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# After The War



## Synopsis

"Didn't the gas ovens finish you all off?" is the response that meets Ruth Mendenberg when she returns to her village in Poland after the liberation of Buchenwald at the end of World War II. Her entire family wiped out in the Holocaust, the fifteen-year-old girl has nowhere to go. Members of the underground organization "Brichah" find her, and she joins them in their dangerous quest to smuggle illegal immigrants to Palestine. Ruth risks her life to help lead a group of children on a daring journey over half a continent and across the sea to Eretz Israel, using secret routes and forged documents -- and sheer force of will. This adventure will touch readers, who will marvel at the resources and inner strength of mere children helping other children to find a place in this world in which they can belong. Carol Matas, one of the foremost authors of historical fiction, brings the desperation and passion of this remarkable journey to life.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Grade 7-10? Matas's historical novel shows that the persecution of Europe's Jewish population did not end with their liberation from the Nazi death camps. She tells the story of Ruth, 15, who makes her way back from Buchenwald to her Polish homeland to discover that Jews are still viewed by others with suspicion and hatred. Desperate and alone, she meets Saul, who persuades her to join a group of refugees planning to emigrate to Palestine. Historically, the book is accurate and

references to actual events are interwoven neatly into the narrative. The author does oversimplify the position of the British and their decision to stop Jewish immigration to Palestine, and this is a definite weakness. Nonetheless, the story is strong and compelling and the use of descriptive language creates a mood of desperation and hope combined with a commitment to survival. The use of flashbacks is effective and serves to sustain the mood as well as add depth to Ruth's character. *After the War* is a thought-provoking novel that offers great insight into the current problems in the Middle East and the passion with which the Jewish people will fight to protect what they perceive to be rightfully theirs. Robyn Nicoline Ryan, Otterville Public School, Ontario Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Turtleback edition.

The main setting of *After the War* is in Europe. Ruth's family was forced to move out of a Jewish section in Kurov after it was destroyed by Nazi bombs in September of 1939. They moved to a Jewish ghetto in a small rundown section of Ostroviec. Ruth was trying to get to Palestine with other Jewish children and teens. The time period of this book was a little bit after World War II in 1945. The plot of the story is Ruth, the main character, gets out of a concentration camp and finds out that all of her family members were killed by the Nazis. A man named Saul approaches Ruth and notices she is sad because her family is dead. Saul takes Ruth to a hideout so she can have somewhere to stay. Once Saul and Ruth get to the hideout, they find out that some soldiers have killed five people in the hideout. Ruth goes on a mission to get the other children at the hideout to safety in Palestine. She is accompanied by other teens named Nate, Miriam, and Zvi. Nate has a pack of cigarettes, so when they get to the border to Czechoslovakia, they bribe the soldiers to get across the border, but Nate gets captured by the soldiers. Ruth saves Nate because he has the papers to get them legally into Palestine. When they get to the border of Poland, the soldiers on the border shoot at the teens. They cross successfully and get on a truck that takes them to a hospital with injured Jewish children and teens. They rest for a few nights before setting off for Italy. Once in Italy, they teach children in a school how to read and write while they wait for the boat to Palestine to arrive. Once on the boat, the only thing they have to worry about is British airplanes and warships. While on the boat, Ruth meets her brother Simon who is alive. When a British warship spots their ship, it attacks. The children get off the boat and swim the short distance to shore. The soldiers capture Ruth and the others, but that same night they escape from the camp, run through the woods, and find a jeep that takes them safely to Palestine where Ruth finds her brother Simon again. I think that this book wasn't that good. I wouldn't recommend it to many people. It was confusing because the characters were always moving to different places. Students who have

learned more about World War II would understand the events better than younger students might.

Ruth survived the Holocaust, the only person in her family to do so. She simply feels empty. She shuts herself down and won't let herself feel emotion--she thinks it will hurt too much. Then, a man finds her. He is part of a secret organization that sends Jews, many of who survived the Holocaust, to Palestine to start a new country. He asks if she will escort a group of orphans to Palestine. She accepts, for the main reason of not having anything else to do. The book is about hope, the realization that life is worth living, happiness, and a new life. It is a very interesting perspective. Often, people get caught-up in the horrors of the Holocaust and of the 6 million Jews that died. It is rare, however, that the life of those who survived is considered. It was, by no means, an easy life. This is historical fiction, but the author did research and tried to put all her research into the story. It is a wonderful book that should be read by everyone.

"It is quiet, almost peaceful. Then the ship begins to roll, just a little. I am not sleeping, I'm staring up at bunk above me, Zvi beside me, holding my hand. I am desperately trying not to think of Auschwitz, but I'm not doing too well."-Excerpt Page 90-91 "After The War" a historical fiction novel by Carol Matas, is a great read about the Jewish conflicts in the time after World War II. In this novel, fifteen year old Ruth Mendenberg must overcome challenges in leading a group of Jews throughout Europe to Palestine. At this time she is also looking for her family who is believed to be of the many Jews who lost their lives in the war. Matas, the talented author, creates great theme and conflict in this novel. She has also published the sequel called "The Garden". I am sure this too would be a great book. Theme in this novel is very evident. Many lessons have been learned in reading this, not only by the reader but also by the main characters. One of the main themes would be that anything is possible if you try, but if you don't try then you could put yourself in a bad situation which may keep getting worse. Ruth proves this in "After The War" by how she handles the many difficult situations that she stumbles upon, on her way to Palestine. Another theme, which is more tied into the plot of the novel, would be that sometimes you have to lie to survive. Ruth must lie numerous times about her name, her age, where she came from, and anything else that may link her to being who she really is - a Jew. She does all this and more because it is her only way to survive. If she doesn't lie she might not be able to live her life of freedom. Conflict is another literary element. It is defined as a struggle between two or more people, between a person and his or herself or between a person and nature. All three types are found in this novel. Obviously, one of the main conflicts would be that of the Jewish and British disagreements about Jewish entry into

Palestine. Another less obvious would be how Ruth struggles in the boat because of the swaying due to the wind. This would be an example of person vs. nature conflict. Lastly, an example of person vs. self, or internal conflict would be how Ruth struggles with herself about what and how she should think and feel. Overall, "After The War" was a very good novel. I think anyone, especially young adults who enjoy historical or historical fiction novels will think the same, however, I recommend this novel to anyone and everyone.

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