himself. Not unlike Lutz Heck as described in *The Zookeeper’s Wife*, Grant had an obsession with big-game hunting, which, along with his relationship to such figures as Theodore Roosevelt, gave him a very influential role in the establishment of America’s national parks system; he also helped to create the Bronx Zoo (Conniff). Conniff explains how idea of a national parks system, which led to the forced

resettlement of native peoples, was exported from America to the rest of the world. Similar to the Nazis, Grant began to advocate for the “Nordics,” i.e., white Northern Europeans, who were being undermined by immigration and intermarriage (qtd. in Coniff). He particularly found fault with the “swarms of Polish Jews” in New York City and the growing numbers of Arabs and Asians (qtd. in Conniff).

One motif throughout history that bears scrutiny is the use of animals as a pejorative, as a way to dehumanize people, and, therefore, to justify their mistreatment. This is already evident in *Gilgamesh* if Humbaba indeed symbolizes people whom the Sumerians wished to overthrow. The Athenians arguably depicted foreign peoples, such as the Persians, as less civilized; some claim the Centaurs (part human, part horse) on the Parthenon represent the Persians. Whenever rhetoric refers to groups of people with animal names or terms associated with animals, one should be wary. The word “swarms” in the above quotation by Grant to describe Jews is illustrative. More recently, in Rwanda radio-broadcasted hate speech referred to the Tutsis as “cockroaches,” arguably encouraging the genocide.<sup>4</sup>

Artists, in their own trickster fashion, have also portrayed minorities or subjugated people through anthropomorphic animal imagery, but for very different purposes. These images bring attention to the process of dehumanization. Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel, *Maus*, for example, depicts the plight of the Jews in World War II Poland by depicting them as mice. Like the cartoons, we are made to identify with the victims as they must try to escape their victimizers (Germans and Poles sympathetic to them), who are cast as cats and pigs. Another interesting example is the film *District 9*, in which otherworldly

creatures, known as “prawns,” appear to represent the treatment of black South Africans under apartheid. Karen Russell’s short story called “St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves” conceivably comments on the Native-American schools, which attempted to transform indigenous people into whites by stripping them of their culture.

Environmentalists have published books and articles about our innate need for a deep relationship with nature, one that appears to be deteriorating. In 1984 the influential and controversial biologist and researcher E. O. Wilson advanced the theory of “biophilia,” the hypothesis that humans are instinctively drawn towards nature and require it to thrive (“E.O. Wilson”). In a similar vein, Richard Louv explained the concept of “Nature Deficit Disorder” in his book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*. According to Louv, for a variety of reasons (parental paranoia, the appeal of TV and computers, structured play time and sports) most children lack meaningful contact with nature, leading to many ills such as a decrease in concentration and creativity and an increase in illness, obesity, stress, and a sense of alienation from the world. Fewer visitors to U.S. National Parks, which are celebrating their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, are a cause for concern. Conniff cautions that the low number of minority visitors and the lack of minority representation in environmental organizations and movements indicate a disturbing continuation of the influence of “exclusionary” figures like Madison Grant. He exhorts conservationists to do more to reach out to those communities whom have historically been overlooked by the environmental movement.

The article “Why People Keep Taking Deadly Selfies with Animals,” by John R. Platt, demonstrates the negative consequences of our desire for close encounters of the

wild kind. Margo DeMello, who directs the human-animal studies program at the Animal and Society Institute explains the dilemma: ““I think we’re drawn to what’s left of wilderness. We have a desire to feel close to wildlife and wild animals”” (qtd. in Platt). A dearth of such experiences makes us reckless: ““Other than pets, we’re very disconnected from animals in our lives. We don’t spend a lot of time near and around animals the way our ancestors did”” (qtd. in Platt). She believes that pets are not viewed as ““real animals”” because they have been domesticated and are ““common”” (qtd. in Platt). Yet our easy accessibility to and familiarity with pets make us less cautious when we come upon a wild animal. The chief executive of Born Free USA, Adam Roberts, claims that humans have a ““profound affinity for wild animal;”” however, we do not really understand them because we are used to seeing them in unnatural environments, such as zoos, circuses, TV shows, and commercials with trained animals (qtd. in Platt). Social media has made it possible for us to document our experiences with the wild, to prove that we have had an authentic experience, and as more people share their photos, others will feel it is safe to take the risk. DeMello warns that, as ““we get more urbanized and isolated from the world outside us,” the number of these dangerous encounters will increase, which is bad for the humans and bad for the animals (qtd. in Platt).

The last piece to consider is new research which demonstrates intriguing overlaps between humans and animals. In addition to the previous claims that humans are driven by instincts (or drives as posited by Freud) just as animals are and that they lack free will, once viewed as the supreme faculty of humanity, recent investigations into consciousness and empathy in animals as well as of an innate concept of fairness in both

humans and animals (mostly pack animals) provide another bridge between animals and humans (Worrall; de Waal; Bloom). These “altruistic” impulses seem to counter the narrative of innate selfishness, that relic of Social Darwinism.

### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of brevity, I will refer to humans and animals rather than humans and non-human animals.

<sup>2</sup> Ackerman explains that some of the extinct animals the Nazis tried to breed back into existence were the very creatures “Neolithic hunters once painted in ochre on cave walls” (192).

<sup>3</sup> Antihumanism and post-structuralism challenge the humanistic, Enlightenment idea that there is an innate, universal, human subject and problematize the concept of human agency.

<sup>4</sup> The film *Hotel Rwanda* depicts a situation that resembles that described in *The Zookeeper’s Wife*.

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## **CURRENT TOPICS/ISSUES THAT INVOLVE THE ANIMAL-HUMAN RELATIONSHIP AND NATURE**

- Domestic/non-domestic divide: feral dogs and cats, exotic pets, and the wild encroaching on suburban/urban spaces (bobcats and coyotes)
- Breed-specific bans
- Zoos, circuses, and other uses of animals for entertainment
- Big game hunting, poaching, hunting and fishing as a form of conservation (such as Ducks Unlimited)
- The effects of pesticides and herbicides on bees, butterflies, and other insects

- Animal rescue: no kill shelters, fostering, and adoption versus buying a purebred animal
- Puppy mills
- Animal rights—testing on animals, fur and leather, veganism, etc.
- Families without children but with pets
- Anthropomorphizing animals: dressing up dogs and cats, spas for pets, etc.

Notice the number of advertisements that use animals to appeal to viewers!

- Urban farms and factory farms (nature in the city, industry in the countryside)
- Outward Bound (getting underprivileged kids in contact with nature)
- Veterans in nature (nature as therapy)
- Search and rescue and military/police dogs
- Assistance animals and therapy animals
- Animals and autism (see the work of Temple Grandin)
- Desperate for the Wild: the fiction film *Into the Wild* and the documentary *Grizzly Man* both examine the dangers of getting too close to wild nature
- Genetically modified organisms and selective breeding
- Climate Change and the “Sixth mass extinction”
- Anthropocentrism: the belief that humans are superior to all other living beings
- The effects of trash and pollution on animals
- Biodiversity

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER ON THE HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONSHIP AND NATURE**

- What are different ways to characterize nature? Which do you find most compelling and why?
- Are you fascinated by, afraid of, and/or enamored with nature and animals?
- Do you think we live in an age of “Nature Deficit Disorder?” That is, one in which there is a “divorce between humans and their habitat?”
- Why do you think animals have been used to represent the “other” (outsiders)?
- Can you think of examples in which people have used animal terms as a way of insulting other people? Would you consider this “hate speech?”
- Do you think children have a special relationship to animals? If so, why?
- Do you think that the way we treat animals/nature reveal anything about our treatment of other humans?
- Are we that different from the animals? Do we have a greater “right” to exist than them?
- To what extent is nature related to freedom? What are some things from the natural world that represent freedom (tigers, mustangs, eagles, lions, wolves, majestic mountains, ocean, outer space)? Why do you think these natural things are often associated with freedom?
- Does nature remind us of our entrapment by forces beyond our control (in instinct, for example, survival of the fittest, certain environments in which we thrive or do not thrive, ultimate reality of death)?
- Does technology represent an escape from the clutches of nature?
- What seems to be Ackerman’s view of nature in this book? What quotations

from the book would you use to support your interpretation? How would you analyze these quotations to help demonstrate your points?

- Is there some way to honor the difference of animals from us while also treating them “humanely?”
- Do you think aliens can be interpreted as new symbols of the animal other?
- What is our relationship to nature now? Do people appear less connected to it than in the past? Why or why not?
- What are some of the reasons for the environmentalist movement? Are there relationships between environmentalism and racism? Environmentalism and anti-racism?
- What responsibility, if any, do we owe to our environment?

## GARY WILSON -- INSTRUCTION GUIDE WITH PERSPECTIVES, WRITING PROMPTS, AND GROUP PRESENTATION IDEAS

### I. PERSPECTIVES ON THE STORY'S NARRATIVES

The story's narrative structure creates varying perspectives for the reader's consciousness—some easily perceived and some more psychologically subtle. Without becoming too technical, Ackerman's work hovers between a genre of historical non-fiction and a historical novel—a highly creative testament to the author's research and literary skills. As English instructors, we can teach the work as we would teach any fictional text, being mindful, of course, of the author's historically factual intrusions into the narrative. Based on the author's extensive research about Antonina and Jan Zabinski, as well as other Poles living outside and inside the Warsaw Ghetto, this historical-literary account also tells a story through its characters' lives that is replete with the emotions and dialog that create believable characters and a good story.

Ackerman demonstrates her superb writing skills in weaving the narratives of the Zabinski family along with the narratives of other characters who heroically chose to affirm the gift of life in stark contrast to their Nazi captors who practiced an unrelenting culture of death. Layered among these narratives are the more subtle narratives of the Nazi's beliefs in a pure Germanic (Aryan) race that served as a perverse quasi-theoretical basis for justifying their notions of Germanic supremacy, eugenics, and racial mass murder.

Another important narrative dimension is the book's *exempla*—its characters and events teach us about the goodness and also about the evil in people through its portrayals of the characters' life-affirming acts of human kindness. These life-affirming acts, be they helping their fellow countrymen or animals in the zoo, create a powerful undercurrent of unrelenting human courage that daily strives to outwit evil and avoid the inevitable executions that Poles experienced if they hid and supported Jews. These heroic acts of the Zabinski family, their sheltering of friends and "Guests," as well as the "cats" and underground Polish

fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto, create a riveting tension which transfixes us as we vicariously participate in the ongoing drama between moral goodness and abject evil. While the story may be called “a war story,” I argue it is best viewed as *a story that occurs during war* in which the depiction of human struggles between life and death and between love and hate resonate more powerfully in our psyches than would the recounting of soldiers fighting one another on the battlefield.

## II. THEMES AND MOTIFS

For me, I will love teaching this story to my millennial students. Why? Answer: it is a story enriched with many themes and motifs which they can understand. It is a story of stories about “super heroes” who became “super” because their spirits were indomitable and they fought real evil using its worst enemy—simple human kindness and compassion.

The Warsaw Ghetto was the largest urban ghetto for imprisoning Jews that the maniacal Nazis devised in Europe during the Second World War. Teaching students today about what occurred to Jewish families throughout Nazi-dominated Europe can be a depressing undertaking, particularly if the Holocaust is presented through the abstract lens of statistics that quantify the millions who died in concentration or work camps. However, the author does not let this happen. Ackerman’s literary talents “personalize” the historicity of the Holocaust with her stories about how Polish Jews and non-Jews heroically struggled daily to overcome the Nazi’s abject evil ideas about racial purity (eugenics). Jan, Antonina, Rys, and Magdalena are characters whose thoughts, words, and deeds demonstrate that people must continue to uphold life and protect others at any cost because it is what moral people do to protect others. These motifs of innate human goodness fighting against the utterly evil perversion of Nazism, as well as the portrayals of the Zabinski family affirming the sanctity of life in the human and the natural realms impact our consciousness and conscience.

The author’s balance between historical reporting and characterization tugs at our emotions. The story evokes lingering questions about human love and

man's inhumanity to man. Ackerman's portrayals cause us to admire the daily selfless acts of love expressed by the Zabinskis and revile at the Nazis' turpitude.

The themes of daily heroism displayed by the Zabinskis, as well as by those Polish Jews living in the Warsaw Ghetto are awe-inspiring. The author's extensive research foregrounds just how evil some people (the Nazis) can be and how their thoughts of racial purity based on occultist notions ultimately played out in the horrific and calculated exterminations of fellow human beings.

We are privileged to teach students this story because it teaches important truths about our human nature and about the hundreds of acts of human compassion and courage that made the difference between life and death for so many people. The story also illustrates one well-known maxim: the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men and women to do nothing.

### III. ESSAY QUESTIONS AND WRITING PROMPTS

1. **(Appreciating Themes):** Identify and argue in 200 words what you believe are at least two key themes in the story and relate how these themes contribute to the overall meanings of the story.
2. **(Appreciating Characterization):** Even though the novel is based on historical facts about its characters, argue in 200 words what are several stylistic uses of language that Ackerman employs in her characterizations to make her characters believable and impacting.
3. **(Appreciating Meaning):** Identify and argue in 200 words what you believe are several key meanings that the story conveys. In-text cite at least two passages or places in the story to validate your own arguments.
4. **(Reflection Essay):** Enable your students to write a reflection essay about the values and aspects of life they learned from reading the story. Require them to apply these values to the times in which we live and how they might apply in their own lives.

5. **(Issues Prompt):** Require your students to argue their views on the topic of ethnic and racial genocide. Current examples can be found in the political ideologies of terrorist groups and in some national ideologies. For example: argue in an essay of 2-3 pages how these current ideologies embrace racial, ethnic, and religious “cleansing” that correspond to those surfaced in Ackerman’s text. Ask them to cite specific passages or places in the story which parallel current practices, philosophies, and nation-state ideologies.

6. **(Response to a Quote):** Enable your students to argue the context of one of the quoted passages from the story and its implications in terms of the values and meanings of the story:

**Quotation 1:** “Why was it, she asked herself, that animals can sometimes subdue their predatory ways in only a few months, while humans, despite centuries of refinement, can quickly grow more savage than any beast.”

**-OR-**

**Quotation 2:** “One of the most remarkable things about Antonina was her determination to include play, animals, wonder, curiosity, marvel, and a wide blaze of innocence in a household where all dodged the ambient dangers, horrors, and uncertainties.

#### **IV. LABS AND GROUP PROJECTS**

1. **(Appreciating Narratives—you may want to use this as an out of class lab activity or assign it as a group in-class presentation):** The Nazi leadership held some notions about racial purity that led to practicing the science of eugenics with certain segments of the German and Jewish populations. These practices and theoretical notions, which were based to some degree on occultist and romanticized notions, had dire and ultimate consequences. Undertake online research to demonstrate you found some meaningful insights about what was meant by the term “master race,” its theoretical underpinnings, and how it ultimately affected the whole world.



2. **(Group Project):** After World War II, the nation of Israel accorded to Jan and Antonina Zabinski its "Righteous Among the Nations" honor given to those men and women who, at great personal danger and sacrifice, aided and rescued Jews during the Holocaust. Counted among these honorees is also the famous Oskar Schindler, a Czechoslovakian-born businessman whose personal intercession and dealing with Nazi authorities saved 1,200 Jews who were destined for concentration camps. However, history somehow buried between its pages the heroics of Irena Sendler (who the author mentioned briefly in the story), a young Polish worker in the Warsaw Ghetto). Recent research over the last decades validates that Sendler's personal efforts alone saved 2,500 Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto.

As part of these group presentations, assign students to research and present the little-known heroics of Irena Sendler, Oskar Schindler, and other Poles in the resistance against evil mentioned in the story who saved fellow Poles living in the Warsaw Ghetto.. It will be interesting to see how continuing historical research substantiates the deeds of these heroes in our contemporary era where several nations have publicly proclaimed the Holocaust is a myth.

## **LINDA SEARS -- RESILIENCE IN THE ZOOKEEPER'S WIFE**

When we see how the people in Ackerman's book survive and even thrive at points that most of us would consider intolerable, we gain a new understanding of the human ability to be resilient. What does it mean to be resilient? Resilience is the combination of being tough and durable yet also flexible and elastic. It means being able to find the appropriate response to a difficult situation, which usually requires that one has prepared emotionally and intellectually for hard times. A resilient person or institution does not put all its eggs in one basket or become overly confident that a plan or way of acting is fail proof. Rather, resilience requires that one see alternatives, find a new way to deal with the issues, and change in mid-course if necessary. Some people are less resilient than others because of a variety of circumstances, for example, having faced early traumas that make it more difficult for them to recover from an emotional blow; however, everyone can cultivate resilience. Diversity in groups or cultures is also very important to their success as multiple perspectives help to keep groups and cultures open to changing contingencies.

Resilience is defined by Andrew Zolli and Anne Marie Healy in their book on the subject as "the capacity of a system, enterprise, or person to maintain its core purpose and integrity in the face of dramatically changed circumstances" (7). Having a core purpose is essential to maintaining a sense that the institution or person has a reason to keep going even when circumstances are very bad. Another definition of resilience is "the ability to modulate and constructively harness the stress response—a capacity essential to both physical and mental health" (Southwick and Charney 34). In this definition, the stress response is viewed as vital for motivating people to action as long as it does not overwhelm them and cause them to give up.

Feeling one has the ability to make things happen is a key to being resilient. Hopelessness and helplessness are the opposite of being resilient because the hopeless/helpless person can feel there is nothing he/she can do to alter the situation. We often refer to this attitude as fatalism. Agency or self-efficacy is the quality that gives us the feeling we can affect outcomes; "the belief that one can influence one's surroundings and the outcome of events" is correlated with resilience (Zolli and Healy 128). Because being creative involves making choices and producing something that can increase a sense of self-efficacy, creativity is fundamental for decreasing feelings of apathy/despair.

Creative thinking involves looking at a situation with fresh eyes and even being disagreeable if it means standing up for one's unique view. Sometimes, we are blindsided by the belief that the obvious answer is the only right one.

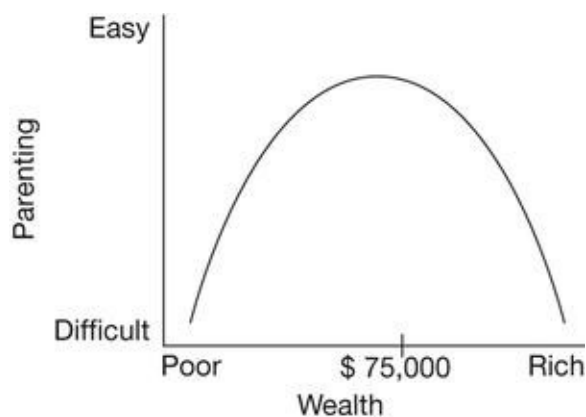
Resilience, while a source of strength, should not be confused with displays of power. In his book *David versus Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants*, Malcolm Gladwell uses historical documents, interviews, and sociological and psychological studies to assert that the person or groups who appear weaker may actually have advantages over those who appear stronger. He shows that we often underestimate the so-called underdog, thinking that those with more are always better off. In fact, the underdog can have many advantages that allow him/her to succeed where the more privileged are unable because the privileged are yoked to a particular way of doing things and may be more likely to capitulate when faced by overwhelming odds they had never expected to come their way. The person, who has already struggled in life due to his or her minority position, can rise up to the challenge as long as she/he does not play by the rules of the powerful. And sometimes, the show of overwhelming power from the seemingly stronger backfires.

In one chapter Gladwell describes how the blitz bombing of England during WWII by the Germans actually increased morale for the majority of Londoners rather than traumatizing them to the point of chaos, hopelessness, despair, and, ultimately, surrender. The Germans calculated that their superior arsenal of weaponry would cause the British to roll over in submission. Gladwell's assertion relies on a different understanding of what we call courage: "Courage is not something that you already have that makes you brave when the tough times start. Courage is what you earn when you've been through the tough times and you discover they aren't so tough after all" (149). His argument is that, although some people lost their lives, homes, and/or family members or were profoundly injured, most Londoners were what he refers to as "remote misses" (131). These are people who heard the sirens and the bombs, saw the damage after the fact, and yet survived unscathed. As a result, they were braver than they were before because they saw they could live through something they would have earlier thought to be impossible to survive: "the conquering of fear produces exhilaration" (149). In other words, facing a real fear and making it through produces more courage, more will to continue and thrive. According to reports from Londoners at the time, the mood of some

survivors was almost ecstatic. For example, one man refused to leave London after having his house bombed twice because it would mean missing all the action (133). Emboldened and ready to prove otherwise to their adversaries, the British people overwhelmingly stood up to the blitz, a German strategy that was supposed to render them hopeless and defenseless.

At the same time, we must remember that people who have been historically beaten down have much more to contend with than those whose problems are more restricted in time. Decades, or even centuries, of living in poverty under repressive regimes, for example, tend to sap a people of their ability to cultivate resilience. Had these Londoners lived for years under the daily bombings, food shortages, and martial law, the story could be very different. We may ask ourselves, at what point does an advantage become a disadvantage and vice versa?

An intriguing argument that Gladwell makes about this dilemma is that persons who live with privilege can also be at a disadvantage if they never learn how to deal with adversity. To support his point, Gladwell discusses the statistical phenomenon of the inverted-U curve, which convincingly illustrates how too much is just as bad as too little (48-54). In the inverted-U curve, we see that the amount of something, in this case the wealth a parent has, is correlated with the ease of parenting only up to a point.



Page 52.

It is obvious that too little wealth hinders the ease of parenting because the parents who are in poverty have a daily struggle just to survive and cannot offer

their children sufficient nutrition, time, and assistance. Yet the parents with more money than is necessary have difficulty motivating their children to work for goals when all they need to do is ask for what they want. A child who has everything he/she needs may not cultivate the traits crucial for later success.

While resilience is clearly a great asset, even the most resilient of people can have breaking points that decrease their ability to thrive. Brain traumas and chronic depression, for instance, can severely compromise the person's ability to feel a sense of agency, putting the person on the low end of the curve. Loss of the most important people in one's life, loss of one's identity, witnessing highly traumatic events up close, or taking part in distressing activities against one's will, all of these can take their toll. Having networks of people to turn to, professional help, and supportive infrastructures must be in place when a person has faced these kinds of situations.

Therefore, a resilient society is one that realizes how much people can handle and what to do when they have been subject to extreme traumas. To expect everyone to fend for him or herself is the opposite of promoting resilience. A healthy, compassionate society will look out for those who have fallen through the cracks or been subjected to enormous stressors and enable them to find a way towards peace and well-being.

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**

How much suffering can a person deal with before it damages him/her beyond repair?

What can help a person or group of people be more resilient?

When/where was Antonina at her worst and why? Why did she keep struggling? Did helping other people make a difference in her will to survive? What kept Jan's spirit to endure alive?

Is there anything that could have happened that would have ended her ability to hope and keep going? If yes, what and why?

How did the animals affect her, her son, and the people they were protecting?  
What did they learn from the animals?

How would things have been different if there had been no underground of Polish people determined to fight back? For example, if the Zabinskis had been German?

What would have happened to the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto if people like Jan and Antonina hadn't helped them out?

What responsibility do we have to look out for those who have it much worse than we do?

#### Works Cited

Gladwell, Malcolm. *David versus Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants*. New York: Back Bay Books, 2013.

Southwick, Steven M. and Dennis S. Charney. "Ready for Anything." *Scientific American Mind* July/Aug. 2013: 32-41.

Zolli, Andrew and Ann Marie Healy. *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*. New York: Simon and Schuster,



# ASSIGNMENTS AND PROMPTS

## LETHA CLAIR ROBERTSON – ART AND ARCHITECTURE PROMPTS

On page 120, Ackerman describes the architecture of the beloved villa - one of the most integral characters of the book. She explains that it was designed in the International Style, a modernist architectural movement led by Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson among others. She states that the clean and severe aesthetic was at odds with Nazi tastes. Locate images of the Reich Chancellery and Goring's Air Ministry building. Compare and contrast them with the image of the Villa on page 191, Gropius's Bauhaus building, Mies Van der Rohe's Farnsworth House. How different are they? What International Style architectural examples can you find in the United States?

On page 238 Ackerman describes Antonina's extraordinary relationship with animals: "There were many mystical episodes in her past when she felt certain she could build an invisible bridge with the animals, make them listen to her requests, bridle their fear, trust her."

In the first few decades of the 20th century, some German Expressionist artists believed that art and animals could repair the damage humanity and industrialization caused upon the earth. Look up the work of Franz Marc of the Der Blaue Reiter German Expressionist group. What does he believe about the relationship between humans and animals? How does it parallel Antonina's beliefs and her desire to protect the zoo? How does Marc's work compare to that of animal artist Magdalena Gross mentioned on page 176?

What did the Nazis believe about art? What type of art was acceptable and what type of art was unacceptable?





## TIFFANY CARTWRIGHT – ASSIGNMENTS FOR GOVT 2305

The following are assignments that can pair with the sections normally covered in GOVT 2305. They correspond to the themes and concepts that the book, The Zookeeper's Wife: A War Story, touches on. Since you're the expert for your course, these assignments are made to be flexible with no particular chapters assigned for reading – that's up to you. They can be done in class or as homework assignments, or you can just post them on Canvas for students to complete for extra credit over the semester.

### GOVERNANCE AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

The book, The Zookeeper's Wife: A War Story, features a glimpse into life under a very different type of government than what you may be familiar with. What type of government did Nazi Germany have? What type of government does the U.S. have? What are the tradeoffs in freedom for the public between these two very different types of government?

On a basic level, what do you think the purpose of a government should be?

Can governments be set up in different ways but still carry out that same purpose just as well?

#### ASSIGNMENT:

The BBC has created a quick guide to the key differences between a democracy and a dictatorship. Take a look at how these two types of government compare and contrast: [http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/wjec/history/pdf/democracy\\_or\\_dictatorship.pdf](http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/wjec/history/pdf/democracy_or_dictatorship.pdf)

After reading about these different government types, answer the following questions:  
What is the definition of a dictatorship?

How does that contrast with the definition of a democracy?

What daily aspects of your life might be different under a dictatorship? Does that remind you of any of the changes experienced by the characters in The Zookeeper's Wife?

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has documented Hitler's rise to power and the changes in Germany's government during his reign. Click here to read over this brief summary:

<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10008206>

What was the German economy like during this time? How might this have led to conditions that seemed favorable for the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party?

What promises did the Nazi Party make? Do these promises seem similar to any of the propaganda heard by the characters in the book?

How did Hitler and the Nazi Party tailor their message to appeal to different groups of people within Germany?

How did Hitler manipulate the German government into appointing him chancellor?

## **THE MEDIA**

### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:**

In the U.S., we are used to having a free media where journalists can speak their minds, hold whatever political values they choose, and help keep the public informed on what's going on in their government, good or bad. In contrast, the book shows us a glimpse of a very restricted press that cannot report whatever it wants to. It can only report what the government allows it to report.

What are the possible advantages and disadvantages of having a free press?

Is it important to have a free press in a democratic country? Why or why not?

In the book, the press keeps a positive tone during the invasion in Poland. Was this the right move? Why or why not?

### **ASSIGNMENT:**

The book references several addresses made during the war in Poland, both by the Polish government and then subsequently by Nazi Germany. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has documented what happened to the free press in Germany after Hitler seized power:

<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007655>

After reviewing the article, answer the following questions:

What were some of the tactics used by the Nazi Party to take over the press (radio and newspapers) in Germany?

Why do you think the Nazi Party didn't just shut down the press entirely? Why do you think they went to such lengths to so tightly control the flow of news and information?

What happened to journalists who did not comply with the directives of the Propaganda Ministry?

What happened to the press in Germany after the end of World War II?

Imagine for a moment that the U.S. had something similar to the Propaganda Ministry instead of a free press. Would it be easier or harder to find out about what's going on in government? Why? How do you think your ability to participate in politics would change?

## **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND FOREIGN POLICY**

### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:**

What are the goals of U.S. foreign policy today? Would you include the protection of human right as one of those goals?

What is the history between the U.S. and Germany?

How has U.S. foreign policy toward Germany changed since the end of World War II?

The end of the Cold War?

### **ASSIGNMENT:**

Many people have wondered why the United States didn't have much of a response after Germany invaded Poland. Take a look at the article from *The New York Times*:

[http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/09/01/sept-1-1939-nazi-germany-invades-poland-startingworld-war-ii/?\\_r=0](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/09/01/sept-1-1939-nazi-germany-invades-poland-startingworld-war-ii/?_r=0)

After reading the report, answer the following questions:

Why didn't France and England come to the aid of Poland? Why was Poland's own army ineffective against the invading German forces?

After the very quick invasion of Poland, why did the American press begin to call it the "Phony War?"

How might this initial perception of the war in the minds of the public have delayed action by the president or Congress?

What role do you think public opinion plays today in U.S. foreign policy? Use an example to support

## LISA KIRBY - ENGLISH 1302 ESSAY 3: ARGUMENT AND PROPOSAL

### *THE ZOOKEEPER'S WIFE*

#### IMPORTANT DATES

- Tuesday, October 18—discuss guidelines for Essay #3
- Tuesday, October 25—research proposal/first source due (in class)
- Thursday, November 3—annotated bibliography due (Canvas; by midnight)
- Tuesday, November 8— Peer Review (four typed pages due + Works Cited page in class)
- Thursday, November 10—final draft due (Canvas; by midnight)

#### ESSAY PROMPT

For the next few weeks, we will be reading and discussing Diane Ackerman's *The Zookeeper's Wife: A War Story*. This book tells the story of Polish zookeepers Jan and Antonina Zabinski and how they were able to save the lives of hundreds of people from the Nazis. While this text narrates a significant historical moment, and one about which arguments can certainly be made, there are also ways to think about the important issues raised in this book in a more contemporary context. For instance, the book raises universal questions about human rights, the nature of humanity, genetic engineering, animal liberation, relationships with the natural world, and the rise of dictatorial regimes that are still relevant today. Readers can examine these issues and many others in the historical setting in which they occurred in Ackerman's book or perhaps reimagine them in a more contemporary context.

We will be using *The Zookeeper's Wife* as a starting point for your own writing in Essay #3, in which you will compose an argument and proposal related to a very specific issue somehow related to or inspired by the book. Whatever issue you choose, you will complete the following tasks:

- Pick a specific problem or issue that is related to a topic addressed in or inspired by *The Zookeeper's Wife*;

- Research more in depth this issue, take a side, and formulate an argument; and
- Suggest a proposal (or solution) to deal with this issue. In short, you are writing a persuasive paper about the issue and then suggesting a solution to the problem.

## CRITERIA

A successfully written paper will contain the following components:

- Length of the paper should be at least **eight pages, typed, doubled-spaced**, and with proper formatting and heading;
- A strong **thesis statement** that makes clear your argumentative claim about your chosen research topic;
- Focus on a **specific, narrow issue** and, perhaps most importantly, an issue you truly care about;
- Both an **argument** taking a side on this issue and a specific **solution or proposal**;
- Use of at least **six sources**. At least five of your sources need to be from the library or article research databases and one can be a credible Internet source. At least **one source must also be a peer-reviewed** (scholarly) article from the databases. You may also use the essays in our textbook, but these will not count as any of your six sources;
- **Research Proposal/First Source**. On **Tuesday, October 25**, I would like you to submit a brief description (one paragraph, typed) of your project for me to review. At this point, I will let you know if you are on the right track. This description should include:
  - the specific focus of your essay and which essay from the textbook inspired you;
  - why you want to explore this particular issue;
  - a working thesis;
  - any problems or questions you may have about the issue or the assignment; and
  - your first source.
- Inclusion of all aspects of **persuasive writing** and **academic arguments** that we have covered this semester (rhetorical situation, ethos, pathos, logos, structure, organization style, evaluating sources, audience, proposals, claims, evidence, etc.);
- At least one example each of **formal, simple, and partial attribution**. Other than that, there is no requirement on the number of direct quotes and/or paraphrases you should use. However, remember that this is a lengthy research paper, so you should use plenty of evidence;
- Use of the **MLA Quick Reference Guide** and near-perfect use of direct quotes and Works Cited entries;

- Clear evidence of **revisions** in each stage of your writing. In other words, your rough draft and final draft should not be the same exact paper;
- Use of strong grammar, punctuation, and spelling to the best of your ability. Make sure you use a **dictionary** and your **handbook** to help you write your paper. I will be grading for correct grammar, style, and punctuation;
- Completion of an **annotated bibliography** for this project, which is due on **Thursday, November 3**. Separate guidelines for this assignment will follow;
- Participation in **Peer Review**. On **Tuesday, November 8**, we will have a peer review workshop during class. You must have at least four typed pages and a Works Cited page on this day. Not having a draft on this day and participating in peer review will result in lost points on your final grade;
- **Final drafts** will be due on Canvas by **midnight on Thursday, November 10**. Please retain any prewriting, rough drafts, peer review, and sources in case I need to review them.

## PARTING WORDS

I have purposely left the topic for this essay very broad in the hope that each of you will find an issue you are truly passionate about; there is a lot of opportunity here for you to pick a topic of interest to you. That said, this is an assignment that could quickly spin out of control because it is so involved and also due to time constraints. I am not requiring conferences with me, though I strongly urge you to consider making an appointment to discuss your draft. I have built in due dates throughout the writing process to help you stay on track, but the responsibility for this assignment falls on your shoulders. Get an early start, work on it often and diligently, and let me know immediately of any issues. Remember that this entire project (essay + annotated bibliography) counts for 30% of your English 1302 grade. Good luck and I look forward to your essays!

# ONLINE RESOURCES

## BETTY BETTACCHI -- YOUTUBE VIDEOS ON THE TOPIC OF THE BOOK:

### "912 DAYS OF THE WARSAW GHETTO"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfbWsjeePKg>

### "WARSAW GHETTO: A SURVIVOR'S TALE."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68a66ZSqFhA>

## MARTA MOORE – MOVIE TRAILER AND BOOK REVIEWS

### MOVIE TRAILER

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gf3PsWRHwoA>

### "ANTONINAS LIST" – BOOK REVIEW, NEW YORK TIMES

[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/09/books/review/Max-t.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/09/books/review/Max-t.html?_r=0)

### "A NATURAL HISTORY OF TERRIBLE THINGS" – BOOK REVIEW, WASHINGTON POST

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/13/AR2007091301895.html>



## HELEN MCCOURT-- DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND LINKS

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

From Lit Lovers website:

<http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/14-non-fiction/1197-zookeepers-wife-ackerman?start=3>

1. How does Diane Ackerman's background as a naturalist and a poet inform her telling of this slice of history? Would a historian of World War II have told it differently, and, if so, what might have been left out?
2. Reviews have compared this book to Schindler's List and Hotel Rwanda. How would you compare them?
3. Did this book give you a different impression of Poland during World War II than you had before?
4. Can you imagine yourself in the same circumstances as Jan and Antonina? What would you have done?
5. How would you describe Antonina's relation to animals? To her husband? How does she navigate the various relationships in the book, given the extreme circumstances? Is her default position one of trust or distrust?
6. Do people have a "sixth sense" and how does it relate to "animal instinct"?
7. Some might judge Jan and Antonina guilty of anthro-morphizing animals and nature. Would you? Why or why not?
8. Can nature be savage or kind—or can only humans embody those qualities? As science and the study of animal behavior and communication teach us more and more about the commonalities between animals and humans, is there still any dividing line between the human and the animal world? If so, how would you describe it?
9. The Nazis had a passion for animals and the natural world. How could Nazi ideology embrace both a love of nature and the mass murder of human beings?
10. The drive to "rewrite the genetic code of the entire planet" is not distinct to Nazism. What similar efforts are alive today? Are there lessons in Jan and Antonina's story for evaluating the benefits and dangers of trying to modify or

improve upon nature? Do you see any connection between this story of more than sixty years ago and contemporary environmental issues?

11. Genetic engineering of foodstuffs is highly contentious. So are various reproductive technologies that are now common, such as selecting for—or against—various characteristics when choosing from sperm or egg banks. How would various characters in this book have approached these loaded issues?

## ONLINE LINKS

NPR interview with Diane Ackerman from January 18, 2008 re: *The Zookeeper's Wife*

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=18222827> (length 35:38)

PBS interview with Diane Ackerman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13k5o0RwrsM> (length 8:29)

C-SPAN Book Discussion with Diane Ackerman re: *The Zookeeper's Wife*

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?201269-7/zookeepers-wife> (length 35:19)

## MELISSA BLACKMORE – ONLINE FILM AND FREE BOOK RESOURCES

### SAFE HAVEN: THE WARSAW ZOO (A SHORT FILM)

<http://www.imdb.com/video/wab/vi3786670617> . Still photos and background information: [http://www.blueheronpix.com/safe\\_haven\\_warsaw\\_zoo](http://www.blueheronpix.com/safe_haven_warsaw_zoo)

### FREE ONLINE BOOKS:

*Epidemics Resulting From Wars* by Dr. Friedrich Prinzing (1916)  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b4285341>

*Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* (1945-1946). Also known as "The Red Series," a "Collection of Documentary Evidence and Guide Materials Prepared by the American and British Prosecuting Staffs for Presentation before the International Military Tribunal at Nurnberg, Germany."  
[https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military\\_Law/NT\\_Nazi-conspiracy.html](https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/NT_Nazi-conspiracy.html)

*Heart of Europe : The Past in Poland's Present* by Norman Davies  
<http://library.collin.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=155679&site=ehost-live>

Another online book in Collin's eBook collections that is particularly relevant:

*Jewish Life in Nazi-occupied Warsaw*  
<http://library.collin.edu/login?url=http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.31365.0001.001> .  
The chapter "Three Ghetto Sketches" and the chapters about Janusz Korczak are particularly relevant.

In addition, our library has numerous print books from the Notes/Bibliography of *The Zookeeper's Wife*.