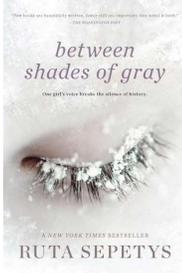


Books by the Stack



Between Shades of Gray by Ruta Sepetys

Fifteen-year-old Lina is a Lithuanian girl living an ordinary life--until Soviet officers invade her home and tear her family apart. Separated from her father and forced onto a crowded train, Lina, her mother, and her young brother make their way to a Siberian work camp, where they are forced to fight for their lives. Lina finds solace in her art, documenting these events by drawing. Risking everything, she imbeds clues in her drawings of their location and secretly passes them along, hoping her drawings will make their way to her father's prison camp.

Why you'll like it: Character driven. Historical. Russia. Moving & Haunting.

About the Author: Born and raised in Michigan, Ruta Sepetys is the daughter of a Lithuanian refugee. She holds a B.S. in International Finance from Hillsdale College. While in school Sepetys also studied at the Centre d'études Européennes in Toulon, France and at the ICN in Nancy, France.

Her debut novel *Between Shades of Gray*, describes the genocide of Baltic people after the Soviet occupation in 1941, when nations of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia disappeared from maps, not to reappear until 1990. As this is a story seldom told, Ruta wanted to give a voice to the hundreds of thousands of people who lost their lives during Stalin's cleansing of the Baltic region. The book was met with broad critical acclaim, and was translated into over 22 different languages. Ruta currently lives with her family in Tennessee.

Questions for Discussion:

1. As the novel opens, Lina explains that though the signs were in place, she has little understanding that her parents had planned to attempt to escape Lithuania. What can be inferred about her understanding of the political climate in her country? Do you think her surprise is a typical reaction for a teen? Why or why not?
2. Lina's mother remains calm throughout the roundup of her family; how does her family benefit from this?
3. When Jonas observes his mother smashing her beloved china and crystal before they depart their home, he asks her why she is destroying these items. She replies, "Because I love them so much." Do you consider this an act of rebellion? In your opinion, is her reaction appropriate? In what ways is she trying to control the situation?
4. As Lina's family is first placed in the truck to take them to the trains, they meet the bald man who proclaims loudly, "We're all going to die. We will surely die." How does his presence affect the other prisoners?
5. Consider and explain how Lina and her mother react to his rants. In what ways is Elena (Lina's

mother) sympathetic to his condition?

6. Using textual examples, what are some of the specific ways Lina's mother chooses to fight back against the NKVD?
7. Being held prisoner on the train brings out the best and worst in some of the inhabitants. Consider and discuss some of the ways that individuals extend their assistance and support. How do their choices differ from those who are most unkind to others?
8. Lina unflinchingly shares the nature of the condition in which she and the other prisoners are forced to live. What feelings does this candor evoke in you?
9. How does the author use the embedded flashbacks to help readers understand why Lina's family has been rounded up for punishment? Do you agree with the family's choices? Why or why not?
10. Though readers mostly learn about Kostas, Lina's father, through her shared memories, a great deal can be understood about his character. In your opinion, what kind of man is he? Is he a good father? Use textual evidence to make your case.
11. Why does Lina's mother, Elena, pretend she doesn't know her cousin Regina? What is she trying to accomplish? What can be gleaned about Elena from this encounter?

(Questions issued by publisher)

