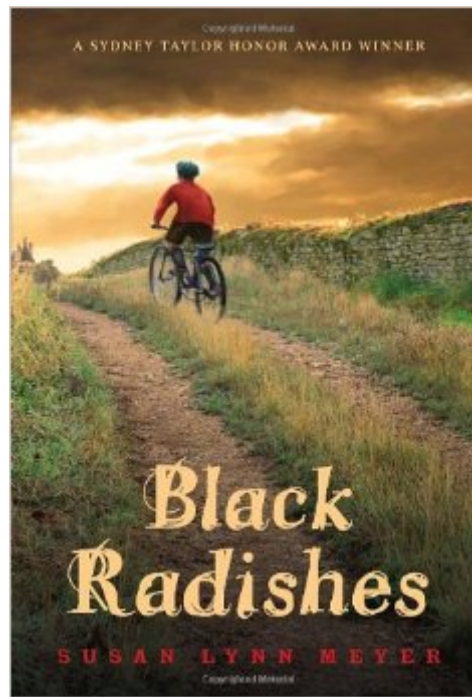


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# Black Radishes



## Synopsis

Sydney Taylor Honor Award Winner *Black Radishes* is a suspenseful WWII/Holocaust story, in which one boy learns what it means to be Jewish and French at a time when everything is changing. Gustave doesn't want to move from the exciting city to the boring countryside, far from his cousin Jean-Paul and his best friend, the mischievous Marcel. But he has no choice. It is March of 1940, and Paris is not a safe place for Jews. When Paris is captured by the Nazis, Gustave knows that Marcel, Jean-Paul, and their families must make it out of the occupied zone. And when he learns that his new friend Nicole works for the French Resistance, he comes up with a plan that just might work. But going into Occupied France is a risky thing to do when you are Jewish. And coming back alive? That is nearly impossible.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 790 (What's this?)

Paperback: 240 pages

Publisher: Yearling (November 8, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375858229

ISBN-13: 978-0375858222

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.5 x 7.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars See all reviews (33 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #368,814 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #85 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Holocaust #127 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Religious Fiction > Jewish #306 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Europe

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

With childlike enthusiasm, Gustave and his Boy Scout pals scour the streets of Paris in search of an elusive yellow feather, the last item needed to complete a scavenger hunt and win chocolate bars. These critical opening pages put the reader squarely in the mind of an eleven-year-old French Jewish boy, circa March 1940. We see a child filled with wonder and youthful vigor yet still aware of the ominous signposts cropping up at every turn: animals from the zoo being evacuated in case of

bombings, shopkeepers being turned into soldiers, and the Eiffel Tower being cloaked in gray paint to camouflage it from enemy planes. Soon, the reality of war hits home, as Gustave and his family, fearing an imminent German invasion, flee to the French countryside in the hope of eventually finding passage to America. Using a map from his geography class, Gustave demarcates the Germans' rapid progression by painting all Nazi-occupied countries in red. His innocence fades in increments with every harsh revelation--hearing about Jews being forced into prison camps, experiencing hunger for the first time during an aborted attempt to flee to Spain, and receiving an anti-Semitic note from the class bully. Meyer deftly weaves historical details with plenty of adventure in this fast-paced story, allowing her readers to identify with the young hero as he helps the French Resistance, bribes Nazi guards with black radishes, and helps his aunt and cousins escape to freedom. Maps of France and Europe help to illustrate Gustave's journey. Drawing from stories told to her by family members, Meyer delivers a rich, well-written tale of lost innocence and newfound courage. An excellent novel to introduce the subjects of the Nazi occupation of France and the Holocaust to children in grades 6-8. Allison Marks

"Black Radishes" is an exciting and carefully plotted story of a young Jewish boy whose family tries to stay one step ahead of the Nazis as they tighten their grip on France in the year 1940. The protagonist goes from being a happy and somewhat heedless 11-year old Parisian boy scout on a scavenger hunt, with little sense of the challenges the world has in store for his family and his friends, to a wiser and sadder young man of 12, whose imagination and good sense allow him to play an important part in outwitting the enemy and winning his family to relative safety. Meyer writes clearly and eloquently; well chosen details provide the flavor of the time period and setting of this well crafted novel. In addition to telling a charming and inspiring story, "Black Radishes," which includes two well constructed maps of Europe and France, also teaches its young readers about the history of World War II.

I loved this book. It is beautifully written, persuasively imagined, and completely compelling. I learned a lot from it on a practical level, and I liked it the way I like YA books that obviously also have an adult audience. I was glad for the author's note at the back telling about the sources for parts of the story, since throughout I couldn't help but wonder how the author knew the inside of the experience so very well. I also have to say that I'm glad that this is one of my son's first Holocaust books. The book was completely honest and straightforward, but in a way that he could digest at age 11. He could be presented with the facts and be aware of how horrible things were without

being so overwhelmed by the nightmare that he couldn't take the truth in. I know I'm going to be recommending (and giving) this book to a lot of my Jewish friends with children in the upcoming year. Here's my son's book report on the book: "This is a realistic novel about growing up in France in WW2. It has some sad parts, such as when Jean-Paul leaves his friends in Paris, and some terrifying scenes, like when Jean-Paul is travelling and the road he is on is attacked by German planes. This is a suspenseful and exciting read full of mystery and friendship."

A map at the beginning of a historical fiction book promises an adventure, and this story will not disappoint children looking for a safe entry into the subject of the Holocaust. Written for a younger audience than the usual YA literature on this topic, the horrors of the Nazi occupation of France are touched upon, but always through the eyes of 10 year old Gustave, a Jewish boy fleeing the encroaching Germans with his family. The first chapter finds the family in Paris, and, by following the provided map along with the storyline, the reader learns about such things as how France was split and occupied in 1940, and where it was possible for a Jewish family to go to escape the Nazis while waiting for visas to America. Gustave's story is inspired by author Meyer's father's experiences of this time, and the research she did is very thorough--from the descriptions of the Menier Chocolate Factory on the demarcation line, to the way a child may have ridden a bicycle to help ferry messages for the Resistance. The family is likable and Gustave is appropriately childlike without being too innocent. The first-time author error of over explanation of detail can be overlooked because the plot moves quickly and the danger builds as the Nazis come to control even the part of France where it had been considered safe for the family. When Gustave learns that German soldiers love to eat black radishes, he comes up with a clever scheme to use them as a distraction when helping his father to smuggle Jewish relatives across the line. Children will enjoy this well told story about the day-to-day struggles of a French family and not even realize how much they are learning about geography and history at the same time. Grades 4 - 6. Lisa Silverman

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