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***Berlin Boxing Club* Discussion Guide & Enrichment Project Options**

1. At the beginning of the novel, “Hitler and the Nazis” rank only fifth on Karl’s list of “biggest concerns in life” (page 21). Why are other matters more pressing for Karl? How does Hitler’s regime become a more significant problem in Karl’s life as the story progresses?
2. How are people classified into particular religious and ethnic groups? Why is Karl categorized as being Jewish, even though his family is secular and doesn’t practice the religion?
3. What Jewish stereotypes does the novel examine? What stereotypes about other groups of people are also explored? How can subscribing to stereotypes be misguided and even dangerous?
4. According to Karl’s father, “Art should elevate humanity” (page 59). What do you think he means? What other purposes do you think art should serve?
5. Do you, like Karl, think boxing is “a noble sport,” or are you more of Greta’s mind that it’s “pretty dumb” (page 115)? Explain.
6. How does Karl initially react to the Countess, and how does his impression change over time? Why do you think Karl is uncomfortable with homosexuality? How can being afraid or unsure of something different develop into hatred?
7. Why can Karl and Greta not be together? Once their relationship is exposed and consequently forbidden, how does the memory of it help Karl? How does seeing Greta with another boy affect Karl?
8. What happened at Dachau? Do you think Uncle Jacob really died of dysentery? Why or why not?
9. Describe Karl and Hildy’s relationship. How do you know they care for each other? How does each experience Nazi Germany differently, particularly because of their looks?
10. What afflicts Karl’s mother? Though often shown as weak, how does she demonstrate strength?
11. How does Karl’s understanding of his father change over the course of the novel? How does Karl’s opinion of Max Schmeling change?
12. How is Karl a “misunderstood outsider” like his comic-book hero Superman (page 313)? How does Karl act heroically?
13. Max Schmeling says, “As long as you fight back, there’s no shame” (page 36). How does this statement act as a motif for the novel? Which characters fight back and which do not? Does Max Schmeling always live by his own words? Why is it sometimes difficult—or even impossible—to fight back? Is there necessarily shame in being passive—or feinting—instead of fighting? Explain.
14. How do the illustrations and comics interspersed through- out contribute to your reading of the novel? How can you “read” art?
15. Karl’s mother tells her son, “One of your father’s modern ideas about parenting is to leave you alone and let you become the man you want to be, not the man he wants you to be” (page 302). What kind of man does Karl want to be? What kind of man does he become by the novel’s end? How does his father help Karl become this man?

**Enrichment Project Options**

**Fighting Back.** What were the Nuremburg Laws, and what effects—both immediate and long-term—did they have on German Jews? Research other anti-Semitic laws and periods of Jewish persecution in history. How does anti-Semitism still exist today, and what religious, ethnic, racial, or other groups are faced with discrimination? What can you do personally to combat discrimination? Fight back by creating your own antidiscrimination slogan. Post your slogan to your online profiles and encourage your friends to adopt the slogan as their own.

**History:** **Live.** At the end of the novel, Robert Sharenow describes how YouTube was an invaluable resource in his research. Use YouTube to watch newsreels of 1930s Berlin, the Max Schmeling and Joe Louis fights, and clips of Max Schmeling and Anny Ondra’s film, Knockout (note that some videos might not always be available). How do these live pieces of history affect your reading of The Berlin Boxing Club?

**Funny Papers.**  Karl and Neblig share a love of comic strips, and Karl even creates his own cartoons. Look up examples of the American comic strips mentioned in the novel, including Mutt and Jeff, The Katzenjammer Kids, Joe Palooka, and Superman. How do these early-twentieth- century comics compare to today’s? Draw your own comic, either portraying a funny situation or making a political or personal statement.

**State of the Art**. Research some of the artists mentioned in *The Berlin Boxing Club*, such as Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, Marcel Duchamp, Albrecht Dürer, George Grosz, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Auguste Rodin, and Rembrandt van Rijn. What styles did these artists work in, and what are their most famous works? If a nearby art museum houses any works by these artists, plan a visit to view them in person. **Boxing Ring**. Delve deeper into the history of boxing, using some of the resources Robert Sharenow mentions at the end of the book. Focus your research on the careers of Henry Armstrong, Jimmy Braddock, Tony Canzoneri, Joe Louis, Barney Ross, and Max Schmeling. What were these boxers’ various backgrounds? How did these backgrounds play roles both in and out of the boxing ring? Should a person’s race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, etc., matter in the world of sports? Why or why not? How do boxing and other sports serve as equalizers?