

Book Club Kits!

The ZOOKEEPER'S WIFE



About the Author:

Poet, essayist, and naturalist, **Diane Ackerman** is the author of two dozen highly acclaimed works of nonfiction and poetry, including *The Zookeeper's Wife* and *A Natural History of the Senses* — books beloved by millions of readers all over the world. In prose so rich and evocative that one can feel the earth turning beneath one's feet as one reads, Ackerman's thrilling observations urge us to live in the moment, to wake up to nature's everyday miracles.

<http://www.dianeackerman.com/about-diane-ackerman>



Inside the kit:

- (8) book copies
- (1) book club guide

About the Book:

(From the author's website)

The Zookeeper's Wife is a strange, but historically true story of WWII. It reveals the extraordinary efforts of Jan and Antonina Zabinski, Christian zookeepers horrified by Nazi racism, who capitalized on the Nazis' obsession with pureblood animals in order to save over 300 doomed people by hiding them in the bombed-out cages at the Warsaw Zoo. A tale of people, animals, and subversive acts of compassion.

After their zoo was bombed, Polish zookeepers Jan and Antonina Zabinski managed to save over three hundred people from the Nazis by hiding refugees in the empty animal cages. With animal names for these "guests," and human names for the animals, it's no wonder that the zoo's code name became "The House Under a Crazy Star." Best-selling naturalist and acclaimed storyteller Diane Ackerman combines extensive research and an exuberant writing style to re-create this fascinating, true-life story — sharing Antonina's life as "the zookeeper's wife," while examining the disturbing obsessions at the core of Nazism. Winner of the 2008 Orion Award.

Suggested Reads:

Walker, Fay
Hidden

Larson, Erik
In the Garden of Beasts

Crowe, David
Oskar Schindler

Nemirovsky, Irene
Suite Francaise

1. How does Diane Ackerman's background as a naturalist and a poet inform her telling of this slice of history? Would a historian of World War II have told it differently, and, if so, what might have been left out?
2. Reviews have compared this book to **Schindler's List** and **Hotel Rwanda**. How would you compare them?
3. Did this book give you a different impression of Poland during World War II than you had before?
4. Can you imagine yourself in the same circumstances as Jan and Antonina? What would you have done?
5. How would you describe Antonina's relation to animals? To her husband? How does she navigate the various relationships in the book, given the extreme circumstances? Is her default position one of trust or distrust?
6. Do people have a "sixth sense" and how does it relate to "animal instinct"?
7. Some might judge Jan and Antonina guilty of anthropomorphizing animals and nature. Would you? Why or why not?
8. Can nature be savage or kind --- or can only humans embody those qualities? As science and the study of animal behavior and communication teach us more and more about the commonalities between animals and humans, is there still any dividing line between the human and the animal world? If so, how would you describe it?
9. The Nazis had a passion for animals and the natural world. How could Nazi ideology embrace both a love of nature and the mass murder of human beings?
10. The drive to "rewrite the genetic code of the entire planet" is not distinct to Nazism. What similar efforts are alive today? Are there lessons in Jan and Antonina's story for evaluating the benefits and dangers of trying to modify or improve upon nature? Do you see any connection between this story of more than sixty years ago and contemporary environmental issues?
11. Genetic engineering of foodstuffs is highly contentious. So are various reproductive technologies that are now common, such as selecting for --- or against --- various characteristics when choosing from sperm or egg banks. How would various characters in this book have approached these loaded issues?

<https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/the-zookeepers-wife-a-war-story/guide>