

SECRETS OF WAR



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***Secrets of War* (original title: "Oorlogsgeheimen")**

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Synopsis

Country of Origin: Netherlands

Release Year: 2014

Director: Dennis Bots

Runtime: 95 minutes

Language: Dutch

Themes: Friendship, Coming of Age, Heroism, Secrets and Lies, Dutch Resistance

Adapted from Jacques Vriens's bestselling young-adult novel (inspired by events that occurred in the author's native region of Holland), ***Secrets of War*** is a harrowing account of friendship and courage.

When the Nazis occupy the Netherlands in 1943, 12-year-old best friends Tuur and Lambert are initially shielded from the political chaos around them as they spend their days going to school and playing war games. All that changes with the arrival of Maartje, a newcomer to their classroom. Vying for her affection, Tuur and Lambert's friendship is tested, and when Maartje grows closer to Tuur, Lambert's jealous reaction sets in motion a chain of events with consequences that will alter the lives of all three children.

Curriculum Links

Secrets of War can be used to meet the English and Media Studies component of the English curriculum from Grades 7-9. It can also be applied to the Social Studies curriculum from Grades 7-9.

Before Viewing the Film

Below is one of the advertising posters for *Secrets of War*. Students should consider the way that advertising shapes our expectations of film by answering the accompanying questions.



1. What do you think that movie is going to be about? Why do you think so?
2. What impression do you have of each of the characters? What gives you this impression?
3. Who do you think the hero of the film is going to be? Why?
4. Why do you think the girl is photographed in the centre?

Setting

Secrets of War is set in the South Limburg region of the Netherlands, on the border with Belgium. Locate the region on a map and find out more about the area's

geography, history, culture and religious affiliations. Central to the film are the St. Pietersberg caves located near Maastricht. Learn more about the caves and the various purposes they served in different historical periods.

Suggested Websites:

Maastricht Underground

<http://www.maastrichtunderground.nl/eng/caves>

hotelinmaastricht-holland

http://www.hotelinmaastricht-holland.com/attractions/St_Pietersberg_Caves.htm

Historical Context: The Netherlands During WWII

Secrets of War is set in 1943 when the Netherlands was occupied by Nazi Germany. Though it declared itself to be neutral when the war broke out in 1939, the Netherlands was invaded in 1940 and the Dutch government and Royal Family went into exile in Britain. The Netherlands remained under Nazi occupation until May, 1945.

In order to better understand the film, students should do some research about the Netherlands during the war, especially with regard to the way the population reacted to the Occupation. How many Dutch people supported the Nazis and collaborated with them? How many resisted? In what ways did they resist? Though many students will be familiar with the story of Anne Frank, the number of Dutch people who actively resisted the persecution of Jews was quite small. In fact, the Netherlands saw one of the highest levels of collaboration during the Holocaust than any other country, with less than 25% of the country's Jewish population surviving the War. *Secrets of War* offers students a chance to explore some of complexities of the way that ordinary Dutch people reacted to being occupied by the Nazis.

Listed below are some websites students can use to learn more about the Netherlands during the War.

Dutch Resistance Museum

http://www.verzetsmuseum.org/museum/en/tweede-wereldoorlog/kingdomofthenetherlands/thenetherlands/thenetherlands,during_the_thirties

WWII database

<http://ww2db.com/country/netherlands>

Historical Context: Hitler Youth

One of the strengths of *Secrets and Lies* is the manner in which it illustrates how Hitler was able to spread his message by indoctrinating young people into his philosophy through a popular youth movement. While Lambert seems oblivious at first to what it means to be sympathetic to the Nazis, his brother Roeland has clearly endeared himself to their father by embracing Nazi ideology through his participation in Hitler Youth. Lambert believes that Hitler Youth is a benign organisation where boys learn to “sing songs and march”, but the reality is far more insidious.

From 1933 until 1945, Hitler Youth was the sole official youth organization in Germany and it was partially a paramilitary organization. It consisted of the *Hitlerjugend* proper for male youth aged 14 to 18, the *Deutsches Jungvolk* (German Youth) for younger boys, and the League of German Girls. In 1936, membership in Nazi youth groups became mandatory for all boys and girls between the ages of 10 and 17. After-school meetings and weekend camping trips sponsored by the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls trained children to become faithful to the Nazi Party and the future leaders of the National Socialist state.

Students should research the role that Hitler Youth played in ensuring that the younger generation was indoctrinated into Nazi ideology. Below are some helpful websites to get them started.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Interactive Website)

<http://www.ushmm.org/propaganda/exhibit.html#/themes/indoctrinating-youth/>

History Learning Site

http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/hitler_youth.htm

Holocaust Research Project

<http://holocaustresearchproject.org/holoprelude/hitleryouth.html>

Jewish Virtual Library

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/hitleryouth.html>

Focus Questions:

1. What values did Hitler Youth emphasise? What was its main purpose?
2. What values did the League of German Girls promote? What was its main purpose?
3. What was the Nazi ideology of race propagated by Hitler Youth leaders?
4. Why did Hitler Youth put so much emphasis on sports and physical fitness?
5. Hitler Youth groups were divided into squads, platoons and companies. Why is this significant?

6. Compare Hitler Youth to contemporary North American youth movements like Boy Scouts and Girl Guides. In what ways are they similar? How do they differ?

Related Activity

Hitler Youth was a vehicle through which Nazis could disseminate propaganda. The role that propaganda plays in shaping peoples' beliefs is another issue that teachers should explore with students. What exactly is propaganda? How can we recognise it? What is the difference between propaganda, indoctrination, education and objective news? Below is a link to a unit of work designed to lead students to think critically about these questions:

Mandel Project

<http://www.mandelproject.us/McAbee.htm> (Recognising Propaganda/Bias)

Historical Context: Dutch Resistance

Where Lambert and his family represent the Dutch people who collaborated with the Nazis, Tuur's family reflects those who resisted the German occupation, risking their own safety and security. The Ramakers and other families like the Holtermans who hid Maartje provide teachers with a springboard to discuss the theme of heroism and standing up to tyranny. To that end, teachers could look at some of the real life heroes who their lives on the line to save Jews during WWII. Listed below are some resources to begin your research:

Bible Probe

<http://www.bibleprobe.com/hulstein.htm> (account of Dutch couple who hid Jews)

Scholastic

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/frank/tscripts/miep.htm> (Interview with woman who hid Anne Frank)

Yale University

<http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/excerpts/marionp.html> (Testimony of Dutch woman who saved Dutch Jews)

Classroom Activity

Below are links to excerpts from stories of young people who resisted Nazis and a lesson plan that relates to their personal accounts of heroism.

Holocaust Teacher Resource Centre

<http://www.holocaust-trc.org/faces-of-courage-children-who-resisted/>

Holocaust Teacher Resource Centre

<http://www.holocaust-trc.org/faces-of-courage-children-who-resisted/faces-of-courage-lesson-plan/>

Secrets of War: Themes

Secrets and Lies

Most of the major characters in the film either tell overt lies or keep secrets from each other. While these lies are usually designed to protect loved ones from either physical danger or emotional hurt, they often have the opposite effect. Students should fill out the chart below listing the various lies and secrets that each character keeps (in some cases more than one), the reason for doing so and the consequences that result from those lies.

Character	Lie(s) Told/Secret(s) Held	Reasons for Lying/Keeping Secret	Consequences of Lie/Secrets
Tuur			
Maartje			
Tuur's Parents and brother			

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Focus Question:

Is it ever acceptable to lie? If so, under what circumstances?

Theme: Friendship and Betrayal

Central to the film is the friendship between Tuur and Lambert and the way in which this tested to the breaking point. Students could explore this theme by answering the questions below.

1. What is the significance of Tuur and Lambert's secret handshake?
2. How does Tuur respond when his brother and his classmates make nasty comments about Lambert and his family? At what point in the film does his response to these comments change? Why do you think that Tuur stops defending Lambert and his family?
3. How does Tuur respond when Lambert first invites Maartje to see the caves?
4. How does Lambert respond when he hears Maartje invite Tuur over to her house "to do nothing together"?
5. What is Tuur's reaction when his Grandmother tells him that his parents don't want him playing with Lambert anymore?
6. Why does Tuur lie to Lambert about having to help his sister with her homework? Is Tuur's rejection of Lambert based more on his dislike of Lambert's family's affiliation with the Nazis or is it because he has now become more interested in his relationship with Maartje?
7. Lambert accuses Tuur of being responsible for what happens because if Tuur hadn't lied about going to see Maartje, Lambert would not have followed him and discovered Maartje's pig. Do you agree? Why/why not?
8. Do you think that Lambert decides to help Tuur and his family because he feels guilty about what happened to Maartje or because he still values his friendship with Tuur? Provide evidence from the film to support your answer.

Theme: Coming of Age

Both Tuur and Lambert move from a state of childish innocence at the beginning of the film to a more mature understanding of the world as the film progresses. Though the war forces them to grow up faster than they might have otherwise, their move from childhood to adolescence can also be charted through their rivalry over Maartje's affections. Listed below are some questions that can guide students in their exploration of this theme.

1. How does the director establish Tuur and Lambert's innocence at the beginning of the film?
2. What is Tuur and Lambert's attitude towards the war at the beginning? At what point does their attitude change? What are the reasons for this change?
3. How does Tuur react to Maartje's secret? How does her secret affect his relationship with Lambert?
4. When does Lambert decide to join Hitler Youth? Why does he join?
5. Why does Lambert tell his father about the Maartje's hidden pig? What are the consequences?

Classroom Activity: Film Review

Write a film review of *Secrets of War*. Use the chart below to think about the qualities of a film that you need to consider when writing a review.

Criteria	Rating 5=Great, 1=Poor					Comments
	5	4	3	2	1	
Story Elements						
Dialogue/Screenplay						
Historical Accuracy						
Emotional impact						
Overall interest level						
Message of the film						
Character Elements						
Character believability						
Character development						

Development of friendship between Tuur and Lambert						
Development of relationship between Tuur and Maartje						
Technical Elements						
Cinematography						
Music						
Special effects						
Lighting						

General Discussion Questions/Activities

1. Why do Tuur's parents keep their involvement with the Resistance a secret from Tuur? Do you think that they underestimated his maturity? Why/why not?
2. What clues does the director give to suggest that Maartje is not who she says she is?
3. What role does the senile grandmother play in the film? Why do you think her character is included in the story?
4. How does Lambert's father's involvement with the Nazi party affect Lambert's relationships with his friends?
5. How does Lambert's father become mayor of the town? How does his collusion with the Nazis affect his relationship with the rest of the town? What do you think will happen to him after the war?
6. After Tuur picks up the teddy bear from dropped from the train, he tries to get information from his parents about where the trains are heading. His father tells him "sometimes it is better not to know." Do you agree? Why/why not?
7. Why does Lambert's father agree to help get Tuur released from prison?
8. What will likely happened to Maartje? Where will she be sent? Research the fate of the Dutch Jews during WWII.
9. Why does Tuur decide to trust Lambert after Lambert had betrayed him?

10. Write a letter from Tuur to Lambert after he reaches safety in Belgium. What do you think he would say to his friend?

References

(All websites cited are from April, 2015)

Maastricht Underground

<http://www.maastrichtunderground.nl/eng/caves>

hotelinmaastricht-holland

http://www.hotelinmaastricht-holland.com/attractions/St_Pietersberg_Caves.htm

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