***The Book Thief - Markus Zusak***

*Presented by Chris Aronson for Dr. Mary Warner*

Author’s Website: http://www.zusakbooks.com/

Author Information/Biography:

*The Book Thief* was written by Sir Markus Zusak, born June 23, 1975. He is best known for *The Book Thief* & *The Messenger*; though he also wrote four other books: *The Underdog* (which took him seven years to publish from 1992-1999)*, Fighting Ruben Wolfe (2000), When Dogs Cry* - sequel to *Fighting Ruben Wolfe (2001),* and *Bridge of Clay*, which comes out later this year.

Zusack was born in Sydney, Australia - although neither of his parents are natives there. His mother Lisa is from Germany, and his father Helmut is from Austria. His parents moved to Australia in the late 1950’s. One can’t help but believe that the origins of his parents birthplace heavily influenced the writing of Zusak’s classic novel, *The Book Thief*. Because the book takes place during the horrible events of World War II, I’m almost certain his parents had a multitude of stories and experiences with which he was able to construe his extraordinary book.

Early in his professional career, Zusak began teaching English and Writing at the high school level - eventually going on to study English and History at the University of New South Wales where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts and Diploma of Education.

*The Book Thief* - Summary:

*The Book Thief* takes place in 1939 in a small town called Molching inside of Nazi Germany. Our protagonist, Liesel, loses her brother on the train to Molching, who is subsequently buried alongside the tracks. This is where Liesel’s story takes off and she finds a book dropped by one of the gravediggers making her brother’s grave. Liesel becomes enamored with books ever since finding it - and was inspired to steal a few more books - even though she didn’t yet know how to read. Liesel is taken in by her adoptive parents, Hans and Rosa Hubermann. She begins to take books wherever she can find them - even book burnings. Hans later hides a Jewish man named Max from the Nazi regime, allowing Liesel a chance at a new brother. After Hans is forcibly enlisted in the armed forces, Liesel begins to write her life story in a blank book given to her by the mayor’s wife - and whilst writing in the basement, an air-raid kills everyone except Liesel.

Notable Quotes:

1. The Fuhrer’s voice roared from German radios. “We will not give up. We will not rest. We will be victorious. Our time has come.” The German invasion of Poland had begun and people were gathered everywhere, listening to the news of it. Munich Street, like every other main street in Germany, was alive with war. The smell, the voice. Rationing had begun a few days earlier--the writing on the wall--and now it was official. England and France had made their declaration on Germany. To steal a phrase from Hans Hubermann, “The fun begins”. (*The Book Thief* - pg.39)
2. “Then again, who am I kidding? I’m in most places at least once, and in 1943, I was just about everywhere.” (*The Book Thief* - pg. 539)
3. “Yes, mama.” She was about to open the door. “But you’ll come and get me if he wakes up, won’t you? Just make something up. Scream out like I’ve done something wrong. Start swearing at me. Everyone will believe it, don’t worry.” (*The Book Thief* - pg. 165)

Bibliographic Resources:

*The Book Thief* is such a dynamic book that it stretches across many of the chapters we have read in *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning*. It clearly fits the bill for chapter four: Books about Real-Life Experiences - it doesn’t get much more real-life than the story of a girl living amidst Nazi Germany. We see the differences in the relationship between Liesel and Rosa and Liesel and Hans for example, a real experience many children have with their parents. Chapter five, “Books about Facing Death and Loss”, represents the theme of the book perfectly, as the entirety of the story is encapsulated in death and loss surrounding Nazi Germany. This also ties in with the theme of chapter 6, “Books about Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions.” Identity (being a Jew in particular) was the biggest identity issue for a character such as Max. Zusak has been writing professionally since 1999 and will release his next book on October 9 of this year.

Analysis:

After reading *The Book Thief*, I would argue that it falls under the Lexile Code of a Non-Conforming book. A Non-Conforming book is “good for high-ability readers who still need age-appropriate content. The reason I classified it as such is because this book definitely contains complexities an advanced reader would comprehend, but doesn’t delve into the realm of impossibility. This is the story of a teenage girl after all, making it relatable and appropriate for a myriad of age groups.

*The Book Thief* has an ATOS book level of 5.1 and is recommended for upper grades (9-12). Interestingly enough, I was that age when I first read the book myself, and it was/still is my favorite book of all time. This book is perfect for advanced level readers who are willing and able to research the complexities of World War II to greater understand the story.