



**Discussion Questions for
Irena's Jars of Secrets**
by **Marcia Vaughan**
illustrated by **Ron Mazellan**

1. When Irena was a child, what advice did Irena's father give her? What did the advice mean to Irena?
2. What word or words would you use to describe the mood of the story?
3. Look at the illustrations. How does the illustrator, Ron Mazellan, use color and light to establish the story's mood?
4. Why did Irena feel compelled to help the Jews? What does this tell us about the kind of person she was?
5. What risks did Irena take when she chose to smuggle food, medicine, and clothing into the ghetto? Put yourself in Irena's shoes. Would you have taken the same risks? Why or why not?
6. What difficult choice did Jewish parents have to make? What would you have done if you were in those parents' shoes?
7. What is an extermination camp? Why was it so important that Irena help the children of the ghetto escape? What obstacles stood in Irena's way?
8. What was Irena's plan to reunite families after the war? How did it work out?
9. Why were some non-Jewish families hesitant to take in a Jewish child from the ghetto and pretend the child was their own?
10. What happened to the children after the war? What happened to their parents? How did Irena feel about this? How would you have felt if you were Irena?
11. Why do you think many people in Poland during World War II chose *not* to get involved or did not try to stop the Nazis?

12. If you could pick only one sentence in this story as the most important, which would it be? Why is that sentence important to you?
13. What were some of the best clues in the story that helped you figure out what was going on? Imagine you were explaining this book to someone who didn't know anything about World War II. How would you explain the events in Irena Sendler's life?
14. Why do you think the author, Marcia Vaughan, wrote this story for young readers? What message does the story present?
15. Irena was named one of the Righteous Among the Nations, an honor given to gentiles (non-Jews) who risked their own lives to help Jews escape the Nazis. Why do you think Irena was given this honor? What does this tell you about how others acted during the war?
16. Why do you think it's important to learn about and remember people like Irena Sendler?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marcia Vaughan is an award-winning author of numerous books for children, including *Snap!*, a Junior Library Guild Selection, *Whistling Dixie*, an ALA Notable Book, and *The Secret to Freedom*, a Teachers' Choices Award winner published by LEE & LOW BOOKS. A full-time author, Vaughan is a popular speaker at national and regional conferences. She lives in Vashon Island, Washington, with her husband and their son.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Ron Mazellan is the illustrator of several award-winning picture books, among them *The Harmonica*, which appeared in The Original Art, a gallery show of children's book illustrations. He holds an MFA degree in illustration and is a professor of art at Indiana Wesleyan University. Mazellan was drawn to *Irena's Jars of Secrets* by Irena Sendler's character, bravery, and selfless acts of kindness. He and his family live in Marion, Indiana. His website is ronmazellan.com.

Book Information

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(Reading level based on the Dale Chall Readability Formula)

Interest Level: Grades 1-6

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