

***Underground Soldier*, by Marsha Skrypuch**

Teacher's Guide

Summary

In 1943, in the midst of World War II, Luka is an injured slave labourer in a Nazi work camp. He escapes in a wagon of corpses and tries to walk back home to Kyiv in the hopes of finding his father who had been imprisoned in Siberia by the Soviets (Luka's mother was captured by the Nazis and is a slave labourer at an unknown camp). Instead of walking away from the war, he ends up walking right into the Front. He is saved by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, a multi-ethnic group of underground freedom fighters who steal weapons from the Nazis and the Soviets and fight both of these brutal regimes. Luka joins and fights with them, but he never loses his desire to find his parents and somehow be reunited with his beloved Lida, who he last saw at the slave labour camp.

Underground Soldier is a companion novel to *Stolen Child* and *Making Bombs for Hitler*.

Historical Background

World War II is popularly viewed as the war against Hitler and the Nazis, and while this is largely true from a western perspective, to Ukrainians, Poles, and other Slavs whose homelands were the battleground, the Nazis were not the only enemy. Stalin and the Soviets also committed genocide before and during World War II, and they were responsible for even more deaths than the Nazis.

Why are Hitler's crimes common knowledge and Stalin's are not? In part, because Stalin was allied with us during the latter part of WWII. "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." (ancient proverb)

At the beginning of World War II, from September 1939 to June 1941, Stalin and Hitler were on the same side, and together they divided between them what was then Poland (now Poland and Ukraine). In June of 1941, Hitler betrayed Stalin by attacking the Soviet Union. US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill allied themselves with Joseph Stalin, Dictator of the Soviet Union, in order to fight the Hitler and the Nazis. Stalin's large-scale human rights abuses in the decade before the war were known to both western leaders, but there was an urgent need to stop Hitler at all costs.

While the alliance did achieve its goal of defeating Hitler and the Nazis and ending WWII, it was the people who lived in the Eastern European war zone between the Nazis and the Soviets who paid the price with their lives. Of the 50 million people killed worldwide during WWII, 10 million were Ukrainians -- 25% of the Ukrainian population: victims of Stalin and Hitler. This figure includes 600,000 Ukrainian Jews, or 10% of the 6 million Jews killed in WWII. To put this into context, Germany lost 4.2 million citizens in WWII, Japan lost 2.35 million, Canada lost 37,000, America lost 400,000, and the United Kingdom lost 388,000.

Official statistics regarding Ukraine's devastating death count has largely been lost because during the Second World War, Ukraine as a nation did not exist. Ukrainians were called either "Polish" or "Russian/Soviet" depending on which country had occupied their part of Ukraine. This means that in official 'total losses by country' lists, Ukrainian losses are absent. The Soviet Union lists their losses at 20 million, but that is often interpreted to mean 20 million Russians. In reality, approximately 6 million were ethnic Russians. The rest were ethnic minorities, primarily Ukrainians, Poles, and Jews, killed by their own government as frequently as by the Nazis. Also absent in the 'losses by country' charts are the Jewish losses. Six million Jews of many nationalities were killed by the Nazis but an unidentified number were also killed by the Soviets.

Important Terms/Events

Nazi – an abbreviation of the German pronunciation of "National Socialist" or the National Socialist German Workers' Party. Headed by Adolf Hitler in 1920 until his death by suicide in April 1945. The ideology (a system of ideas and ideals) of Nazism was racist, militaristic, expansionist, and nationalist. Strong belief in the superiority of the "Aryan" or Germanic peoples, and the inferiority of Jews, Slavs and other groups. During WWII, Germany was under Nazi rule. Germany and its captured nations were called The Third Reich. People who were considered inferior were sent to work camps and concentration camps.

Hitler – Adolf Hitler was the dictator of Nazi Germany from 1934 to his suicide in 1945. He was responsible for starting World War II and for ordering people killed based on their race, including the murder of six million Jewish men, women, children, and babies, which has come to be known as **The Holocaust**.

Soviet – a direct translation from Russian is "council" but the term is a colloquial way of referring to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) which was a cluster of countries that had been forced into a one-party state run by the Communist Party in Moscow and in which every aspect of life was highly regulated by the central government. The state took over private property and frowned on religion. Those who owned property or demonstrated belief in God were punished as "enemies of the people". The ideology was militaristic, expansionist, and nationalist. Like Nazism, the Soviets had a hierarchy of humans, but where the Nazis' hierarchy was built on race, the Soviets' was built on perceived "enemies of the state" which was ever changing.

Stalin – Joseph Stalin was the dictator of the Soviet Union from about 1924 until his death in 1953.

During the winter of 1933–34, he withdrew food from eastern Ukraine and sealed the borders so that the populace starved to death by the millions. The area was then repopulated with ethnic Russians. This act of genocide is now known as **The Holodomor** — literally 'death by hunger'. Stalin ordered Koreans, Poles, Germans, Chechens, Tatars, and other ethnic groups deported from their homelands to prison camps in Siberia, Central Asia and other harsh, remote regions, where large numbers of them died. Under Stalin's rule, so-called "socially harmful people", such as the homeless, the unemployed, and former aristocracy, were rounded up and shot. It is

impossible to know how many people were killed as a result of Stalinism. Estimates range from 15 to 20 million or more.

Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact – This was a non-aggression pact between the Soviets and the Nazis in which they agreed to carve up Poland together and to not attack each other. For the first two years of World War II, Stalin fought on the same side as Hitler, against the Allies. After Hitler attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Allies accepted Stalin on their side, and they both fought against Hitler and the Nazis.

Slave Labour Camps – Both the Soviets and the Nazis had slave labour camps. Perceived enemies of the state were stripped of their rights and sent to camps where they were forced to work under brutal conditions. Millions of prisoners in both dictatorships died from starvation and exhaustion.

The Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukrainska povstanska armiiia or UPA)- was a well-organized military network of guerrilla fighters — men and women whose goal was independence for Ukraine. The UPA fought both the Nazis and the Soviets and operated throughout Ukraine, but were mostly concentrated in Volyn, the Carpathian Mountains, and the forests of western Ukraine. The UPA was formed in response to the brutality of both regimes and drew its members from many nationalities and all parts of the populace, although most of its members were Ukrainian. At its height, the army consisted of 45,000 to 60,000 fighters.

Babyn Yar -is a ravine located in Kyiv, beside a Jewish cemetery. Over the course of two days, from September 29 to 30, 1941, the Nazis killed 33,771 Jews at this site. This was one of the largest single massacres in World War II. By the end of the war, Babyn Yar would claim more than 100,000 other Nazi victims, including Roma, Ukrainians, and Soviet prisoners of war. The Babyn Yar massacre of Jews was by no means an isolated incident. Mass graves of Jews and others executed by the Nazis can be found throughout what is now Poland and Ukraine.

Bykivnia - was a village in the woods on the north-eastern fringe of Kyiv. Between 1936 and 1941, the Soviets used the area as a massive yet secret burial ground. The site is still being excavated. It is believed that more than 100,000 Ukrainians and others who had been tortured and killed by the NKVD (Soviet secret police) are buried there. Bykivnia and the massacre of Ukrainians by the Soviets is by no means an isolated incident. Mass graves of Ukrainians and others executed by the Soviets during and prior to WWII can be found throughout what is now Poland and Ukraine. The most famous Soviet mass grave is in **Katyn Forest**, where 8,000 Polish officers were murdered and buried. They had been taken prisoner by the Soviets during the 1939 Soviet invasion of Poland.

Forced repatriation – is when a person is forced to return to the country of their citizenship or origin, even if they don't wish to or if it is unsafe for them to return. This occurred after the war because of **The Yalta Agreement**, when Stalin demanded of Churchill and Roosevelt that Soviet citizens captured by the Nazis be returned to the Soviet Union. Many of those who did return were either killed outright or sent to brutal slave labour camps in Siberia, because Stalin considered

anyone who was captured by the Nazis to be a traitor. Those who managed to escape to the West hid their wartime experiences because they feared being sent back to the Soviet Union. Their stories only began to emerge after the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Comprehension Questions

Chapter 1

1. The novel opens with a grisly chapter detailing the main characters escape. Is this an effective way to start the story? Why or why not?

Chapter 2

2. Where did Luka escape from? What was he forced to do for a job while at this camp?

3. "You have the tools to heal yourself", Luka's father once told him. What did he mean by this? (pg. 7)

4. Luka says he doesn't blame the British and Americans for bombing German farms, that if soldiers can't eat, they can't fight. Do you agree with this common military tactic? If you were in Luka's position, do you think you would blame the British and the Americans?

Chapter 3

6. Using context clues, try to determine what 'kolkhoz' means. (pg.11)

Chapter 4

7. What did Luka have to give to the cow Beela before he could successfully milk her? What did he want to do with the milk? (pg. 17)

8. Who are Helmut and Margarete? How did they end up on the small farm in Germany? Why doesn't Luka feel sorry for them? (pg. 21)

9. What does this German couple do when they discover Luka? How do you think this makes him feel? (pg. 27)

Chapter 5

10. What types of thoughts come into Luka's head as he begins to eat his dinner of eggs?

Chapter 6

11. Why do you think it was so confusing and scary for the Ukrainians to see the Germans marching into Kyiv? What do you think Luka meant when he said "...they don't seem to be the devils Stalin told us they were"? (pg.30)

Chapter 7

12. Why does Luka have a hard time trusting the kindness of Helmut and Margarete? (pg. 37)

13. What does Luka mean when he says he will "...become as soft as Martin's bed" if he remains hidden at the old farm house for too long?

14. From 1939-1941, when Hitler and Stalin were on the same side of the war, what did they decide to do with Poland? What happened to the people who were moved? (pg. 40)

Chapter 8

15. Why did Luka's heart stop when he saw Helmut and Margarete's son for the first time?

16. What important war developments did Officer Schmidt tell his parents about? (pg. 45)

Chapter 9

17. What does Luka mean when he says "...now that I knew Officer Schmidt has slept in these sheets, I felt the weight of them like chains"?

18. Why was it so important to Luka that he had Lida's blessing to try to escape from the hospital at the slave camp? Would it have been important to you if you were in Luka's position?

19. Why do you think Helmut and Margarete went to such risks to help Luka? Do you think you would have done the same?

Chapter 10

20. In a flashback, Luka says to his old friend David "Sometimes you need to be more fearful." What does Luka mean? Is it good advice? (pg. 59)

21. What happened in the summer of 1941 that changed everything for Luka and his family? (pg 60)

22. What do the Soviet leaders do before the Nazi's arrive in Kyiv? Do they fight? (pg. 61)

23. What happened to Luka's grandfather, Dido?

Chapter 11

24. Why is Luka grateful that he feels bird poo on the back of his neck as he walks through the German forest?

25. Approximately how many bodies were said to be buried in the Bykivnia Forest?

26. Why would Stalin kill so many of his own people? Who do the Nazis blame for all of these killings? (pg. 66)

Chapter 12

27. Why did the Soviets hide bombs in buildings all over Kyiv before they left?

28. What ended up happening to Luka's friend David and the rest of the Jews who were 'evacuated' from Kyiv? (pg. 75)

Chapter 13

29. What happened to Luka's tenth ration box when he was down by the river?

30. Luka meets a girl in the forest who saves his life. How did she protect him from being discovered by the soldiers who were searching for runaways? (pg. 81)

31. What are Nazi Bandit Hunters? (pg. 82)

32. What kind of survival tips did Martina teach Luka? (pg. 84)

33. What does Luka plan to do once he reaches the mountains? (pg. 86)

Chapter 14

34. Luka and Martina crawl through a series of tunnels at the end of chapter 14. Do you think these tunnels will play a role in the rest of the story? How? (pg. 94)

Chapter 15

35. After much trekking through the forest, where do Luka and Martina find themselves at the beginning of chapter 15?

Chapter 16

36. What happens to Luka and Martina after they make it across the river safely? Why is Luka so concerned about discovering which side of the war these people are on? (pg 101)

37. What is the Red Cross? Where do they take Luka and Martina?
38. Why was this a perfect spot to build an underground hospital? (pg. 103)
39. How does Luka help the Red Cross on his very first night in the underground hospital? (pg. 107)
40. Vera asks Luka if he wants the Soviets to win the war. Why do you think this is a hard question for Luka to answer? (pg. 108)
41. What is an Ostarbeiter?
42. What does Vera call the group who saved the Nazi soldier's life? What is the relay system that they use to keep the location of their hideout secret? (pg. 109)
43. What makes Luka realize he can't go to Kyiv to find his father? What does he decide to do instead? (pg.111)

Chapter 17

44. Who is the Ukrainian Insurgent Army fighting against? What are they fighting for? (pg. 113)
45. Why is it so important that the location of the underground hospital remain a secret? (pg. 115)

Chapter 18

46. Luka and Martina each have very specific talents that are helpful to the UPA. What are these talents?

Chapter 19

47. Why is Luka disappointed when he is assigned to protect a small village? (pg. 124)
48. What happened to the small village church in Zhuraki? (pg. 126)
49. Why does Luka feel guilty about the fire at the church?
50. Where were Oleh and Pavlo taken after they were captured? What kind of prison was it, and who was it run by?
51. What does Luka do the first time he kills someone? (pg. 132)

52. By the end of chapter 19, Luka has been on his feet for 48 hours. After attacking the prison, how else did he help? (pg. 135)

Chapter 20

53. As winter turns into the spring of 1944, Luka and the UPA see more and more Soviet planes flying over them. What are these planes doing? (pg. 137)

54. Is Luka happy to be moved from being a soldier to helping Vera in the hospital? Which role do you think you would be best suited for?

55. Luka has recurring nightmares about Lida. What do they usually involve?

56. Why did Luka and the UPA have to evacuate their current camp and escape to the mountains? (pg 140)

Chapter 21

57. What happens to Martina as the UPA army are trying to evacuate? What was her injury? (pg. 143)

58. What was the last thing Martina asks Luka to do? Why is this so important to her?

Chapter 22

59. What was the astounding news that Luka and the UPA receive in the spring of 1945? (pg. 147)

60. What was Luka's new job going to be? What does Luka wish he could do instead? (pg. 147)

61. Luka headed west after leaving the UPA. Who did he end up travelling with? What information did he learn about the war? (pg. 152)

62. How old was Luka at this point?

Chapter 23

63. What does the Red Cross offer to do for refugees that will "...heal their soul"? (pg. 155)

64. Why were Luka's days in the displaced persons' camp so hard for him? (pg. 157)

65. What extraordinary news does Luka get about Lida at the end of chapter 23?

Chapter 24

66. Where did Luka eventually find Lida? (pg. 163)
67. Luka asks Lida how she managed to stay alive, and she says “Sometimes you have to fight back.” What do you think she means by this?
68. What do Luka and Lida do over the next weeks while they are at the displaced persons’ camps?

Chapter 25

69. What incredible news does Luka get about his father from a Red Army soldier?
70. Luka is worried that Stalin considers him a traitor because he was caught by the Nazis. What does the Red Army soldier explain to him so that Luka believes it is now safe to return to Kyiv?
71. How do Lida and Luka end up being separated from each other again?

Chapter 26

72. What happens once Luka enters into the Soviet Zone? Why did the Red Army soldiers lie to him?
73. After all of his ordeals, Luka finally decides there is only one person he cannot live without. Who is it?

Chapter 27

74. How does Lida react to Luka when he manages to make it back to her camp? What promises do they make to each other?

Epilogue

75. What is the happiest day of Luka’s life?
76. How do Luka and Lida end up in Canada?

Essay Questions

Imagine if you were a young person, living in the buffer zone between the Soviets and the Nazis, knowing that whichever side won, you were likely to die. What are your choices? How would you cope? Where would you turn for help? What skills do you have that you could rely on to survive?

“Why was it always the civilians who suffered the most in these wars?” What has Luka seen and experienced that makes him say this? Do you agree with his statement? Do you think this applies only to WWII, or to other wars that have taken place? Is this taking place in 2015?

Culminating Tasks

These culminating tasks have been designed with a variety of learning styles in mind. There should be a project that appeals to all learners, and can easily be modified to suit all needs. You can allow students to choose their own task or assign them, and many activities are well-suited for group work. Many of these tasks incorporate other curriculum expectations (Fine Art, Technology, History, and Writing, to name a few).

- ▶ Make a missing persons poster for one of Luka’s loved ones. Include their names and any physical characteristics that might help them be identified. Be sure to list where they were last seen, and where Luka thinks they might be now.
- ▶ Draft a letter from Luka to his parents or Lida. Put yourself in his shoes. What types of information would you tell them? Would you be honest about the work you were doing with the UPA? What would you ask them?
- ▶ Create a timeline of events, starting with the onset of WWII. Choose a character, and plot their actions throughout the novel onto this timeline. Use at least two different sources to gather the facts needed to make this timeline.
- ▶ The main character, Luka, was based on a real man who now lives in Ontario, Dr. Peter Potichnyj. Research more about his life, and what he did after the war ended. Use a number of different sources. You may want to consider contacting him for a personal interview.
- ▶ Create a fictional Facebook profile for one of the main characters. Be as detailed as possible.
- ▶ Choose a main event in the story, and write 10 to 15 fictional tweets from that character’s point of view detailing the events that took place (‘live- tweeting’). Be sure you have created a fictional Twitter profile for that character. Choose a Twitter handle that would suit the character that you have chosen.
- ▶ Create a mock website or Facebook page for the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. You will need to compile a lot of research in order to properly explain the role that they played during WWII.

- ▶ Write a job posting as if you were one of the leaders of the UPA. What types of people would you want to join your army? How would you encourage them to be a part of your team?
- ▶ Create a newspaper that could have been published during this time period. Research and write several different articles, and include advertisements, current event listings etc. Make it as realistic as possible.
- ▶ Complete a costs/benefits analysis of historical decisions that were made during this period in history. Have students create a short infomercial promoting the pros/cons of each side/decision.
- ▶ Film a documentary about one of the following topics:
 - Ukrainian Insurgent Army
 - Ostarbeiters
 - Babyn Yar
 - Bykivnia
 Try to access primary and secondary documents when doing your research.
- ▶ Research the current government of Ukraine and the current government of Russia. Draw parallels to WWII. (Background for teachers: Putin's war on Ukraine, partitioning off bits at a time while the western leaders refuse to get involved, is exactly what happened when Hitler annexed Austria, then invaded Czechoslovakia and Stalin and Hitler carved up Poland between them. Putin is using propaganda tactics, branding the current democratically elected government and also the Euromaidan protesters as a "Fascist junta" and he uses a lot of symbolism from WWII to make the point resonate with contemporary Russians. The Soviets branded the UPA as fascists during WWII, dropping down leaflets to civilians to that effect. The Nazis branded them Soviet terrorists and did the same.)

Additional Resources

Web:

Memorial Site for Bykivnia: <http://memorial.kiev.ua/expo/eng/bikivnia.html>

Chronicles of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. English summaries available online:

<http://infoukes.com/upa/>

The Peter Potichnyj Collection of Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Ukraine:

<http://infoukes.com/upa/related/pjpc.html>

Political Thought in the Ukrainian Underground:

<http://infoukes.com/upa/related/poltho.html>

World War II in Ukraine:

<http://infoukes.com/history/ww2/>

Into Auschwitz for Ukraine, by Stephan Petelycky. Complete memoir downloadable at no charge here:

<http://uccla.ca/In%20Auschwitz-Petelycky.pdf>

Film:

Between Stalin and Hitler: Ukraine in WWII, the Untold Story

<http://www.ucrdc.org/Film-Hitler.html>

Books

Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin, by Timothy Snyder

No Simple Victory: World War II in Europe, by Norman Davies

Their just war: images of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army / Vasyl Humeniuk and Lubomyr Luciuk

Map:



"Eastern Front 1943-08 to 1944-12". Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons -

