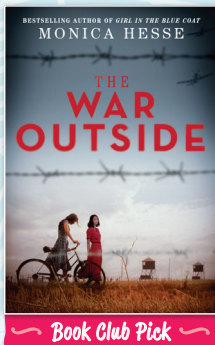


THE WAR OUTSIDE

by MONICA HESSE



ABOUT THE BOOK:

In 1944, World War II seems far away from Margot and Haruko—until they are uprooted to dusty Texas, all because of the places their parents once called home: Germany and Japan. When the girls meet at the “family internment camp” for those accused of colluding with the enemy, they find solace in their growing, secret friendship. But in a prison the government has deemed full of spies, can they trust anyone—even each other?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In the first chapter, Haruko’s mom tells their family story (pages 4-5), but leaves out some details. Why do you think that information is important to Haruko? Why do you think her mom left it out?
2. Why do you think the internment camp has separate housing for the German and Japanese prisoners, despite placing them in the same camp?
3. On page 48, Haruko recalls the moment her family got removed from their home and reveals that she suspects that her father is hiding something from her. How does Haruko’s speculation compare to the reality? Do you think Haruko would have acted any differently if she had known all the information from the start?
4. The Crystal City Internment Camp was a real place located in Crystal City, Texas. What other ways could the internment camp’s name, “Crystal City”, be interpreted?
5. What do you think would have happened if Margot and Haruko were ever discovered in the ice house together?
6. Some of Ken’s letters are censored by the government. What do you think was written in those censored portions? Do you think Ken knew that his words would be erased before getting to his family? If so, why did he write them?
7. Why did Margot and Mutti join Vati in Crystal City? Do you think it was a choice and, if so, do you think they made the right one?
8. On page 193, Haruko and Ken repeat lines from posters they saw in their childhood: “Loose lips might sink ships/An enemy’s ear might be near/Stop all loose talk to strangers.” What significance do these lines hold? How do they relate to the larger plot of this book?
9. How do you make sense of the scene where Mike, the guard who befriended Haruko, lies to defend his fellow guard?
10. Margot’s father’s distrust in America intensifies to the point where he takes extreme action. What factors do you think contributed to his decision?
11. At the end of the book, Haruko and her family’s lives change drastically. What factors led to that outcome? Do you think the characters in the book were justified in acting the ways that they did?
12. What parallels can you draw between the historical World War II events in the book and the world today? What themes from the book feel relevant today, and why?