

The Tin Drum by Gunter Grass

Topics for discussion 9-11-13 - Gloria Asher and Martha Smith

1. History & Geography

- partitions of Poland, identify Kashubes
- rise of Nazis (Bebra's friends, p. 289)
- detailed accounts of neighborhoods, esp. cemeteries
- inclusion of WW II events: Russian front, France, D-Day - p. 366

2. Literary influences

- Oskar's schooling in Goethe and Rasputin
- John Dos Passos; does book read like James Joyce or Charles Dickens?
- Literary impact: Irving's Prayer for Owen Meany; Hegi's Stones from the River 4.

3. Characters - Open Discussion. name and describe characters besides Oskar. Note their occupations: grocers, merchants, stonecutters, performers, postal clerks

4. Music and Religion

- drumming captures rhythms of waltzes, marches, environmental sounds
- Wagner's Parsifal, p. 453
- Beethoven's picture over the piano
- Catholic Poland - Cathedral of the Sacred Heart; Mama's weekly confessions; Oskar's baptism; riff on crosses, p. 126; Faith, Hope and Love chapter; Oskar as Jesus
- Protestant Germany
- Jewish - Krystallnacht and death of drum supplier Sigismund Markus, p. 185
- doubt vs. belief p. 341

5. Biography of Gunter Grass

- birthdate is approximately same as Oskar's
- personal, eg. art student, stonecutter
- Waffen SS service and defense
- prizes and reputation

6. Senses depicted

- smells linked to characters: vanilla to Maria; Lina Greff's effluvia p. 291; rancid butter to Anna; cinnamon and cloves for Raguna; vinegar for Sister Dorothea, p. 469
- sights - Photo Album chapter, p. 38+; "could it be that nearsighted people see more than we do?" p. 241:
- tastes: brick soup, eels, mock turtle soup, p. 284; Matzerath's dishes, p. 386; Klepp's spaghetti, p. 483
- sounds - trams, trains, planes, artillery; examples of touch

7. Motifs and Themes

- Dwarves as outsiders/observers
- Skat card game
- ominous Black Cook game; Santa Claus was really the Gasman, p. 187
- contrast of daily life to war
- coming of age, sexual identity, adultery, identifying fathers
- migration (East to West, like Dos Passos)
- morality: Oskar's mom's hypocrisy, Oskar tempting inner thieves, p. 117
- before and behind the grandstand, p. 111