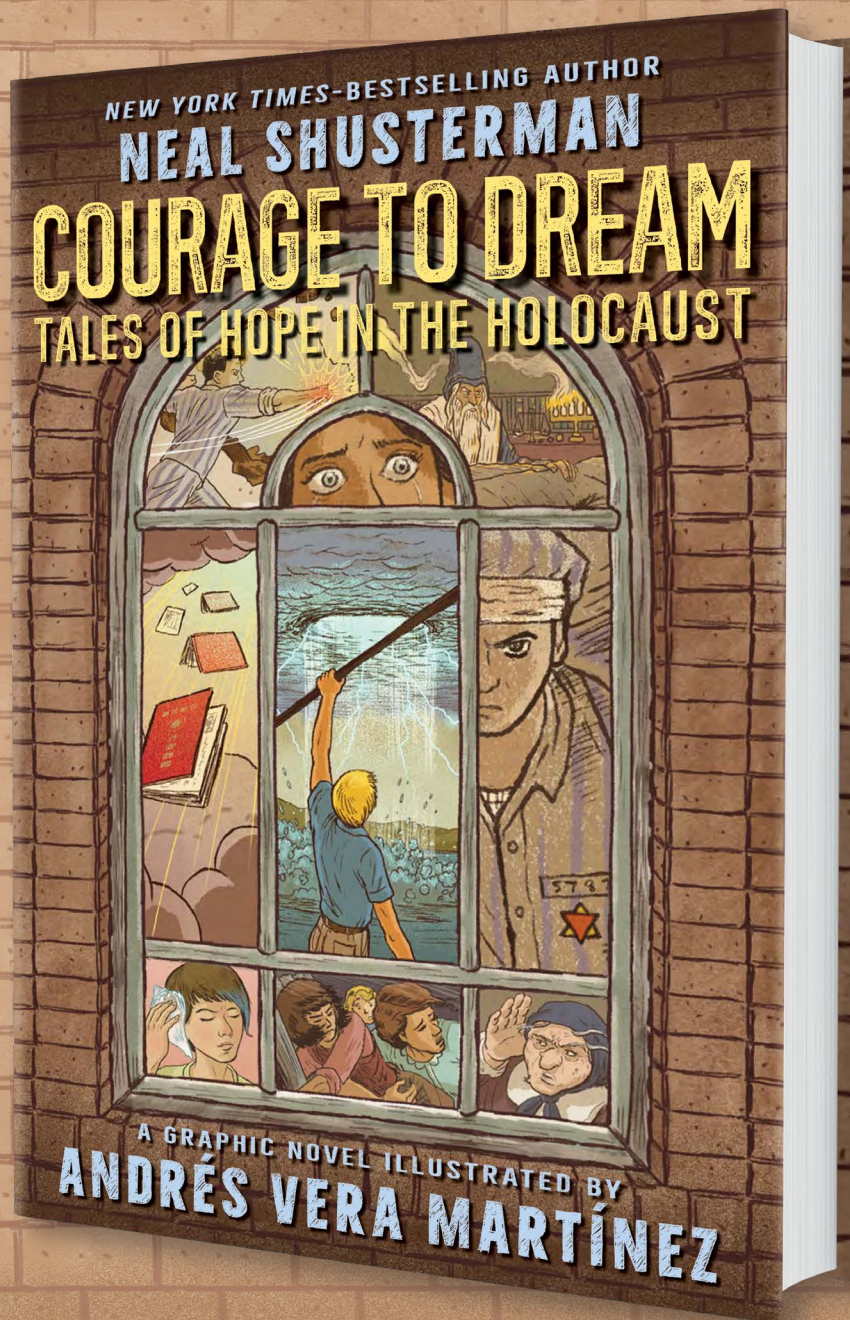


# READING GUIDE

## HOPE AND HISTORY IN COURAGE TO DREAM

BY NEAL SHUSTERMAN & ILLUSTRATED BY ANDRÉS VERA MARTÍNEZ

AGES  
12 & UP  
GRADES  
7 & UP



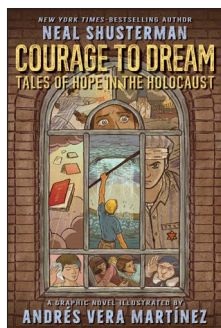
The  
Power  
of Story

Building Equitable  
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 SCHOLASTIC



## ABOUT THE BOOK



National Book Award–winner Neal Shusterman and acclaimed illustrator Andrés Vera Martínez present a graphic novel exploring the Holocaust through surreal visions and a textured canvas of heroism and hope. *Courage to Dream* plunges readers into the Holocaust—one of the greatest atrocities in human history—delving into the core of what it means to face the extinction of everything and everyone you hold dear. This gripping, multifaceted tapestry is woven from Jewish folklore and cultural history. Five interlocking narratives explore one common story—the tradition of resistance and uplift. Neal Shusterman and Andrés Vera Martínez are internationally renowned creators who have collaborated on a masterwork that encourages the compassionate, bold reaching for a dream.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In his opening note to readers, author Neal Shusterman describes the Holocaust as a “dark stain on history” (page ii) that needs constant light shined upon it to help us understand “how humanity could go so terribly wrong” and ensure it never happens again. In what ways do the words and visual elements in this book explore the meaning of “light”? How do the stories and characters demonstrate hope, compassion, and courage in the face of intolerance, fear, and hatred? How does this story help you understand the Holocaust?
2. In the first story, “He Opens a Window,” Frau Müller hides Anna and her sisters from the Nazis. Search this story for one example of something (or someone) being hidden and one example of something (or someone) being found. How do the visual elements—the choice to use panels or full-page illustrations, the characters’ body language and facial expressions, the way some panels “zoom in” while others “zoom out”—guide your reading of those scenes? Beyond the themes of concealment and discovery, what other themes or patterns do you notice in this story, and how do they relate to the title?
3. A number of people act heroically to protect and save Anna and her sisters. Who are those people, and what specific examples can you find that demonstrate their courage? What risks do they face when they choose to help? Why do you think some people choose to help, while others either do nothing or actively help the Nazis? Study the historical note at the end to learn about the real people whose courageous actions inspired the story. What were those actions? How would you act in a similar situation?
4. Anna’s sisters are saved when she thrusts them through the window of their hiding place into a magical world, away from the horrors around them. Where do you imagine they end up, and what do you think happens next? Why does Anna choose to stay behind? What do you think the window symbolizes? Do you think another “window” will open for Anna, or for Friedrich?
5. Partway through the second story, “The Golem of Auschwitz,” the main character, Duvid, learns that he is a golem, a Jewish mythological being created from earth or dust and magically brought to life by humans, often in times of great need. How does Duvid respond to this knowledge? What clues do the text and visuals offer to suggest that he might be more than human? While golems are often portrayed as childlike and/or only capable of following their creators’ commands, some legends portray them as superhero figures who rescue or defend Jewish people from oppression and danger. How does Duvid’s character align or diverge with these traditional portrayals and what is the impact on the story? What other stories throughout history, literature, and popular culture center around figures like the golem?
6. In the third story, “Spirits of Resistance,” Hannah and Yosef encounter several mythical characters from Jewish and Eastern European folklore, including the Baba Yaga, the shamir, and the fools of Chelm. How do each of these characters and their specific abilities play a role in helping Hannah, Yosef, and the resistance fighters in their moment of need? Why do they choose to help? What do Hannah and Yosef learn from the resistance fighters and the mythical characters? What does resistance mean to you?



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

7. The fourth story, “Exodus,” mirrors another famous story from the Torah, in which the heroic Moses leads the Jewish people out of enslavement in Egypt by way of the parting of the Red Sea. What about this book’s version of the story is similar to that in the Torah? What is different? Who is the hero in this version of the story? Review the story’s informational note about the history of the Danish Jews during the Holocaust. How did their experience differ from the fate of many Jews in other European countries? What are some ways that Danish and Swedish people protected the Danish Jews? How can people today follow their example and take action to protect their Jewish friends, neighbors, and colleagues?
8. In the fifth story, “The Untold,” Caitlin receives an opportunity to experience a world in which the Holocaust had not happened, and to meet the family members and friends who are only alive in that “world that might have been” (p. 238). How does this story explore the concept of cause and effect—both intentional and accidental? What does Caitlin learn through her experiences with the crystal shell passed down from previous generations? How do the choices made by her ancestors guide Caitlin’s decision about what to do with the shell? Many Jewish traditions and customs encourage remembrance. How does Caitlin connect her own experience to a specific Jewish tradition?
9. Caitlin slowly realizes that, while the Holocaust did not happen in the “world that might have been” (p. 238), that world is also marred by antisemitism. What are some examples of antisemitism that Caitlin encounters there? Consider the images on page 240, in which four panels of Caitlin and her friend Adam are laid over several vignettes depicting antisemitic violence. How do you interpret the pairing of this scene with these vignettes? What elements within those vignettes do you recognize from recent and current events in our own world? Do you think this scene represents the future of the “world that might have been,” Caitlin’s world, or something else? How do the panels convey Caitlin’s inner conflict and, finally, her resolve at realizing her path forward?
10. Why is it important for young people to connect with and learn from living Holocaust survivors? Do you think people have an obligation to protect and share the stories of those who have come before? What are some ways to ensure their memories and stories live on after they are gone?
11. How did the informational notes at the end of each chapter impact your response to each story? Did you learn any information that surprised you? What was it like to see photographs of the real people and places that inspired each story?
12. One of the most well-known precepts in Judaism, as well as in Islam, is “whoever saves one life, it is as if they have saved the entire world, and whoever destroys one life, it is as if they have destroyed the entire world.” What does this oft-repeated phrase mean to you? How is this phrase reflected in the stories of *Courage to Dream*? What examples can you find of someone saving a life or causing harm, and what is the impact of each action?
13. The five stories in *Courage to Dream* depict a world in which the boundaries of our world give way to others, figures and objects rooted in Jewish traditions and lore become tangible, and “the impossible suddenly [becomes] real.” How do these stories balance the themes of possibility and wish fulfillment with the bittersweet acknowledgment that history cannot be changed? How can reimaginings and/or fantasy or folklore elements offer new ways of looking at historical events? How do these “impossible” things create new possibilities—and even inspire hope—for the characters and storylines in the book? What examples can you find of characters experiencing hope in the face of challenges or suffering, and how is that depicted through the text and visual elements?
14. How does each individual story connect with an aspect of Jewish faith or culture? Consider how the book draws upon traditional Ashkenazi Jewish and Eastern European myths, like the golem in “The Golem of Auschwitz” and Baba Yaga in “Spirits of Resistance,” to retell and reframe stories of the Holocaust. Explore these themes further by reviewing the nonfiction section at the end of each story and by reading the “Note about the Hebrew Letters in This Book” on page 251.
15. Artist Andrés Vera Martínez’s illustrations blend classic comic realism with more modern coloring and linework. Why do you think Martínez chose this blended approach for these stories? How does the artistic style of the book inform your reading? What connections can you make between the book’s style and its contents? What do you think about the creators’ choice to tell these stories in a graphic novel format? What image(s) or page(s) did you find most resonant, and why?



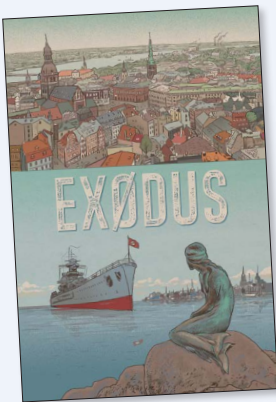
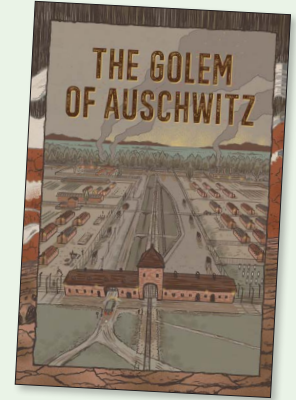
## BEHIND THE SCENES: PROCESS TALK WITH NEAL SHUSTERMAN



Author Neal Shusterman shares a few notes on the writing process behind several stories within *Courage to Dream*. Use these quotes and corresponding prompts to start discussions about writing and storytelling with readers.

"I was scared to write 'The Golem of Auschwitz'—but also felt compelled to write it. I was scared because it would be so easy to do it wrong, and the last thing I would want would be to be disrespectful to the memory of the dead. But I felt compelled to write it because the Golem, traditionally, is *supposed* to return when the Jewish people are threatened. I remember hearing a true story about a group of rabbis who convened to discuss why the Golem didn't appear during the Holocaust. So once I came up with the idea for this story, I felt I would be 'cheating' if I was too afraid to write it."

Writing stories inspired by historical events can be a challenging task for authors. Why do you think that is? What, if anything, do you believe an author owes their work or their readers? Do you agree with Neal Shusterman that it would feel like "cheating" as a writer to encounter a challenging but important topic or question—and then decide not to explore it further?



"As an author, I'm always trying to go beyond expectations. When working on 'Exodus,' the obvious expectation is that when Jory raises the staff, it will part the Oresund as if it were the Red Sea. So to defy that expectation, I came up with something different that was both poignant and surprising."

Why might a writer take the time to ponder multiple possible narrative directions when writing? What is the significance of Neal Shusterman wanting to "defy expectations" through this specific story? Keeping in mind the source material, what other possibilities can you think of for how this story could have unfolded? What do you think makes this version successful?

"For me, 'The Untold' was the most difficult story to write."

Why do you think Neal Shusterman said this? What clues can you find in the book to justify your answer? What considerations do you bring to your own writing process? What fears or concerns might impact that process? What motivates you to keep writing in spite of the challenges or concerns that may arise?





# RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

## WEBSITES AND ARTICLES

**JewFAQ | Judaism 101 | [jewfaq.org](http://jewfaq.org)**

A website offering accessible, encyclopedia-style articles about a wide range of topics related to Judaism including important people, holidays, language, symbols, values, the law, and more.

**My Jewish Learning |** Discussing the Holocaust with Children

[myjewishlearning.com/article/discussing-the-holocaust-with-children](http://myjewishlearning.com/article/discussing-the-holocaust-with-children)

A brief article that discusses the importance of talking about the Holocaust with children in grades six and up.

**Facing History & Ourselves |** Getting Started with Holocaust and Human Behavior

[facinghistory.org/learning-events/getting-started-holocaust-human-behavior](http://facinghistory.org/learning-events/getting-started-holocaust-human-behavior)

An interactive, self-paced online professional learning course to help educators develop their own customized teaching plans about the Holocaust and human behavior. (Free as of July 2023.)

**United States Holocaust Memorial Museum |** Guidelines for Teaching about the Holocaust

[ushmm.org/teach/fundamentals/guidelines-for-teaching-the-holocaust](http://ushmm.org/teach/fundamentals/guidelines-for-teaching-the-holocaust)

A set of guidelines for how to appropriately and sensitively discuss and teach about the Holocaust.

**PJ Library |** What Are Jewish Values? | [pjlibrary.org/values](http://pjlibrary.org/values)

A helpful and easy-to-navigate web page listing and describing core Jewish values such as tzedakah (helping others), Tikkun Olam (healing the world), Bikur Cholim (visiting the sick) and more.

**My Jewish Learning | [myjewishlearning.com](http://myjewishlearning.com)**

An online resource aimed at “empowering Jewish discovery for anyone interested in learning more,” offering articles, videos, and other resources to help navigate all aspects of Judaism and Jewish life—from food to history to beliefs and practices.

**Jewish Women’s Archive | [jwa.org](http://jwa.org)**

An online archive, dedicated to “documenting Jewish women’s stories and elevating their voice.” Includes a vast encyclopedia of related material, programs, and education.

**Jewish Multiracial Network | [jewishmultiracialnetwork.org](http://jewishmultiracialnetwork.org)**

An organization established over 25 years ago with the goal of advancing Jewish diversity through community building and empowerment with Jews of Color and Jewish multiracial families.

## BOOKS

*Here All Along: Finding Meaning, Spirituality, and a Deeper Connection to Life—in Judaism (After Finally Choosing to Look There)*  
by Sarah Hurwitz

*Nine Questions People Ask About Judaism* by Dennis Prager

*Questions I Am Asked About The Holocaust: Young Reader’s Edition* by Hédi Fried

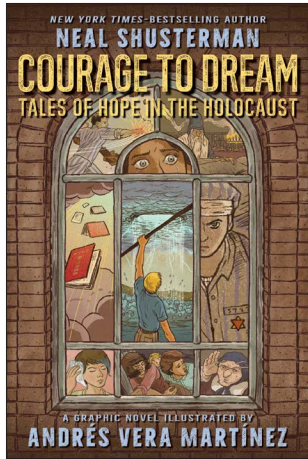
*Righteous Indignation: A Jewish Call for Justice* by Rabbi Or N. Rose, Jo Ellen Green Kaiser, Margie Klein

*Tough Questions Jews Ask: A Young Adult’s Guide to Building a Jewish Life* by Rabbi Edward Feinstein





## PRAISE FOR *COURAGE TO DREAM*



HC: 9780545313476 • \$24.99  
PB: 9780545313483 • \$14.99  
Also available as an ebook  
Ages 12 & up, Grades 7 & up

★ “Inspired by actual examples of aid and rescue recounted in brief between each story, the author celebrates courage in the face of brutality and terror . . . Moving examples of the power of culture and folklore to offer help, hope, and inspiration to act.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ “Innovative . . . Informational spreads following most stories provide historical and, when relevant, folkloric context. Amid the brutality depicted, the creatively applied magical elements give power back to the Holocaust-victim characters.”

—*The Horn Book*, starred review



## ABOUT THE CREATORS



Photo © Gaby Gerster

**Neal Shusterman** is the *New York Times* bestselling author of more than thirty award-winning books for children, teens, and adults, including the *Unwind* dystology, the *Skinjacker* trilogy, *Downsiders*, and *Challenger Deep*, which won the National Book Award. *Scythe*, the first book in his latest series,

*Arc of a Scythe*, is a Michael L. Printz Honor Book. He also writes screenplays for motion pictures and television shows. Neal is the father of four, all of whom are talented writers and artists themselves. Visit Neal online at [Storyman.com](http://Storyman.com), [Facebook.com/NealShusterman](https://Facebook.com/NealShusterman), and [@NealShusterman](https://Instagram.com/NealShusterman) on Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter.



Photo © Enid Arvelo

**Andrés Vera Martínez** is a cartoonist and illustrator. He is the co-author of the graphic memoir, *Little White Duck: A Childhood in China*. Andrés’s work has been recognized by the *New York Times*, *School Library Journal*, *The Horn Book*, NPR, the Society of Illustrators, *American Illustration*, *3x3*, *Junior*

*Library Guild*, and *Slate Cartoonist Studio*. He currently lives in New England with his family. For more, find Andres at [andresvera.com](http://andresvera.com).

About the Writer of This Guide: Talya Sokoll is a school librarian right outside of Boston. They have served on a number of award committees including the Stonewall Book Award and the Sydney Taylor Book Award. They are the faculty advisor to the Jewish affinity group at their school and are currently pursuing a master’s of Jewish professional studies at Gratz College so that they can continue their lifelong journey as a student. They offer their deepest gratitude to both their mother and one of their amazing tenth graders, Amanda Rosa, for their invaluable suggestions. They live by the daily reminder, “It is not incumbent upon you to complete the task, but neither are you at liberty to desist from it.” (Pirkei Avot 2:16)

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