

## Book Club Questions - The Interpreter

1. When the OSS approaches Kurt to return to Europe to act as an Interpreter he is hesitant. Why do you think that is? Would Kurt have been better off to move on with his life and leave Europe and his past behind?
2. Whether the OSS actually recruited former Nazis as operatives in the Cold War is unproven. They did though recruit former Nazis into programs such as Operation Paperclip and other similar projects. How do you feel about that? Should former Nazis have been excused for their crimes? Was this action a betrayal of America's Jewish community, and ultimately America's morals and values?
3. Many thousands of Jewish children between the ages of 3 and 17 were saved through the Kindertransport program. Sadly, many never saw their families again. Similar attempts to evacuate children on this scale were not attempted in other countries under Nazi domination or the threat of it, such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary, France and Poland. Why do you think this was the case?
4. Elsa is persecuted by the Nazi regime because her father is a Jewish, anti-Nazi, activist and artist. How did the Nazis feel about mixed-race people known as mischlings? How did they feel about modern art and why? Why do you think they were so afraid of activism and resistance? Can you think of any other similar situations in modern history or even today?
5. When thinking about the United States, Kurt ponders the situation of African Americans. On page 9, he considers that Nazi racial laws already exist in the United States, only the victims are African Americans in the Jim Crow south. How do you feel about that? Do you think Hitler borrowed some of his methods and ideas from southern racists in the United States?
6. How do you think most Americans felt about a flood of Jewish refugees in the 1930's? Why? Was anti-Semitism a major problem in this country at that time? Did Americans want their sons to die in a war to save Europe's Jews? Did Americans associate Jews with communism?
7. What similarities and differences do you see between the immigration crisis in the 1930's and the immigration crises we see today, both in terms of people from the middle east and Africa escaping to Europe, and central Americans attempting to come to the United States? As a Jew, do you feel we have a responsibility to help those fleeing political and economic violence?
8. On page 207, Hertz observes that even in the trenches of the Great War he didn't feel more helpless. How do you feel about the way Hertz internalized and handled his stress and did he do the right things to save his family? Should he have been more careful when facing dangers?
9. In the book, Kurt's uncle Sam observes that the Belgian Jews, like many others elsewhere, didn't think they would suffer the same fate as their German Jewish

- neighbors. This belief was common from country to country. Why do you think Europe's Jewish communities didn't believe what was right in front of their eyes?
10. Berta is left alone in Vienna with the responsibility to complete the liquidation of whatever assets the Berlins still have and to transport that wealth out of the Reich illegally. Considering the status of women at that time, what fears do you think she faced about what she needed to do and how did she defy stereotypes to succeed in her escape?
  11. When Kurt and Saul have von Hauptmann in their hands, they come to realize that they are faced with a huge moral problem in how they will ultimately dispose of him. Kurt argues that to kill him is to become like him. What do you think? What should they have done with him? How subject to arbitrary concepts of morality should Kurt and Saul be when dealing with a confessed murderer?
  12. Elsa has a unique situation in her story. How do you feel about her continued devotion to her faith in the face of the abuse she and her family experienced by the Nazis? Should she embrace her Jewishness? How does her faith compare to that of the Mandelbaums? How does their devotion compare to your own? Should she be judged for her choice?
  13. Executing orders was a common excuse used by Nazis after the war to explain their behavior. Von Hauptmann spends a good deal of time discussing his devotion to executing orders and to executing policy, and what to do when those concepts conflict with each other. Do you think he was just an anti-Semite hiding behind his "orders," or was he merely a functionary in the Nazi regime, doing his duty? Where does a citizen of a nation draw a line between dedication to one's country and moral actions?
  14. Colonel McClain and Captain Rosenthaller clearly break regulations to pursue the enlistment of von Hauptmann to their program. They, like von Hauptman, consider themselves patriots. What do you think? Did they cross the line or was their fear of a coming conflict with the Soviets justification for what they were planning? How dangerous did the fear of the Soviet Union and communism become to American democracy in the decade that followed?
  15. What role did the Berlin's gentile friends play in their escape? Could they have escaped without their help?
  16. Both Kurt and Hertz kill a man in the course of the story. They both contemplate what the act of killing does to one's mind, how it changes them. What do you think the act of taking a life does to a person? If it occurs in war is it different?
  17. The Interpreter is a novel based on real events. In this case the book's two storylines incorporate elements of the stories of two different people. Authors often have to take a bit of literary license to make a story more readable. How do you feel about that? Did the format of a novel help you to feel and understand the experience of these characters, or do you prefer to read an actual history or memoir of a person's experience? Or do characters in a novel enable you to feel closer to the story?