

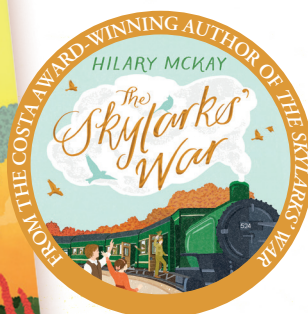


# The Swallows' Flight

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## NOTES AND ACTIVITIES FOR UPPER KS2



These activities and discussion topics have been designed to engage and challenge 9-11 year olds, encouraging students to develop their critical thinking, comprehension, creative writing skills, oracy and historical knowledge, whilst immersing themselves in the incredible story of *The Swallow's Flight*.

### THE BOOK

In England, Kate and Ruby's friendship blossoms as the Second World War takes hold. In Germany, for Erik and Hans, the carefree innocence of their childhood is tested as they're drawn into a war they don't want to fight.

The four crossing paths would, ordinarily, be highly unlikely but, one fateful September day, their worlds collide.

A story filled with heart and courage, exploring the themes of friendship and family against the backdrop of conflict and the horrors of war. Fans of McKay's *The Skylark's War* will be delighted to be reunited with some familiar faces.

### THEMES

- Conflict (specifically WW2)
- Family
- Friendship
- Displacement

### CURRICULUM AREAS

- Literacy
- History
- Science
- Geography
- Drama
- Art

### BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK:

Look at the cover by Dawn Cooper

- What can you see?
- Where and when do you think the picture is set? What evidence can you give for this?
- What might have happened to the smoking plane?

### NOW CONSIDER THE TITLE: *THE SWALLOW'S FLIGHT*

## SCIENCE/GEOGRAPHY

### DID YOU KNOW?

Each year, swallows migrate to South Africa for the British winter months, before flying back to the UK each Spring - a journey of over 6,000 miles, in which they cover 200 miles each day, across France, Spain, Morocco and over the Sahara to the southern tip of Africa. They fly during the day, rest overnight in flocks and eat only flying insects, so are vulnerable to starvation and exhaustion.

### CHAPTER 1, P1 AND P6: THE SWALLOWS

p1: *'Their nest had fallen; the fragile shell of dry mud had crumbled and split from the wall and two fledglings had been lost, but three had survived.'*

p6: *'On the fourteenth day after Erik found them, his three swallows flew from his open window, straight from his hand into a bird-filled apricot evening sky, joining dozens of others circling the roofs and eaves and skyways of the city.'*

### VOCABULARY CHECK

**Migration:** Travelling long distances in search of a new habitat.

**Vulnerable:** Likely to be harmed or injured

**Starvation:** Weakness, suffering or death from lack of food

**Exhaustion:** Having no energy; extreme tiredness and inability to do anything.

**Foreshadowing:** An indication of something that will happen in the future.

**Metaphor:** When something is used as a symbol or representation of something else.

**Displacement:** When something is moved from its natural position or place.

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

- Why do you think the story opens with swallows? Can you make any predictions about the story?
- What are your thoughts on Hans and Erik here?
- What is the relevance of the names Hans gives the three surviving birds? (Possible discussion around specific clouds not being permanent/shifting but always returning, nature's cycles, nature being a constant)





## CHAPTER 2, PP15-20: RUBY AND WILL/RUBY'S BIRTHMARK

Here, Will and his friend, Danny, persuade Ruby (Will's sister) to scrub the birthmark on her face using a solution of bleach and water.

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

- How would you describe the relationship between Ruby and Will?
- How does this section of the story make you feel? How do you feel towards Ruby? Will? Danny?
- Ruby's middle name - Amaryllis - means: pride, strength and determination. How does she exhibit those qualities in this chapter?

### ACTIVITY - CREATIVE WRITING

- Write a diary entry for the evening or day after this event. You can choose to write as Will or as Ruby - Remember to write in the first person.
- Recount the afternoon as you (as Ruby or Will) experienced it. You may want to pick out five key things that stick in your mind, to help you structure your writing.
- Think about how your chosen character might be feeling, and how they might write their emotional and physical feelings down.
- Consider their use of language and expression in making your piece of writing sound like the character you've chosen. Remember that the story is set a long time ago, so there are some words, references and phrases that won't make sense.



DEAR DIARY...



A large, white, cloud-shaped area with a scalloped border, containing horizontal orange lines for writing. The cloud is set against a yellow background that transitions to orange at the bottom. The writing lines are evenly spaced and cover most of the cloud's interior.





## CHAPTER 5, PP48-49: THE BERLIN OLYMPICS

In this chapter, Hans's Uncle Karl is excited about the Berlin Olympics. Nazi flags line the route the Olympic torch procession will take, as well as Olympic flags and banners. Karl is especially looking forward to watching Jesse Owens - an African American competitor. As a World Record holder, he was one to watch. But, being Black would mean discrimination from the Nazi party.

### VOCABULARY CHECK

*Procession:* People moving together in an orderly fashion.

*Boycott:* Withdraw from an event/stop engaging with an organisation in protest against their behaviour.

*Propaganda:* Biased (one-sided) information used to promote a cause or idea.

*Discrimination:* Unfair treatment of others based on something that makes them different from you.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- The 1936 Olympics divided opinion. The German team included only one Jewish athlete, otherwise only participants that the Nazi party deemed 'Aryan' (part of German society).
- The Nazi party initially stated that no Jewish or Black athletes should be allowed to compete in the games but later removed this rule.
- Many countries, not wanting to anger Hitler, removed all Jewish athletes from their teams, too. Other Jewish athletes opted not to attend.
- There were campaigns to boycott the games from various countries. The strongest opposition was from the US, though they did attend.



#### DISCUSSION POINTS:

- At the games, Jesse Owens won the most medals, with three golds and one silver. The German athlete Luz Long helped him with technical advice during the long jump, which helped him get gold (Long got silver). The pair became friends. Owens said: "It took a lot of courage for him to befriend me in front of Hitler... I would melt down all the medals and cups I have and they wouldn't be a plating on the twenty-four karat friendship that I felt for Luz Long at that moment".
- The Olympic values are excellence, friendship and respect, with a view to building a better world? How did Luz Long display these values in his actions?

#### ACTIVITY - ART/CREATIVE WRITING

- Design a poster encouraging people to boycott the 1936 Olympics.
- Choose language that is persuasive and formal.
- Include clear reasons why you think people should boycott the games.
- Will you include any pictures or symbols?





## CHAPTERS 5, 9, 13, 17: FRAULEIN TRISK

Fraulein Trisk is the upstairs neighbour of Erik and his family. The stairs to her home are via a door on Erik's landing. She is Jewish, and we're given clues about the increasing danger to her life as the story progresses, moving from Erik's recollections of being five years old, throughout the war and in its aftermath.

### VOCABULARY CHECK

*Jewish:* Something, or someone, relating to/following Judaism, an ethnic religion.

*Persecution:* Ill-treatment and oppression based on religion, race, culture

*Luftwaffe:* The German Air Force.

### CHAPTER 5 (1936, WITH FLASHBACKS TO 1926), PP36-38

*'Fraulein Trisk lived all alone... permanently annoyed... It took nothing to set her off... no person ever visited.'*

*'Erik would sit on a wooden chair by the window where Fraulein Trisk had her green fern. It was the only bright thing in the room; everything else was faded with age, just as Fraulein Trisk herself was faded.'*

*'...one day she handed him a parcel... when Erik untied the bow and opened it he found to his utter astonishment that she had knitted him some mittens.'*

*(Erik loses the mittens)*

*'After that she always mentioned the mittens in a way that made Erik feel bad... But at last he was old enough to go to school, and after that he hardly saw Fraulein Trisk, unless he craned his head back very far to look up at the window from the street. Sometimes she would be there, gazing out.'*

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

- How does your impression of Fraulein Trisk change throughout this chapter and why?
- How do you think she feels towards Eric? Why does she keep talking about the missing mittens?



#### CHAPTER 9 (1937), P83

*'One day Erik suddenly remembered Fraulein Trisk... "Poor old lady," said his mother. "Well, I always thought she'd be better off staying with her niece in the country."*

*'He thought Fraulein Trisk, and realised for the first time that it was a Jewish surname.'*

P87

*'It was not long afterwards... that Erik noticed something in the attic window... It was a fern, bright green.'*

#### DISCUSSION POINTS:

- What does the writer want us to think has happened to Fraulein Trisk and why?
- What does the green fern in the window suggest?
- Why won't Erik's mother discuss it with him?

#### CHAPTER 13 (1938), P114

*'The fern in the window was dried to the grey ghost of a fern... The wooden chair was dim with dust. Erik knelt down in front of it, a Luftwaffe pilot in full uniform.*

*Shrunk against the cushions, her hands pressed against her mouth, her eyes wide with fear, Fraulein Trisk shook and shook.*

...

*Before he left, Erik said, "When all these troubles are over I will buy you a new fern. I promise. Green as a forest."*

#### DISCUSSION POINTS:

- Why is Fraulein Trisk so scared of Erik? What has changed?
- Think about the fern. Why is its dead, shrivelled state important in the context of the story? What might it symbolise? (Possible points for consideration: live plant would give her position away to passers by. Symbolic of/metaphor for the hold the war has on the city and, in particular, on Jewish people)





## CHAPTER 17, P140

*'Then one of the men noticed, "There's a door behind that dresser!...*

*Exactly at that moment, Hans came running down the stairs, followed, a minute or two later by Erik...*

*That caused a pause. Hans, tall, blond, furious, in full Luftwaffe uniform... "I'll report the lot of you!"*

## P141

*'In a few minutes, it was over, the three apartments were searched, Fraulein Trisk's clearly long abandoned, empty as a shell.'*

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

- Why is Erik and Hans' behaviour risky in this section?
- What did you believe had happened to Fraulein Trisk?

## CHAPTER 42 (1947), PP271-3

*'The journey home seemed endless... he got there at last, pushed open the heavy door that led from the street, and paused.'*

*... "Oh, Fraulein Trisk, I thought of you so often. Wait, I'll fetch what I brought you!"*

*... "Oh," said Fraulein Trisk. "Oh," and she looked up at Erik's mother. "Oh," she said to her. "Look, a new fern, green as a forest."*

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

- How did reading this chapter make you feel?
  - Think about the new fern. What does it symbolise?
  - Throughout these sections featuring Fraulein Trisk, the fern is a motif (a recurring theme or image in a story, song or artwork). Why do you think this is used?
- Can you think of any other motifs in the book (The Scrapyard Dog/Pax, swallows, the idea of an Amaryllis, the sherbert dab (to a lesser extent))?



## ACTIVITIES

Using the information we have from 1926 to 1947:

### SUMMARISE

- Looking closely at the five extracts about Fraulein Trisk, summarise the key events that shape our understanding of her situation/life. Choose key descriptions and imagery that supports your ideas.

### POETRY

- Consider her living situation, her relationship with Erik's family, what might have happened if they had reported her, the fern, her recollections of Erik as a child and then as an adult, the time she spent away from Berlin and her return.
- You could write in third person or choose a character and write as them.

### COMIC STRIP

- Turn Fraulein Trisk's life in these twenty-one years into a short comic strip.
- Think carefully about the descriptions we're given and about the key images you need to include, such as the fern. Think about the age of Erik as the years go by.
- Select key extracts of writing to include with your images.





## CHAPTER 22 PP177–181: DUNKIRK AND OPERATION DYNAMO

*'...it became increasingly clear what would happen next. Will would be trapped. The army would be trapped... they would be herded onto the French beaches and there would be nowhere left to go.'*

...

*"'There's tens of thousands. Hundreds of thousands. There's three hundred thousand and more.'"*

...

*'She [Violet] looked helplessly around for someone to agree that of course no one would dream of firing at young boys, stranded on a beach.'*

...

*"'...Will will be all right. He'll be with his friends, lots of friends, all looking after each other. And I bet any day soon he'll come back and hug you and dump his stuff on the chairs and eat all the food in the cupboards...'"*

...

*'On the beaches of Dunkirk, the soldiers waited on the sand. Now and again... (to the end of the paragraph)'*

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

- How do Ruby and Violet differ in their responses to the news about Dunkirk in this chapter?
- As a British soldier, what would be going through your mind whilst standing on the sand?

### VOCABULARY CHECK

**Evacuation:** Removing people from a place that is unsafe.

**Stranded:** Left somewhere without the ability to leave.

**Allies/allied:** When countries or people join together to work toward a common goal.



### DID YOU KNOW?

- Once Germany invaded France, over 300,000 British and French troops were pushed towards the coast and had to wait to be rescued.
- Ships and small boats began to gather at Dover, ready to cross the English Channel to France.
- The Luftwaffe (German Air Force) flew along the beaches, planning to attack the stranded soldiers but were kept at bay by the British Royal Air Force (RAF), protecting British and allied troops, though those on the beaches couldn't see much of this fighting, so thought the RAF weren't helping. They did manage to bomb the town of Dunkirk as well as the dock infrastructure, which those stranded would have been aware of.
- Some soldiers waited for hours in water that reached their shoulders.
- 338,000 soldiers were rescued in just over a week. Large warships and cargo ships were used but hundreds of small boats, such as fishing boats also joined the effort. They became known as The Little Ships of Dunkirk.

### ACTIVITY - CREATIVE WRITING

- Write down:
  - Ways the men stranded at Dunkirk might have felt (emotional as well as physical);
  - Who or what they might have been thinking about from home;
  - Their recent experience of being forced onto the beaches.
- Remember that the soldiers wouldn't have seen newspaper reports like those read by Ruby and her family, and didn't have access to the news on phones or radios. They had no way of knowing when or how they might be rescued unless information came from their superiors.
- Write a letter home from a soldier. You may like to split your letter into sections, to include arrival on the beach, the days spent waiting and the moment when the boats arrived into view, or even once on a boat and headed back to Britain.





## CHAPTER 25 (1940): WILL AT KREISGEFANGENENLAGER

In this chapter, Will sends a letter home from one of roughly 1,000 Kreisgefangenenlager (German prisoner-of-war camps), where captured enemy soldiers were kept and made to work (as long as the work wasn't dangerous, and didn't directly help the German war effort).

Ruby realises that he has written his message in code, telling them he has a plan and is getting out. The family are able to send him a parcel filled with 'playing cards, toffees, cigarettes, a toothbrush and two white cotton handkerchiefs.'

### ACTIVITY - CREATIVE WRITING

- Using the same technique as Will, write a note to your family or a friend telling them about your day, or about an important event.
- Choose a coded message to include in your letter and pick out the letters that spell this out, as Will does in the story.
- If you'd prefer, you could write a reply to Will, from Ruby, instead.

## CHAPTER 30 AND CHAPTERS 32-35

This section brings us back to the cover of the book and the climax of the story. Before you read, think back to the discussion you had around the cover design and the predictions you made about the text. How accurate were your predictions?

### ACTIVITY - DRAMA

Use the table on the next page for this activity. Students are invited to fill in the missing extracts.

- In groups of 4, work together to summarise the key moments and quotations from these chapters.
- Using what you have selected, create a short drama piece to show Kate, Ruby, Erik and Hans's movements in the moments before Erik's plane crashes, the crash itself, and the immediate aftermath.
- You might come up with lots of ideas so discuss them and decide which work best in a dramatic context.
- Think about your positions on the stage, your expression, body language and tone of voice, and any techniques you might use, such as staying very still whilst other group members are talking. You could use group members as narrators, to fill in the gaps between quotations from the story.



## EXTRACT

P220:

*'Erik's plane was staggering, bullet-bitten...  
a pain like fire scorched down his back...  
Hans came bursting through the radio static:  
BEHIND! BEHIND! BEHIND!'*

P228:

P230:

*'Ruby spoke again. 'A plane. Two planes.  
Flying around each other.'*

*'I think they're fighting,' said Ruby suddenly...  
'There's bits coming off the other one!'*

*'They had been so engrossed with the two little  
planes that the third... took them completely  
by surprise. It was roaring towards them,  
dreadfully big, dreadfully low...'*

C34:

C35:

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Erik is in a lot of pain here, and very scared.  
When Hans's voice comes through he might  
feel a moment of relief at hearing his friend -  
we could show this through facial expression.  
Then he realises he is being attacked again,  
so we need to show his panic.  
Hans's voice must be loud and urgent.

Calm voices to begin with here, with  
panic rising.

We need to look into the distance, like the  
picture on the front cover of the book.

When the third plane is heading for us, we  
need to lie on the floor and cover our heads.

