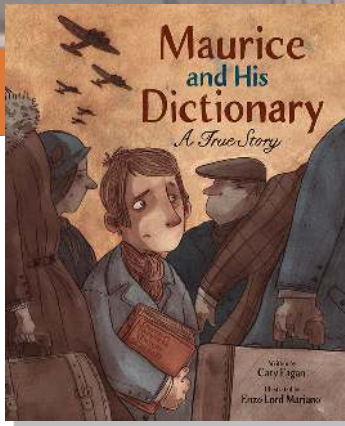


Maurice and His Dictionary



Book written by Cary Fagan
and illustrated by Enzo Lord Mariano

Discussion Guide by Cary Fagan

About the Book

This is the story of one refugee family's harrowing journey, based on author Cary Fagan's own family history. The graphic novel follows a young Jewish boy, Maurice, and his family as they flee their home in Belgium during the Second World War. They travel by train to Paris, through Spain to Portugal, and finally across the ocean to Jamaica, where they settle in an internment camp. All the while, Maurice is intent on continuing his education and growing up to be a lawyer. He overcomes obstacles to find a professor to study with, works toward a high school diploma while in the camp, and is ultimately accepted to university in Canada. His English dictionary becomes a beloved tool and beacon of hope through the danger and turmoil of the family's migration. Moments of lightness and humor balance the darkness in this powerful story of one refugee family's courage and resilience, and of the dictionary that came to represent their freedom.

Discussion Questions

1. Maurice and his family had to quickly leave their home in Brussels. Maurice's brother brought his soccer ball—not the most practical object, but one that was important to him. What would you grab to take with you from home?
2. While in the city of Pau, Maurice returns to school but fails his year. How do you think that made him feel? What effects might it have had on his motivation to keep studying?
3. Maurice's desire for education helped to keep his spirits up while in Gibraltar Camp. Do you think there is anything particular or special about learning that was helpful to him? Can you think of other pursuits that might help a person get through such a difficult time?
4. Why do you think the dictionary is so important to Maurice?
5. When the author, Cary Fagan, was a kid, he had no opportunity to study the Holocaust or other genocides in his school studies. But by the time his daughter was in high school, she was able to take a course called Genocide Studies where she learned not only about the Holocaust but also about the Armenian and Rwandan genocides. Why is it important to study the Holocaust and other genocides?
6. Maurice's father has a new pair of trousers made for him, but trying them on doesn't go as he expects. This is one of the more comic moments in the story. Do you think there is a place for humor in a story about such serious events? What can moments of humor or lightness achieve in a story about such serious events?
7. Maurice leaves the camp to come to Canada on his own. Perhaps you have come to Canada from another country. What was that experience like for you? If not, how do you think you would feel having to leave Canada for somewhere else? How do you think others might feel leaving a home country to move somewhere new?
8. Do you have a big goal or a dream you would like to pursue in your life? Are there any significant objects that remind you of your goal, or keep you inspired?

ISBN: 978-1-77147-323-1

CURRICULUM LINKS:

Language Arts: Reading Comprehension
Social Studies: Global Communities

READING LEVELS:

Grade: 5+
Fountas & Pinnell: W
Lexile® Measure: GN450L
Common Core: L.6, RI.6, SL.6, W.6