Student Name

Ms. Mocarski

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Prompt: Almost all stories contain the same elements: characters, conflict, action, dialogue, plot, and theme. Explain the theme of the book, showing how the elements contribute to the theme.

World War II is the single most discussed war in history. Yet, the history of the Danish Resistance is often overlooked. In *Courage and Defiance,* Deborah Hopkinson tells the stories of spies, saboteurs, and survivors in World War II Denmark. Hopkinson particularly focus on the feats of three men: Niels Skov, Jorgen Kieler, and Tommy Sneum. In each of their stories, all the elements of the book point towards one simple truth, or the theme: Everyone has a responsibility to act against evil.

During most part of his resistance, Niels Skov acted alone. This character felt that it was his personal responsibility to fight the Nazis. The conflict, in his story, was between him and Nazi Germany. That’s the reason why, when Niels finally took action, he attacked everything that could be helpful in any way to the Germans. Niels was frustrated with his government and with his people, for surrendering to the Germans too easily. When he saw German soldiers for the first time, he said: “I saw with complete certainty that I was going to fight, somewhere, somehow. There was hardly a decision process involved; it was simply so” (Hopkinson 15). This simple thought started his career as a saboteur, alone and determined. Fortunately, the plot in his story was such that his actions, and others’ acts of defiance, inspired others to also take action against Nazi German. Protests started, people started giving out flyers against Hitler, and some even started discussing in groups how to bring down Nazi Germany. In Niels’ story, one man decided to be a saboteur and act against what he thought was wrong and evil, which gave others the strength to also act.

Incidentally, one of the people inspired was Jorgen Kieler. At first, Jorgen had no intents to act against Nazi Germany because he had rather prioritize his education as a medical student. Three years after the Nazis arrived, Jorgen still wasn’t feeling ready to be a saboteur or a spy, so he decided to help produce an illegal news sheet called Free Denmark. After a few weeks, Jorgen Kieler got his family to get on the Resistance boat. In his story, the conflict was between him and the threat to his and his loved ones’ way of life. That is what gave him a reason to take action help hundreds of Jews escape Denmark. After which, he decides to even go further and recruit people to attack German factories. Unfortunately, his friends, family, and himself get caught and sent to internment camps. From then on, the plot of his story consists of him surviving under worsening conditions. Yet, at every point of his story, he still tried to fight back and did not regret any actions he took. In the end, he is liberated, but only a few of his friends survive. His story shows how a community rose together to fight against evil, at the cost of their freedom and lives. Jorge Kieler, his family, and his friends, decided that their survival was worth nothing if it meant bowing down to an evil regime that threatened everything that they held dear.

Similarly to Jorgen Kieler, Tommy Sneum was a survivor, but he was also a young flight lieutenant for Denmark’s small air force. Like our first two heroes, Tommy Sneum “wanted nothing more than to be up in the air battling for his country. The order to fly never came” (Hopkinson 18). Tommy Sneum experienced firsthand the Danish defeat, and especially how quickly they gave up. The conflict in his story was between the British forces, that he eventually became a spy for, and the Nazi high-tech defense system. About the time Tommy Sneum’s actions brought him to be pants down in front of a Nazi officer, while hiding technology that he stole from the Germans, he said: “It was one of the most dangerous but also one of the most satisfying” (Hopkinson 36). Sneum believed in his cause and went through two plane crashes to bring intelligence to the British. The few times where he talked, Sneum was always expressing a high level of excitement about fighting for Denmark. Sneum’s story is about a man who loved his country so much that he became a spy and repeatedly put his life in danger.

In conclusion, the feats of these three men demonstrated that everyone has a responsibility to act against evil, which was the theme of the book. Niels, Jorgen, and Tommy all came from different backgrounds. Yet, what ultimately mattered was the actions they took. All these characters expressed some doubt that was overpowered by their duty to fight against evil. None of them every thought to become famous or rich for what they did, but they did it anyway. These men understood something that Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: “Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.” None of them saw themselves as heroes because they were only assuming their personal responsibility, as humans and citizens of their great country.

1. How could German civilians simply ignore the soldiers? Why weren’t they at the very least outraged?
2. What really happened in Copenhagen July 6, 1943? Why did this incident spark such a feverish flame in Danish hearts? What made this incident different from what the Danish experienced on a daily basis during German occupation?
3. What’s the place of a patriotic citizen in a country under occupation? What kind of dilemmas does such an individual go through? What is the definition of “treason,” in those instances?
4. What happened during the six days between Hitler’s death and the Nazi surrender?
5. What is your definition of “defiance”?