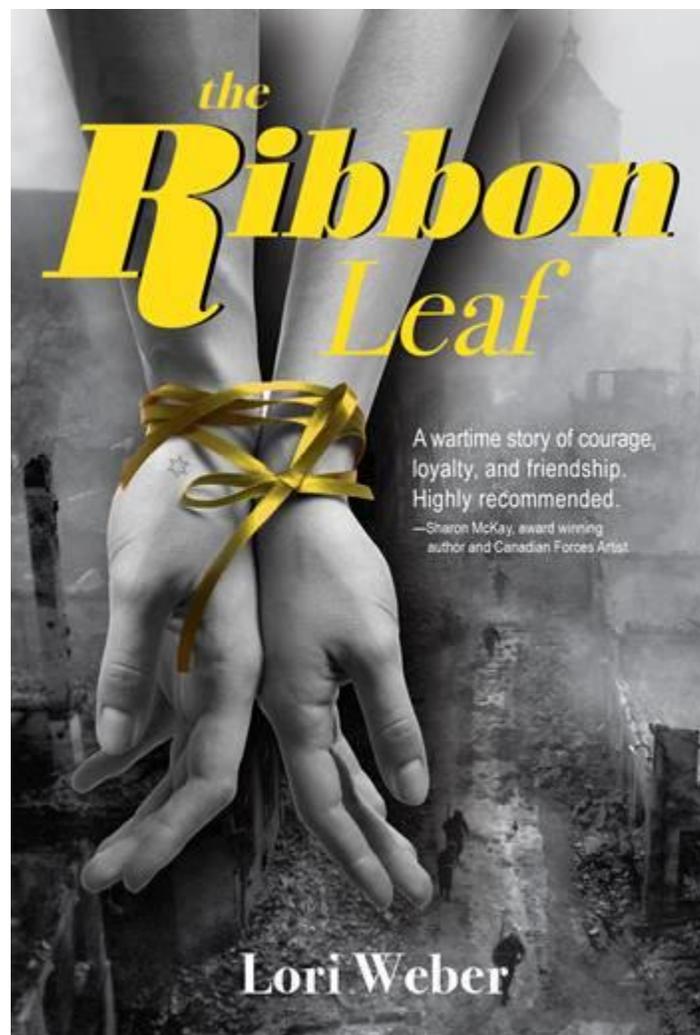


Teaching Guide

The Ribbon Leaf

By Lori Weber



the
Ribbon
Leaf

A wartime story of courage,
loyalty, and friendship.
Highly recommended.

—Sharon McKay, award winning
author and Canadian Forces Artist

Lori Weber

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Pre-Reading Activities

(Skills: speaking, writing, researching)

1. What do you know about **WWII**? You might want to consider the following:
 - a. How and when did it start?
 - b. What countries were involved?
 - c. How many people died?
 - d. What was the Holocaust?
 - e. How and when did the war end?
 - f. How was Canada involved?
 - g. What is inscription?
 - h. How did the war change the world?
 - i. What famous people are associated with the war?
2. What is the meaning of the word **friendship**? What are the qualities of a successful friendship? What do you look for in a friend? How much would you be willing to do for a best friend?
3. What forms of **discrimination** do human beings face today? Were these forms of discrimination worse in past decades? Is discrimination common to all countries, or do some countries deal better with discrimination and human rights violations than others?
4. What does it mean to be a **hero**? How would you define the word heroism? What are some real-life examples of heroism? Do you know some heroes from history? How do they compare to the superheroes of film and comic books?
5. How difficult would it be to move to a completely **new country** where you don't know the language or the customs? What are the main reasons why people choose to emigrate? What is the difference between an immigrant and a refugee? How is war often a factor for both groups of people?

Personal Response / Journal Questions

(Skills: writing, critical thinking)

1. How would you feel to see things in your country change almost overnight? Things that you had always been allowed to do had suddenly become forbidden. People you were friends with had suddenly become the enemy. How do you think you would react? How would the experience affect you?
2. Sabine makes a daring decision to save Edie's father, Herr Pinker. If caught, she and her mother could face deportation to a concentration camp and, potentially, death. Would you make such a sacrifice for a friend? Under what circumstances?
3. When Edie first moves to Canada, she feels like no one understands her, not just because of the language barrier, but also because no one else in her school knows what it's like to be a Jew fleeing the Nazis. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt different and/or completely misunderstood by everyone around you? How did you handle it?
4. Jews faced dangerous forms of discrimination in Nazi Germany, and Edie knows that she will face discrimination as a lesbian in Canada at that time. Have you ever been the victim of discrimination? How so and how did you deal with it?
5. Even though Sabine and Edie can no longer be friends, they each make new friends to help them through tough times. How important is friendship in your life? Could you imagine losing your best friend? How would you deal with it?
6. Have you or someone in your family experienced living through wartime? What was the experience like? How did it affect your or their lives?

Discussion Questions

(Skills: reading, critical thinking, speaking)

1. As twelve-year-olds, Sabine and Edie try to understand **the changes** that are going on around them in Germany. Their parents do not explain why they can no longer sit together at school or the park, or why their friendship is suddenly forbidden. Why don't Sabine and Edie's parents tell them more directly what is happening since the Nazis came to power? Do you think this helps or hurts the children? How do we see them struggle to make sense of things?
2. Sabine's relationship with her **brother, Hans**, is a complicated one. What are some of the things he does that shock Sabine? How is he being influenced by Nazi ideology? Why is she scared to confront him? Were you surprised when she is so happy to see him at the medical tent in Stuttgart? We don't see her tell her mother about Hans, but it is implied that she will do so. What do you think she will say?
3. **Uncle Max** is a positive force in Edie's life, and, in some ways, he becomes a father-figure. He is associated with art and beauty. How does his love of art affect his character and his outlook on life? Would Edie's experience in Canada have been different without him, if she had just been with her mother and aunt? How are Uncle Max's more tender and emotional qualities a contrast to the qualities shown by Sabine's father and the other Nazi figures in the novel?
4. Sabine loses Edie as a friend who is physically present, but she does connect with some **key allies** along the way. Each of these characters helps her through the difficult times. Why do you think Werner, Emma, and even Katya, are important in the novel? What does each contribute to Sabine's storyline and to her growth as a person?
5. Edie also relies on **new friends** to help her adjust to her new life in Canada. How are Annette, Dot & Betty, Rebecca and Tanya important to Edie's development as a character? Which, in the end, proves to be most influential in helping her accept herself and develop self-esteem, in particular in relation to her sexual orientation?
6. The decision to **bury Opa** in the cellar and replace him with Herr Pinker might seem cruel, but in the context of war-time, do you look at it differently? How does Sabine's mother, in particular, struggle with the decision? What would the consequences be for the family if discovered? In what other ways does Sabine put herself in danger during the book to help others?
7. Edie is experiencing war from a distance while in Canada. How is **war on the Canadian home-front** depicted in the novel? What are some of the campaigns and war-efforts mentioned? Do any of these things help put Edie's mind at ease about her Papa? Why do you think she doesn't join the Junior Red Cross?
8. Sabine wishes **everyday life** could be more normal and that she and Werner could simply be a young couple in love, biking and picnicking. How does everyday life change for people in both Germany and Canada because of the war? For example, what are rations?
9. Sabine struggles with her feelings toward **Herr Schmidt, her father**, who has joined the Nazi party and is now working for them. Look at how their relationship changes from the opening scene to

the one where she turns him in. What happens in between to change her opinion of him? How hard do you think her decision to turn him in is for her? Is it something you could do?

10. **Herr Pinker** finds himself in a very vulnerable position throughout the novel, right up until the arrival of The Red Cross. How does he alert Sabine that he needs help, and what do you think of this decision? What other choices did he have? How does he try to show his gratitude to Frau Schmidt? How do her feelings about Herr Pinker evolve? Does she have regrets?
11. Edie was expecting everything to be better in **the new world**. She was hoping she would just be able to be herself, without fear of persecution in Canada, but this is not the case. What new forms of discrimination does she face? How does she deal with them?
12. Sabine is somewhat sheltered from the **horrors of war** in her small southern German town. How does her view broaden once she goes to Berlin and then the hospital near Dresden for her Duty Year? How do these experiences change her and even help with decisions about her future?
13. The two girls have solid plans for **their futures** by the end of the novel. What are these? How have their experiences helped them make these decisions? Did their choices surprise you? Why doesn't Sabine join Werner?

Literary Elements
(Skills: reading, writing, critical thinking)

1. Character Chart for *The Ribbon Leaf*

We can analyze a character in a novel by looking at that character's actions, words, ideas and emotions. Using this chart, find one important example of each in order to build a strong profile of the two protagonists and the secondary characters. Look at each line and state what it reveals about the characters. You can also use this chart to compare and contrast characters.

What the character	Does (Actions)	Says (Words)	Thinks (Ideas)	Feels (Emotions)
Sabine				
Edie				
Herr Pinker				
Herr Schmidt				
Hans				
Werner				
Annette				
Emma				
Sabine's Mom				
Uncle Max				

2. Plot

What is the inciting incident in the novel that begins the story arc for both girls? What key conflicts do the two storylines revolve around? What are some key points of rising action for each of the two storylines? What is the climax of each? How do they come together in the denouement? How important are foreshadowing and flashback to the plot? Are there any significant subplots?

3. Setting

Setting is more than just time and place. It can add meaning to a story by illuminating important things about the characters (their hopes, fears, challenges & triumphs) and by connecting to the larger themes of a novel. What is the significance of the following settings in Sabine's storyline?

1. Her father's two factories
2. The Danube River
3. The KLV
4. The closet where Herr Pinker hides
5. The cellar in Sabine's house
6. The town-square
7. The hospital near Dresden
8. The forests
9. The Red Cross Tent in Stuttgart

What is the significance of the following settings in Edie's storyline?

1. The storage room in the basement back in Germany
2. The ship
3. The St. Lawrence River and the port
4. The back room at Louisa's
5. Annette's apartment
6. Edie's alcove at Uncle Max and Aunt Naomi's
7. Bernstein's Department Store
8. Sainte-Agathe / Mount Sinai Sanatorium
9. McGill University / the campus

4. Point-of-View/Narration

The novel has two narrators. How is the story enhanced by having the two points of view? Find a place where both narrators are describing the same event from separate points of view. Think about the factors that shape a person's perspective: race, religion, age, gender, social class. How do these factors shape both Edie and Sabine? How would the book be different if the narrator were omniscient, telling both stories at once?

5. Symbolism

1. The main symbol in the novel is the **yellow ribbon**. Make a list of all the places it appears. What does it symbolize in each of these instances? What does it symbolize when you look at it across the entire novel? Does the colour yellow have any significance?
 2. There are various references to **metal** in the novel, from the iron gates at the factories, to the war medals, and the various spades and shovels. Who are these harder objects associated with and what is their significance?
 3. **Rabbits** appear in many places in the novel. Herr Pinker is compared to one being hunted, Werner takes care of the ones at the KLV, and Anton makes a wooden rabbit to thank Sabine. Is there any symbolic significance to the rabbits?
 4. Edie first notices the statue of **the angel** atop the Notre-Dame-de-Bonsecours Church while her ship is docking in the Montreal port, then thinks of it many times throughout the book. Why is this a meaningful symbol to her?
 5. There are **two rivers** in the novel: the Danube in Sabine and Edie's hometown, then the Saint-Lawrence River that flows past Montreal/Verdun. The two are depicted very differently. What might the rivers symbolize and how do they compare?
 6. Are there any other symbols in the novel?
- 7. Theme:** Theme is the main idea or underlying meaning in a work of literature. Brainstorm at least three key themes in the novel. What scenes demonstrate or deal with these themes most strongly? What, ultimately, do you think the author is trying to convey about each?

Historical Research & Oral Presentation Activities

(Skills: research, reading, writing, speaking, critical thinking)

1. Hans becomes a member of the **Hitler Youth** and Sabine must join the **League of German Maidens**. What were these organizations; what was their purpose and what sorts of activities did they promote?
2. In November of 1938, **Kristallnacht** (the Night of Broken Glass) occurs; it is this event that prompts Herr Pinker to send Edie and her mom to Munich. What was Kristallnacht? How was it a key event leading up to WWII?
3. Louisa's husband joins the **Royal Canadian Navy**, and one of Annette's boyfriends, Bernie, joins the **Royal Canadian Airforce**. What role did one or both of these play in Canada's war efforts?
4. On the **home-front**, many people joined the war effort through organizations, such as the Junior Red Cross or the Women's Auxiliary. What was the role of these and other organizations in fighting the Nazis? What role did women play in particular?
5. The **Holocaust** was not a term used while the war was happening, and Sabine only hears rumours of various concentration camps, apart from the one at Ravensbrück where Emma's mother is interned. What were some of the more notorious **concentration camps** operated by the Nazis and what happened in them?
6. Edie must hide her sexual orientation from everyone around her, until she meets Tanya, who strengthens her courage. Uncle Max tells her that **homosexuality** was illegal at the time and that Edie would have to be careful. When did the laws change and how have LGBTQ rights evolved in Canada since the 40s?
7. The failed landing at **Dieppe** and the subsequent operation known as **D-Day** are both mentioned in the book, along with some important battles, such as the **Battle of Ortona**. Choose one or more of these military events and show how they were important in WWII?
8. Much of WWII was waged in the air. The book mentions **the Blitz** in London, as well as the fire-bombing of **Dresden**. What were these important events?
9. The book demonstrates the **anti-Semitism** that was on the rise in Germany and throughout much of the world in the 30s and 40s. What is anti-Semitism and how is it still present in the world or at least in Canada today?
10. During WWII, thousands of Japanese-Canadians were forced to leave their homes on the west coast of Canada and sent to **Japanese Internment Camps**. Likewise, many Canadians of Italian origin were interned in camps. Why was this done and what was life like in these camps? What happened to the detainees when the war ended?
11. The Holocaust was the impetus behind the creation of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** in 1948. What is this important document and how is it used in the world today?

Art / Drama Activities / Creative Writing Activities

(Skills: reading, writing, speaking, critical thinking, computer, drawing, sculpture. These can be done alone or in small groups and then presented to the rest of the class)

1. Create a **PowerPoint or Prezi** (or other software) presentation that provides visual accompaniment to key scenes from the novel; you can focus on Sabine's side of the story or Edie's, or both.
2. Take any scene from the novel and create a **3-D representation** of it, either in sculpture or maquette. Add a component to your piece that offers an interpretation of it – play with colour, texture, or add something unique that reveals your idea about the scene.
3. Take a scene from the novel and rewrite it as a **short skit**. It can be one where there was no dialogue, or one where there was some and then you elaborate on it. Add something meaningful to the scene that deepens it, or gives a new perspective on it.
4. Make a **scrapbook** from either Sabine or Edie's point of view. It could include photos, writing, artifacts. Illuminate more about each character with what you choose to include.
5. Write **a letter** from one of these perspectives: Werner to Sabine from the POW Camp in Farnham; Herr Pinker to Edie in Canada; Edie to her father; Emma to her mom in prison; Hans to his mom from the field after he's injured; Herr Schmidt to Sabine after she turns him in.

Essay Topics

(Skills: reading, writing, critical thinking)

1. Analytical Essay: Analyze the yellow ribbon as the main symbol in the novel. What does it represent and how does it add meaning to *The Ribbon Leaf*? Make sure to use some quotations in your essay to support your argument.
2. Analytical Essay: Analyze the theme of discrimination in the novel. Using both storylines, demonstrate what the author is trying to say about it. Make sure to use some quotations to support your argument.
3. Analytical Essay: Analyze how the two main characters develop in the novel. What do they learn and how do they change from beginning to end? Make sure to use some quotations to support your argument.
4. Opinion Essay: Sabine made the right choice in helping Herr Pinker, in spite of the dangers. Argue for or against this statement.
5. Opinion Essay: Inscription should never be used in war time, no matter what the war involves. Argue for or against this statement.
6. Opinion Essay: Discrimination is never justified. Argue for or against this statement.
7. Research Essay: Who were the Nazis and what did they believe in?
8. Research Essay: How did Canada help fight fascism and Hitler in WWII?
9. Research Essay: What is the history of anti-Semitism in Canada?