 Construction of character

Characterisation in this novel is problematic. Given some of the negative reception this novel has received (reference articles, etc.) it should be considered whether Doerr invites us to regard characters such as Marie-Laure and Werner not merely as realistic representations or simply as plot devices but as literary tropes referencing literary traditions. For example, Marie-Laure is the image of the frail, vulnerable, blind girl evoking Grimm’s Fairy Tales and Dickensian orphans; Von Rumpel as the villain etc.

It is through characters that we engage with key ideas, values and themes of the novel. Characters exist to represent collective human experiences.

Students will explore the key ideas behind the concept of relationships between the characters and consider how those relationships convey themes of the novel such as challenging the hegemonic process through which the world is constructed for us. Through characterisation they will consider the artificiality of dividing lines and the conflict that arises between public duty and private conscience.

* The novel calls attention to the shared humanity that bridges our differences and the artificiality of dividing lines between “good guys” and “bad guys.”
* One of Werner’s fellow soldiers ironically point out the artificiality of ethnic division when he jokes, “The true Aryan is as blond as Hitler, as slim as Göering, and as tall as Goebbels,” citing examples of leading Nazi figures who did not fit the Aryan stereotype.
* Marie-Laure and Werner’s bond is perhaps the best example of common humanity. Even though they are strangers on opposite sides of the war effort, they are kindred spirits nonetheless.
* Despite the darkness Jutta is forced to live within she is able to question the legitimacy of the values being expressed by the Nazi regime. Her voice is an important one through which the reader experiences the expression of resistance.
* Students should consider the role of story-telling in the creation of character. The reader understands the characters through the voice of the omniscient narrator who, as a story-teller, is self-referential. The narrator positions the reader to perceive the characters in particular ways as part of a cultural story-telling tradition in which the reader is complicit in the creation of the story.