

The Silver Sword

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Introduction

This ungraded summary is for the teacher's use only and should not be given to students.

The story

The Silver Sword takes place during and immediately after the Second World War. The Balicki family (Joseph, his wife Margrit and their three children Ruth, Edek and Bronia), who live in Warsaw, are separated by war. Joseph and Margrit have agreed that if this happens they will meet in Switzerland, where Margrit's parents live. The story follows the routes that the family take to meet up again.

Joseph is sent to prison by the Nazis when they invade Poland in 1940, but he eventually escapes and returns to Warsaw, which is now under German occupation. He discovers that Margrit has been taken away to Germany by the Nazis, and that the children have disappeared – perhaps they were killed in the war. In the ruins of his old home he also meets a strange orphaned boy, Jan. He tells Jan about his three children, and asks him, should he meet them, to tell them to go to Switzerland. He gives Jan the Silver Sword – in fact this is a paper knife which belonged to Margrit and which Joseph found in the ruins. Then Joseph sets off across Germany towards Switzerland.

In fact, the three children remain in and around Warsaw throughout the war, and are still there when the city falls under Russian control. They then meet Jan, who tells them about his meeting with their father. All four children decide to try to get to Switzerland.

Central Europe is full of refugees, travelling in different directions. Sometimes the children are helped by friendly people, or by soldiers trying to do a difficult job in impossible circumstances. They spend some time in refugee camps, some time living rough, and some time staying and working on a farm. They travel on foot, by rail or in army lorries. Being Polish, they are supposed to be returned to Poland, and few people will believe them when they say they must get to Switzerland. In addition, Edek becomes seriously ill, and Jan, who has suffered for years in wartime Warsaw, is always getting into trouble and refuses to believe that not all soldiers are his enemies.

Finally, the four children reach the shore of Lake Constance and from the refugee camp there, discover that their parents are still alive and are indeed in

Switzerland. They cross the lake and are reunited. Jan, whose parents are never traced, stays with the Balicki family.

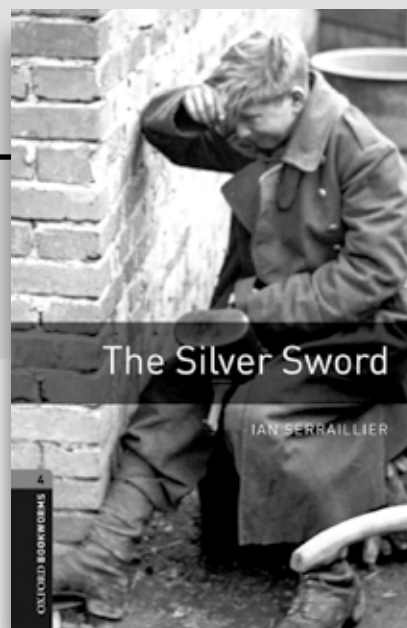
Background to the story

The story is set against the background of the Second World War (1939–45) and its aftermath. Poland was invaded by Germany at the beginning of the war, and for most of the war remained under Nazi occupation until the arrival of the Soviet army in 1944. But for the children, especially Jan, the politics of the war are irrelevant. Some soldiers are kind to them, some are not, and it makes very little difference to the children what governments and armies do. They also discover that people who should perhaps be their enemies can be their friends, as they do with the Wolffs, whose son had been killed while serving in the German army occupying Warsaw.

Before reading

Here are some ways to help your students approach the story:

- 1 Give students the title of the book and show them the picture on the cover. Ask them to try and guess what kind of story it is.
- 2 Give students a copy of the text on the back cover of the book, and of the story introduction on the first page. When they have read the texts, ask them a few questions about the story, or use the Before Reading Activities in the back of each Bookworm.
- 3 Use the pre-reading activity in this worksheet.
- 4 If there is a recording of this title, play the first few pages and stop at an interesting point.



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Pre-reading activity

What's going to happen?

1 *This is the story of four Polish children during the Second World War. Which of these things do you think will happen?*

	YES	NO
1 One or more of the children will be killed.		
2 One of the children will kill a soldier.		
3 The children will sometimes be very hungry.		
4 Some adults will help the children.		
5 There will be a lot of fighting.		
6 The children will sometimes have to steal things.		
7 Soldiers will always be cruel to the children.		
8 When the war ends the children will have no more problems.		
9 Governments and politicians will do a lot to help the children.		

2 *Which of these things do you think will appear in the story? You can add four more words to this list.*

	YES	NO
1 Aeroplanes		
2 Guns		
3 Lorries		
4 Soldiers		
5 Bicycles		
6 Bombs		
7		
8		
9		
10		

To the teacher

Aim: To familiarize the students with the setting and to predict some of the plot

Time: 15–20 minutes

Organization: Give one copy of the worksheet to each student or group of students. Ask the students to make their predictions and then discuss them

with the class. There are no 'correct' answers to this activity, as even after reading the story some of the questions (for example question 5 and question 9 in Activity 1) cannot be answered with a straight 'yes' or 'no'. Students could be encouraged to retain their sheets for comparison once they have read the story.

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While reading activity

What happens next?

1 What do you think will happen next?

	YES	NO
1 Ruth and Bronia will try and go to Switzerland.		
2 Edek will return from Posen.		
3 Ruth and Bronia will try to get to Posen and find Edek.		
4 Jan will do whatever Ruth and Bronia do.		
5 Joseph will come back to Warsaw and find Ruth and Bronia.		
6 The children will stay in Warsaw.		
7 Ivan will help the children find their parents.		
8 Ruth and Bronia will go to Russia with Ivan.		
9 Edek will go to Switzerland and write to Ruth and Bronia from there.		



2 Now complete these sentences.

I think that Ruth and Bronia will

I think that Edek will

I think that Ivan will

I think that Joseph will

I think that Margrit will

I think that Jan will

To the teacher

Where: At the end of Chapter 5

Aim: To encourage predictions on the development of the story

Time: 15–25 minutes

Organization: Give one copy of the worksheet to

each student or group of students. Ask the students to make their predictions in the first activity and then to write predictions in the second activity.

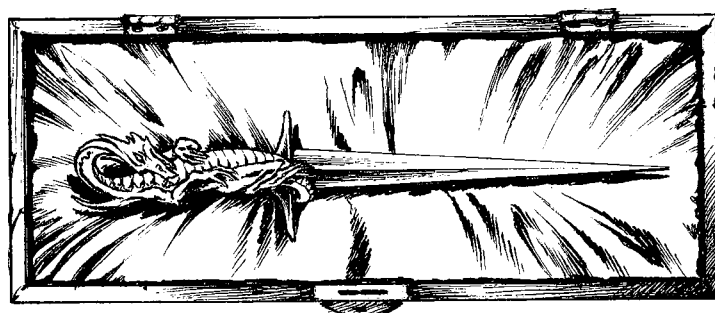
Key: Activity 1: the 'yes' answers are 1, 3 and 4. Activity 2 is an open activity.

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After reading activity

Order the events

EVENT	ORDER
a Edek helps the Burgomaster after the crash.	
b Ruth finds Edek in Posen.	
c Joseph leaves Warsaw to go to Switzerland.	
d Jan realises that he has left the silver sword at the Wolffs.	
e The Burgomaster tells them that they must return to Poland.	
f The children enter the American zone.	
g The children cross the lake.	
h Joseph escapes from prison camp.	
i The children finally meet their parents.	
j The Americans send Jan to prison for stealing food from trains.	
k The I.T.S. tell the children that their father is in Switzerland.	
l Jan meets Ruth and Bronia.	
m Ruth and Bronia find Jan and Edek again – in a haystack.	
n The children meet the Wolffs.	
o Joseph returns to Warsaw and meets Jan.	
p The four children take a train to Berlin.	
q The children meet Joe Wolski.	
r Ivan tells Ruth that Edek is in Posen.	
s The children escape by canoe.	



To the teacher

Aim: To order, revise, remember what has been read, summarize

Time: 10–20 minutes

Organization: Give one copy of the worksheet to each student or group of students. Ask them to try and remember the order in which events happened,

without looking at the book. Once they have agreed an order, they may wish to go back and check that they have remembered correctly by referring to the book.

Key: 1h, 2o, 3c, 4l, 5r, 6b, 7p, 8f, 9j, 10n, 11a, 12e, 13s, 14m, 15d, 16q, 17k, 18g, 19i.