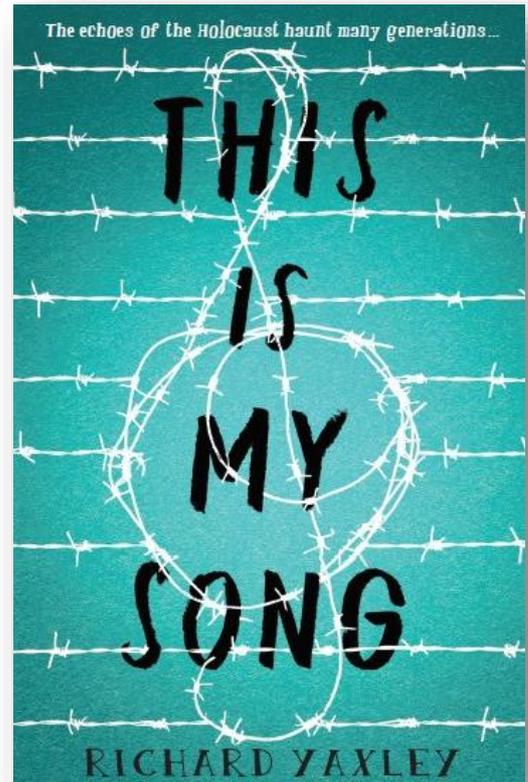


This is My Song

Author

Richard Yaxley



This is My Song is the multigenerational story of a father, his daughter and her son, who each have very different challenges to face and who strive to come to terms with their world. The story starts and ends with Rafael Ullman, a young Czech boy living with his family in Prague in the 1930s. As Rafael grows towards adulthood, Europe crumbles and falls and the Holocaust overwhelms him and all he knows. This is the story of Rafael, who loses his family and his love of music in the Holocaust. It is the story of Annie, growing up in a silent cabin on the Canadian prairie, of her bond with a wild goshawk and of her love of music. It is the story of Joe, who can sing with technical perfection, but struggles to imbue his art with feeling until he finds a mysterious musical score amongst his grandfather Rafael's effects and finds himself able to give voice to a song of hope and love.

RECOMMENDED READING LEVEL: Mid Secondary

TEACHER NOTES

- Discuss the Holocaust. When did it occur and who were its victims? Why do you think more people didn't speak out against the horror? What can we, as individuals and as a society, do and say to ensure that this sort of thing doesn't happen? Write a short piece outlining your conclusions from the discussion.
- For Rafael, music was a wonder and a solace to him as a child, but as an adult he refused to allow music into his house or life. What changed his attitude to music and why? Identify at least three segments of text from the narrative that provide evidence for your answer.
- All three of the main characters are in their teens at the time when their story ceases to be told directly, yet Rafael appears as an adult in the tale of Annie's childhood and Annie and Rafael are both present in Joe's story. Why do you think the author chose to present their stories in this fashion? What is the effect on the flow of the novel of having only their adolescent years explored in any detail and how does it affect our understanding of their characters as adults? What impact would it have had on the novel if all the details of their lives had been included?
- What roles do the twin emotions of hope and despair play in the lives of Rafael and his family? How do his daughter and grandson's experiences of hope and despair differ from his?
- Research the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke either online or in the library and choose one of his poems (in translation) to share with the class. Write a brief paragraph discussing why you chose this particular poem to share, and your understanding of the verses.