Based on

The Book Thief
By Markus Zusak

About the Book:
This story, set during World War II, gives you a personal look at the struggles of a German girl caught in the midst of Nazi Germany. Liesel is accustomed to loss and pain. After her brother dies, her mother is forced to leave her with a foster family. But with Liesel's strong will to adapt and the support of her foster father, Hans Huberman, she learns to read and unleashes the power of written words. Now, with a thirst for books, Liesel finds herself stealing books from Nazi book burnings and even the Mayor's library—the Book Thief is born. When Liesel's foster family takes in and hides a Jew, they teeter on a thin rope between life and torturous death. Liesel and Max have an instant bond through their shared suffering, and Liesel soon finds that Max's friendship is worth the danger of hiding a Jew. Liesel ultimately learns that written words have power and even small defiance can make a difference.

Set the Stage:
Use the following to get the students ready to read:

• Before reading, give students some background on World War II to provide a basis for the setting of the book.
• Tell students that this book is told by an unexpected point of view. Read the Prologue and see if they can determine who is telling the story.
• The author, Markus Zusak, uses an abundance of figurative language to set the tone and mood of the story. Review with students what figurative language is and why it is vital in bringing characters and images to life for readers. You may want to share the interview section in the back of the book, where Zusak explains why he enjoys using figurative language in his writing (A Conversation with Markus Zusak, page 11).
• Review advanced vocabulary words from the book and ask students to keep a list of unfamiliar words as they read. Here is a beginning list of vocabulary words: nefarious, maniacally, mediocre, melancholic, flippant, capitulate, fathom, infernal, ire, prolific, castigated, jocular, morosity.

Review:
After reading the book, discuss the following:

• The story is narrated by the unusual perspective of ‘Death.’ Do you think the story would be different if it were told from Liesel’s point of view? How did it make you feel when you realized Death was the narrator? Did you feel differently about the narrator by the end of the book?
• Discuss how the narrator, Death, often described the surroundings in the book with the figurative use of color. Why do you think the author used colors to create images and help set the mood? Was the use of vivid colors effective? What kind of image is created in your mind when the narrator describes the scene as, “The sky was like soup, boiling and stirring. In some places it was burned. There were black crumbs, and pepper, streaked across the redness”? Have students find their favorite use of color symbolism or figurative language and share it with the class.
• Why did Hans choose not to join the Communist Party? How did that change the way people treated him?
• How does Rudy’s and Liesel’s relationship change from the beginning of the book to the end?
• Discuss how these quotes foreshadow the importance of books in Liesel's life?
  • “Trust me, though, the words were on their way, and when they arrived, Liesel would hold them in her hands like the clouds, and would wring them out like the rain.”
  • “She was a girl. In Nazi Germany. How fitting that she was discovering the power of words.”
• Why does the Mayor’s wife, Ilsa Hermann, befriend Liesel and allow her to take books from the library? How do Liesel’s feelings change toward Ilsa after she finds Liesel stealing books from the library?
• Describe the bond or connection between Max and Liesel? What strengths and weaknesses did they both have?
• How did Max’s Word Shaker story give Liesel courage when she needed it most?
• When do you think Liesel realized the power of words? How do you think her life would have been different if she never learned to read?
**Student Activity** (found on the last page of this PDF):
Students will interpret passages from the book and determine what type of figurative language the author was using.

**Related Activities:**
To extend students’ enjoyment of the book, try these:

- **Hitler’s Olympics:** Rudy was obsessed with Jesse Owens from the 1936 Olympics. Review the “Jesse Owens Incident” chapter from the book (page 56) and discuss why the 1936 games in Berlin were controversial. After doing some research, students can prepare a broadcast news story featuring one main point they learned. Students can present their new story to the class live or as a videotaped news story.

- **Mapping Locations:** Throughout the book, many German towns are mentioned. Provide a map for students to locate these cities: Essen, Stuttgart, Lubeck, Munich and Cologne. Students can select one city to research and then create a fact card listing ten facts they learned, including the city’s involvement in WWII.

- **Nuremburg Laws:** The Nuremburg Laws were anti-Semitic laws that stripped the rights of Jewish citizens in Nazi Germany. Hold a class discussion and allow students to share what they learned in the book about anti-Semitism. Offer some background information on the Nurenburg Laws and Trials, explaining that members of the Nazi party were brought to trial after the war to pay for their atrocities against Jews. Students can work in small groups to create a timeline from the creation of the Nuremburg Laws to the end of the Nuremburg Trials.

- **Burning words:** In the “Book on Fire” chapter (page 118), Liesel attends a book burning and in anger snatches a burning book from the ashes. Review this chapter with students and discuss some historical information on the Nazi book burnings. Then go on an online field trip to the Book Burning Memorial in Berlin, Germany. Explain to students that Chinese and Mayan societies also had a history of destroying books and written materials. Have students explore the reasons why Nazi Germany and other cultures have felt threatened by written words.

- **Sprechen sie deutsch?:** Students can brush up on some German by researching the meanings of each of these German words from the book: Weihnachten, zufriedenheit, mein, kampf, führer, guten morgen, komm, saukerl, auf wiedersehen. Use an English to German dictionary or online resource such as BeoLingus, http://dict.tu-chemnitz.de/deutsch-englisch/Weihnachten.html.
What’s the Meaning?
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**Directions:** Read each passage and determine what type of figurative language is being used: simile, metaphor, or symbolism. For help, use the description and examples shown below.

**Simile** – A comparison using like or as. *He was as tired as a dog.*

**Metaphor** – A comparison of two unlike things that suggest a similarity between the two items. *Her baby brother was a rug rat.*

**Symbolism** – A noun that has meaning is used to represent something entirely different. *The black sky was like death.*

1. ________________________ The silence extended like elastic dying to break.
2. ________________________ His eyes were cold and brown, like coffee stains.
3. ________________________ His hair was like splinters.
4. ________________________ Otto came around the corner, dopey as a lamb.
5. ________________________ The stars were dragged down into the waters of the German Sky.
6. ________________________ Rudy had hair the color of a lemon.
7. ________________________ Personally, I like a chocolate colored sky.
8. ________________________ Trees wore blankets of ice.
9. ________________________ All of them were light, like the cases of empty walnuts.
10. ________________________ For me, the sky was the color of Jews.

**Bonus:** Select three of the passages above and describe in your words (on a separate sheet of paper) what the author was trying to say.