

# When Courage Comes

## Book Club Discussion Guide

**Spoiler Alert:** This discussion guide contains spoilers to *When Courage Comes*.

1. Over 400,000 German prisoners were incarcerated in the United States during WWII. Did you know about POW camps like Camp Huntsville before reading *When Courage Comes*? What else did you learn for the first time?
2. From the beginning, Stephan's fear of his own Nazi comrades sets the tone for struggles that await him. He is clearly afraid. Did you sympathize with him? Were you skeptical?
3. Private Donaldson, the MP who was with Ralph when Stephan saves his life observes that boys like Stephan are just "good people in a bad army." At the time Ralph strongly resists that sentiment. Why?
4. Rose carries her own dark secret. Why do you think it took so long for her to face this injustice and do something about it? Was it enough for you that she eventually did the right thing or was it too little, too late?
5. Stephan's family bible becomes an unexpected influence in Ralph's struggle to do the right thing. At one point he contemplates the words of Stephan's mother scribbled in the margins and thinks, "Oma could have written these words to me." Is this a turning point for Ralph?
6. Secondary characters in the book play various supporting roles in the development of Stephan, Rose, and Ralph. There's quite a list: Hugo, Oma, Heller, Uncle Pete, Clyde, and Bobby Ford to name a few. Is there a particular character that stands out for you? Maybe someone you admire, empathize with, or hate?
7. How did Hugo's death affect you? Did it surprise you that the Nazis were able to get away with it? Would you have been as courageous as him?
8. Stephan, Ralph and Rose battle hypocrisy in different forms – Nazis, racism, intolerance. They follow different paths to courageous choices. Whose courage inspires you the most and why?
9. A recurring theme is the tug of war between truth and lies. Lies necessary to protect. Lies used to deceive and gain trust. Lies to survive! Are there moments in the story where you think, "I would have done the same thing."
10. When Ralph returns home for Thanksgiving, he eventually questions Rose about her relationship with a prisoner, not understanding of course that it is the man who saved his life. Rose responds to her brother's inquisition by saying, "I can explain it to you Ralph, but I can't understand it for you." What does her response mean to you?
11. The epilogue reveals a twist in Heller's journey. Did it change your perception of him? If so, how?
12. Many of us have relatives who served and perhaps even died during WWII. Now, generations removed from that conflict, is there anything about this story that shatters stereotypes or makes you feel different about your perception of this global struggle?

