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**Course: ENGL 112B**

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**Book Talk**

**Name of the Book: Anya’s War**



* **Name of the Author: Andrea Alban**



**Author’s website**-<https://www.andreaalban.com/>

**Author’s information**: The author’s full name is Anjali Andrea Alban, born in Baltimore, Mary land. Her father, Jan Alban, was a doctor by profession, and her mother, Donna, raised Andrea dearly. Andrea, in childhood, loved reading books; she used to read ten books at one time. With this passion, Anjali self-published her first poetry book at six. The fascinating story about her childhood was she sold her first book to her mom for a nickel. Andrea Alban dreamed of writing like professional writers, and her goals and efforts took her to UC Berkeley, where she pursued a B.A. in Creative Writing. After that, her journey started as a writer, and she wrote nine books in total; the most popular books are *The Happiness Tree and Anya’s War.*

**About the book:** Anya’s war is one of her first Young Adults novels based on her dad’s real-life experiences during the Holocaust, the massive killing of Jews by Nazis. This is a fictional story about a fourteen-year-old girl named Anya who fled with her entire family from Odessa, Russia (today’s Ukraine) to Shanghai, China, in time of the Holocaust. While living in China, she finds an abandoned baby on the road and takes her home without anyone’s attention. So, the title itself explains how Anya, a teenager, is fighting many wars and experiencing many situations; such as her own feelings, her role model: Emelia Earhart and Mrs. Roosevelt, a new school, following religion and customs, relationships with the family, her crush on boys, and now the war of protecting this baby.

Besides the fiction, the story also informs of many historical events, such as World War II, the Nazi movement, the Japanese and Chinese wars, and the pandemic of the Cholera. It also captivates readers by giving insights into Jews and Chinese culture. In many places, women’s place in China, Jew religion, and the society as a whole. In addition, Andrea also wrote about the tender feelings of a teenage girl: her physical, social, and emotional development and her excitement and attraction towards boys.

Andrea wrote this book on her dad’s experiences in Shanghai and, main importantly, his guilt of how he found the baby and had to leave her back on the street on his mom’s commands. Her dad was her first inspiration; Andrea, who had writing skills in her bone, later decided to write a book on her dad’s childhood experience. She wrote the fictional story with a new setting, dialogues, and characters, keeping the same historical and cultural aspects in place.

**Summary:** Anya, the main character, comes from a Jewish background; her ancestors resided in Odesa, Russia ( today’s Ukraine) before moving to China, Shanghai. This was the time were many Jews faced persecution and died in Holocaust. Anya lived with her dad, mom, younger brother, and paternal grandparents. The entire family religiously followed the Jewish religion, culture, customs, and rituals, especially her dad and grandmother.

Anya is a fourteen-year teenager who is a very kind and responsible girl; the entire time, she worries about Amelia Earhart, a pioneer lady pilot and writer, and writes to president Roosevelt making requests to find her. Amelia Earhart and Mrs. Roosevelt were her heroes, and she wanted to be like them one day in her life. She highly admired her Aunt Paulina and wanted to become a doctor like her and travel to the United States. On the other hand, mom wanted her to become an opera singer like her and sing on the stage. Throughout the story, Anya struggles to express her feelings about becoming an opera singer to her mother.

Anya struggles to make new friends; until now, she made only one friend named Giselle, her best friend. She also fell in love with two boys in the story, Bobby Sassoon and Gibrel. But in the end, she finds Gabriel to be decent and genuine and gives more importance to him than Bobby. Anya had many Chinese servants in her house, but among all the servants, Li Mei, who is another main character in the story and plays a vital role in the story, is more reliable and honest. One day, Anya, on her way to the grocery store, finds an abandoned Chinese baby girl in the gutter and brings her home. Before coming home, Anya tries to find the baby’s mom and makes her visit an orphanage. During this course, Anya learns women's position and status in Chinese society are ridiculous and inhumane. After hearing all the disastrous stories, she decides to take the baby home. Anya gives the baby a very cute name Kisa, which means cat in the Hebrew language. She hides Kisa from the entire family and takes Kisa to her room, but she can’t keep the secret for a long time. Le Mei knows about the baby first and offers to help Anya with the situation. Mom completely disagrees with the idea of keeping the infant home eventhough she is pregnant for the third time and fails to understand the infant’s pain.

The story informs how this teenager is middle of so many wars in her life: Sabbath rituals, her attraction to Gabriel and Bobby, Emelia and her lost plane, her new school, and little Kisa. The main twist in the story comes when Le Mei’s friend finds Kisa’s mom in a weird situation. Le Mei wants to travel alone to return the baby to her mom, but Anya secretly follows her, and then the story becomes even more interesting when both Le Mei and Anya find little Georgi also following them.

I felt this was the real twist in the story as Anya had a big decision to make whether to go with Le Mei and return Kisa to her mom or take care of Georgi and return him back home. Anya, a smart teenager, makes her decision of leaving Kisa with Le Mei and take Georgi home. Unfortunately, on the way, a big plane crash happens on the road, and both children get injured; Georgi gets more injured and goes through extensive surgery in the hospital. The entire family meets at the end in the hospital, praying for Georgi and the other patients. After returning home safely, Anya learns Le Mei had safely dropped Kisa off to her mom. Anya and the entire family feel proud of helping poor infant Kisa and making the safe departure to her mom. Besides, Anya, at the end of the hospital, makes many decisions: not to follow Bobby Sassoon and help the patients in the hospital she also successfully expresses her feelings to her mom about becoming a doctor and not becoming a singer. We see her mom agrees and hugs her at the end. The story ends with lots of happiness and tranquility.

* **Three quotes: The book informs about historical and cultural events and teenage feelings. So, I have one quote from each situation.** 
  + **First quote: Anya waited until Bobby chair…………….that one twinset for you. (pg. 62).**

I feel this quote is very important and significant to the book as it touches on one of the main aspects of the book: Teenage girls’ feelings. Anya is a fourteen-year-old female; she is worried about her bra size and her attraction to boys around her. In this quote, she imagines Bobby holding her and kissing her. Then she also wants to go to movies with him and get gifts from him to show her friends and brag about being in love. This is obvious with any teenage girl or boy who wants to make boy/girlfriends and imagine things around them.

* + **How unfair that men …………….. How Ironic! (pg. 94)**

This quote is significant to the book and shows the women’s position in any society or culture. Anya is a Jewish girl, and she sees how her dad is the leader of the family, even when leading the prayers. She thinks that the culture and customs in China are similar to Egypt or more ridiculous and insane that men decide whether the female girl would stay alive or die. Even if she gets spared, she doesn't have the liberty to live her way; she has to obey her husband and father even with irrational and bizarre decisions. She learns how patriarchy and male dominancy were everywhere, irrespective of any geographical location, culture, or religion.

* + **Anya could no longer stop…………waved at him. (Pg. 174 & 175)**

This quote is representative of the book and is significant as it shows how Anya could express her dreams to her mom at the end. Her mom wanted Anya to become an opera singer and with this intention, she sends her to music classes in Shanghai. On the contrary, Anya admired Emelia, Mrs. Roosevelt, and her aunt Paulina who was a doctor in the U.S. She wanted to become successful like all three. But she struggles in the story to explain to her mom her choice of becoming a doctor. Fortunately, a time comes in the story when Anya explodes and expresses her feelings to her mom. This is crucial as everyone has their own opinions and dreams irrespective of age. Parents sometimes impose their wills on their children and do not understand their child’s interests. This book ends beautifully ends with a meaningful message that all parents need to guide and support their children in reaching their destiny, not forcing their children to listen to them, especially while pursuing their careers.

* **How might I use this book?**

I can use this book to teach students to respectfully express themselves to their parents. Also, this book teaches many family values and promotes heritage pride. In today’s times, children are moving away from their culture and heritage. Also, the book encourages us to show empathy to fellow human beings and care for each other even if it conflicts with one’s beliefs and customs.

* **What categories of books (Chapters 4 to 9 in Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story)**

Chapter 4, “Books about Real Experiences,” informs how teens today live with divorced parents in two separate houses and sometimes with grandparents; they learn skills from them to act rationally in their lives (pg. 114). Anya is a respectful girl and living in a joint family, she learns how to care about each other in the family. She also learns from her dad to brush off things in the family and not to take it to the heart. She learns how his dad and grandpa don’t feel bad when their wives insult them even in public. She also learns how her grandma takes care of her husband. She admires her dad and mom; a lovable couple. She sees how her mama cared for Georgi. With all these character traits, which she learned from her family, she helps Kisa and decides to protect her till the end. At last, she also decides to leave Bobby and not go to his party instead helps patients in the hospital.

Teenagers are young adults who also need to make wise choices in the life; for example, Anya could have left the infant on the street, but she decided to find her a safe place. Also, Anya made a wise decision and could differentiate between Gabriel and Bobby. After hearing about Anya's brother's surgery, she discovered that Bobby only cared about his party. On the other hand, she saw how Gabriel cared for little Kisa and appreciated her decision to bring her from the street. She did not fall for her desire; she made a wise decision to leave Bobby at one and not join his party but rather help patients in the hospital.

**Chapters 6 & 7,** “Books about Identity, Discrimination, Struggles with Decisions” and “Books about Courage and Survival,” inform how teenagers feel depressed about discrimination. This book gives courage to all teenagers to how there was discrimination in every moment in the book. For example, the true meaning of “coolie” in the book “bitter strength.” Anya also suffered discrimination from Natalie Sampson, who demeaned and called names for Chinese, Japanese, Poles, and Jews. But Anya stood her ground very firmly and acted bravely. The book informs how everyone once in their lifetime faces discrimination and how they have to act valiantly to combat such disparities in life.

* + **What age level?**

According to Lexile measure, the book is suitable for 11-14 years of age, and the count is 840 and is mainly recommended for 6th grade. I recommend reading this book to eighth graders as they will attend high school, helps them to make rational decisions, and more importantly, value family and others.

* + **Why should teens read this book?**
    - Because teens might face discrimination and this book teaches them to stay calm just like Anya and Gabriel stayed calm in every situation.
    - Because today teens are moving away from family values, and this book teaches them they should respect their elders and also protect them.
    - Because in this technological world, children do not care about caring for society or helping anyone, but neither Anya nor Gabriel was taking care of Kisa in this book.
    - Because teens are becoming irresponsible towards animals. This book teaches them empathy towards animals too. For example, Anya takes perfect care of her pet birds.
    - Teaches teens not to fall for their desires and make rational decisions.
* **Text complexities:** 
  + **Qualitative-** the text is readable, and the language is easy to understand. It is also filled with metaphors, but the good part is that the reader does not have to make an effort or research to understand these metaphors. Metaphors are explained in detail right after the metaphor appears. For example, Mr. Benatar says, “I will carve a larger share of the Chinese melon,” which is defined immediately in the following paragraph how it is figurative language about capitalists, which means“the harder we work in our businesses, the more Chinese money we will [put in our pockets.”
  + **Quantitative**- Lexile score is 840

**References**

Alban, A. A. (2016). *Anya's War*. Feiwel and Friends.

“The Lexile Framework for Reading.” *Lexile*, 9 Sept. 2022, http://www.lexile.com/