BOOK THIEF QUOTES

“I have hated words and I have loved them, and I hope I have made them right.”

“It kills me sometimes, how people die.”

“I am haunted by humans.”

“A DEFINITION NOT FOUND  
IN THE DICTIONARY  
Not leaving: an act of trust and love,  
often deciphered by children”

Rudy, please, wake up, Goddamn it, wake up, I love you. Come on, Rudy, come on, Jesse Owens, don't you know I love you, wake up, wake up, wake up.."  
But nothing cared...

“She leaned down and looked at his lifeless face and Leisel kissed her best friend, Rudy Steiner, soft and true on his lips. He tasted dusty and sweet. He tasted like regret in the shadows of trees and in the glow of the anarchist's suit collection. She kissed him long and soft, and when she pulled herself away, she touched his mouth with her fingers...She did not say goodbye. She was incapable, and after a few more minutes at his side, she was able to tear herself from the ground. It amazes me what humans can do, even when streams are flowing down their faces and they stagger on...”

“I wanted to tell the book thief many things, about beauty and brutality. But what could I tell her about those things that she didn't already know? I wanted to explain that I am constantly overestimating and underestimating the human race-that rarely do I ever simply estimate it. I wanted to ask her how the same thing could be so ugly and so glorious, and its words and stories so damning and brilliant.”

“Even death has a heart.”

“He was the crazy one who had painted himself black and defeated the world.

She was the book thief without the words.  
  
Trust me, though, the words were on their way, and when they arrived, Liesel would hold them in her hands like the clouds, and she would wring them out like rain.”

“A small but noteworthy note. I've seen so many young men over the years who think they're running at other young men. They are not. They are running at me

“I carried [Rudy] softly through the broken street...with him I tried a little harder [at comforting]. I watched the contents of his soul for a moment and saw a black-painted boy calling the name Jesse Owens as he ran through an imaginary tape. I saw him hip-deep in some icy water, chasing a book, and I saw a boy lying in bed, imagining how a kiss would taste from his glorious next-door neighbour. He does something to me, that boy. Every time. It's his only detriment. He steps on my heart. He makes me cry.”

“His soul sat up. It met me. Those kinds of souls always do - the best ones. The ones who rise up and say "I know who you are and I am ready. Not that I want to go, of course, but I will come." Those souls are always light because more of them have been put out. More of them have already found their way to other places.”

“The consequence of this is that I'm always finding humans at their best and worst. I see their ugly and their beauty, and I wonder how the same thing can be both. (Death)”

“Hair the color of lemons,'" Rudy read. His fingers touched the words. "You told him about me?"  
  
At first, Liesel could not talk. Perhaps it was the sudden bumpiness of love she felt for him. Or had she always loved him? It's likely. Restricted as she was from speaking, she wanted him to kiss her. She wanted him to drag her hand across and pull her over. It didn't matter where. Her mouth, her neck, her cheek. Her skin was empty for it, waiting.  
  
Years ago, when they'd raced on a muddy field, Rudy was a hastily assembled set of bones, with a jagged, rocky smile. In the trees this afternoon, he was a giver of bread and teddy bears. He was a triple Hitler Youth athletics champion. He was her best friend. And he was a month from his death.  
  
Of course I told him about you," Liesel said.”

“The sky is blue today, Max, and there is a big long cloud, and it's stretched out, like a rope. At the end of it, the sun is like a yellow hole. . .”

“It was a Monday and they walked on a tightrope to the sun.”

“On many counts, taking a boy like Rudy Steiner was robbery--so much life, so much to live for—

“She said it out loud, the words distributed into a room that was full of cold air and books. Books everywhere! It was one of the most beautiful things Liesel Meminger had ever seen.  
  
With wonder, she smiled.  
  
That such a room existed!”

Mystery bores me. It chores me. I know what happens and so do you. It's the machinations that wheel us there that aggravate, perplex, interest, and astound me. There are many things to think of. There is much story.”

“The words. Why did they have to exist? Without them, there wouldn't be any of this.”

“One was a book thief. The other stole the sky.”

“I like that every page in every book can have a gem on it. It's probably what I love most about writing--that words can be used in a way that's like a child playing in a sandpit, rearranging things, swapping them around. They're the best moments in a day of writing -- when an image appears that you didn't know would be there when you started work in the morning.”   
― [Markus Zusak](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/11466.Markus_Zusak), [*The Book Thief*](http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/878368)

“In years to come, he would be a giver of bread, not a stealer - proof again of the contradictory human being. So much good, so much evil. Just add water.”

Liesel observed the strangeness of her foster father's eyes. They were made of kindness, and silver.”

“A human doesn't have a heart like mine. The human heart is a line, whereas my own is a circle, and I have the endless ability to be in the right place at the right time. The consequence of this is that I'm always finding humans at their best and worst. I see their ugly and their beauty, and I wonder how the same thing can be both. Still, they have one thing I envy. Humans, if nothing else, have the good sense to die.”

"When everything was quiet, the curtain in the livingroom was open just a crack... I could see outside." He had not seen the outside world for twenty-two months. "There were stars," he said. "They burned my eyes.”

“Five hundred souls.   
I carried them in my fingers, like suitcases. Or I'd throw them over my shoulder. It was only the the children I carried in my arms.

“They were French, they were Jews, and they were you.”

“A REASSURING ANNOUNCEMENT Please, be calm, despite that previous threat. I am all bluster - I am not violent. I am not malicious. I am a result.”

“Finally, in October 1945, a man with swampy eyes, feathers of hair, and a clean-shaven face walked into the shop. He approached the counter. "Is there someone here by the name of Leisel Meminger?"  
"Yes, she's in the back," said Alex. He was hopeful, but he wanted to be sure. "May I ask who is calling on her?"  
  
Leisel came out.  
They hugged and cried and fell to the floor.”

As it turned out, Ilsa Hermann not only gave Liesel Meminger a book that day. She also gave her a reason to spend time in the basement, her favourite place, first with Papa, then Max. She gave her a reason to write her own words, to see that words had also brought her to life.  
"Don't punish yourself", she heard her say again, but there would be punishment and pain, and there would be happiness, too. That was writing.”

they'll take you away."   
"Why?"   
"Because you shouldn't want to be like black people or Jewish people or anyone who is...not us."

"...you've got beautiful blond hair and big safe blue eyes. You should be happy with that; is that clear?”

She tore a page from the book and ripped it in half. Then a chapter.  
Soon, there was nothing but scraps of words littered between her legs and all around her. The words. Why did they have to exist? Without them, there wouldn't be any of this. Without words, the Führer was nothing. There would be no limping prisoners, no need for consolation or wordly tricks to make us feel better.  
What good were the words?  
She said it audibly now, to the orange-lit room. "What good are the words?”

“If only she could be so oblivious again, to feel such love without knowing it, mistaking it for laughter and bread with only the scent of jam spread on top of it. It was the best time of her life.”

I wanted to ask her how the same thing could be so ugly and so glorious, and its words and stories so damning and brilliant.”

“When she came to write her story, she would wonder when the books and the words started to mean not just something, but everything.”

“The point is, it didn’t really matter what the book was about. It was what it meant that was important.”

“The best word shakers were the ones who understood the true power of words. They were the ones who could climb the highest. One such word shaker was a small, skinny girl. She was renowned as the best word shaker of her region because she knew how powerless a person could be WITHOUT words.”

although on many occasions I still fail. I deliberately seek out the colors to keep my mind off them, but now and then, I witness the ones who are left behind, crumbling among the jigsaw puzzle of realization, despair, and surprises. They have punctured hearts. They have beaten lungs. Which in turn brings me to the subject I am telling you about tonight, or today, or whatever the hour and color. It’s the story of one of those perpetual survivors –an expert at being left behind.”

“Still, they have one thing I envy. Humans, if nothing else, have the good sense to die.”

“She was battered and beaten up, and not smiling this time. Liesel could see it on her face. Blood leaked from her nose and licked at her lips. Her eyes had blackened. Cuts had opened up and a series of wounds were rising to the surface of her skin. All from the words. From Liesel's words.”

“Somewhere in all the snow, she could see her broken heart, in two pieces.

It felt as though the whole globe was dressed in snow. Like it has pulled it on, the way you pull on a sweater. Next to the train line, footprints were sunken to their shins. Trees wore blankets of ice.  
As you may expect, someone has died.”

The orange flames waved at the crowd as paper and print dissolved inside them. Burning words were torn from their sentences. ”

Whoever named Himmel Street certainly had a healthy sense of irony. Not that is was a living hell. It wasn't. But is sure as hell wasn't heaven, either.”

There was once a strange, small man. He decided three important details about his life:  
1. He would part his hair from the opposite side to everyone else.  
2. He would make himself a small, strange mustache.  
3. He would one day rule the world.  
  
...Yes, the Fuhrer decided that he would rule the world with words.”

He watched them grow, until eventually, great forests of words had risen throughout Germany.... It was a nation of farmed thoughts.”

“Death waits for no man - and if he does, he doesn't usually wait for very long.”

“Papa was a man with silver eyes, not dead ones.  
Papa was an accordion!  
But his bellows were all empty.  
Nothing went in and nothing came out.”

She didn't dare to look up, but she could feel their frightened eyes hanging onto her as she hauled the words in and breathed them out. A voice played the notes inside her. This, it said, is your accordion.”

She gave 'The Dream Carrier' to Max as if words alone could nourish him.

When I recollect her, I see a long list of colors, but it's the three in which I saw her in the flesh that resonate the most. Sometimes I manage to float far above those three moments. I hang suspended, until a septic truth bleeds toward clarity.   
  
That's when I see them formulate:  
  
THE COLORS   
RED: [rectangle]  
WHITE: [circle]  
BLACK: [swastika]  
  
They fall on top of each other. The scribbled signature black, onto the blinding global white, onto the thick soupy red. [page 12]”

“The last time I saw her was red. The sky was like soup, boiling and stirring. In some places, it was burned. There were black crumbs, and pepper, streaked across the redness.”

In all honesty (and I know I’m complaining excessively now), I was still getting over Stalin, in Russia. The so-called second revolution—the murder of his own people.  
Then came Hitler.  
They say that war is death’s best friend, but I must offer you a different point of view on that one. To me, war is like the new boss who expects the impossible. He stands over your shoulder repeating one thing, incessantly: “Get it done, get it done.” So you work harder. You get the job done. The boss, however, does not thank you. He asks for more.”

She didn't see him watching as he played, having no idea that Hans Hubermann's accordion was a story. In the times ahead, that story would arrive at 33 Himmel Street in the early hours of morning, wearing ruffled shoulders and a shivering jacket. It would carry a suitcase, a book, and two questions. A story. Story after story. Story within story. ”

Now more than ever, 33 Himmel Street was a place of silence, and it did not go unnoticed that the Duden Dictionary was completely and utterly mistaken, especially with its related words.   
  
Silence was not quiet or calm, and it was not peace.”

What good are the words?”   
―

“Liesel and Papa made their way through the book, this man was traveling to Amsterdam on business and the snow was shivering outside. The girl loved that- the shivering snow. "That's exactly what it does when it comes down," she told Hans Hubermann.”

“Late in February, she stood on Munich Street and watched a single giant cloud come over the hills like a white monster. It climbed the mountains. The sun was eclipsed, and in its place, a white beast with a gray heart watched the town.”   
―

“The world is an ugly stew, she thought.  
It's so ugly I can't stand it.”

Sometimes you read a book so special that you want to carry it around with you for months after you've finished just to stay near it.”

Gradesaver notes

Quotes explained

## uotes and Analysis

1. "I have hated the words and I have loved them, and I hope I have made them right."

the last line written by Liesel Meminger in her novel "The Book Thief," p. 528

After encountering Max being forced on the way to a concentration camp, Liesel becomes hopeless and disdainful of the written word, seeing Hitler's words as the source of her suffering. Ilsa Hermann gives her a blank book and encourages her to write; Liesel writes the story of her life, containing both tragedy and beauty, at a fevered pace. Liesel has come to the realization that words can cause both violence and comfort, and she strives to make them "right" by combating vicious propaganda with writing that emanates from selflessness and love.

1. "You want to know what I truly look like? I'll help you out. Find yourself a mirror while I continue."

Death, p. 307

Far from being a Grim Reaper-like representation, *The Book Thief*'s Death is a weary and cynical character with the relatively menial duty of carrying away the souls of the recently deceased. Yet Death's job is made more difficult by the sheer number of people who die by the hands of others in World War II -- Death seems to agonize most over the gas chambers, literal killing machines at Nazi death camps. Death thus takes a skeptical view of war and humanity itself, believing humanity to be capable of tremendous and irrational evils.

1. "Sometimes I imagined how everything looked above those clouds, knowing without question that the sun was blond, and the endless atmosphere was a giant blue eye."

Death, p. 350

Carrying souls from the gas chamber in Auschwitz, Death imagines the composition of the sky beyond the rain clouds that cover the death camp. In the face of remarkable tragedy, Death expresses optimism that beyond the horrors taking place on Earth, there exists a vivid and unquestionable hope. The "giant blue eye" is potentially a watchful and just God, whose sight has been obscured while His Chosen People are being massacred by the Nazis.

1. "They had no qualms about stealing, but they needed to be told. They *liked* to be told, and Viktor Chemmel liked to be the teller."

Death's narration, p. 274

After Arthur Berg leaves Molching, Viktor Chemmel takes his place as leader of a small gang of teenage thieves. Unlike Arthur, Viktor is a cruel boy who steals for fun and demands obedience from the others. The notion of desiring to be controlled is allegorical to the German people under Hitler's dictatorship, and this passage suggests the existence of a certain weakness and complacency that leads humans to obey to the worst commands merely for the sake of order.

1. "Blood leaked from her nose and licked at her lips. Her eyes had blackened. Cuts had opened up and a series of wounds were rising to the surface of her skin. All from words. From Liesel's words."

Death's narration, p. 253

Liesel explodes at Ilsa Hermann, calling her pathetic and telling her to get over the death of her son. She imagines Ilsa's face becoming physically battered by Liesel's cruel invective. Liesel later comes to regret her tirade, as she realizes the power of words to inflict harm on others.

1. "Mystery bores me. It chores me. I know what happens and so do you. It's the machinations that wheel us there that aggravate, perplex, interest, and astound me."

Death's narration, p. 243

As narrator, Death employs the technique of foreshadowing throughout the novel to reveal, among other things, the fates -- i.e., survival or death -- of individual characters. Just prior to this passage, Death describes how Rudy Steiner dies at the end of the book. Marcus Zusak's employment of foreshadowing places emphasis on the events and "machinations" in Nazi Germany that lead the characters to their ends.

1. "There were the erased pages of *Mein Kampf*, gagging, suffocating under the paint as they turned."

Death's narration, p. 237

Max whitewashes pages of Hitler's propaganda book *Mein Kampf* and draws an entirely new story upon them: a brief retelling of his life, his family's persecution by the Nazis, and his friendship with Liesel. Just as Hans used the same copy of *Mein Kampf* to help bring Max to safety, Max boldly transforms Nazi ideology into compassion.

1. "Did they deserve any better, these people? How many had actively persecuted others, high on the scent of Hitler's gaze, repeating his sentences, his paragraphs, his opus? Was Rosa Hubermann responsible? The hider of a Jew? Or Hans? Did they all deserve to die? The children?"

Death, p. 375

Death compares the plight of the German civilians cowering in a bomb shelter with the certain death of the Jews trapped in Nazi gas chambers. Death's musings bring up the notion of collective responsibility for Hitler's crimes, and Death wonders how culpable these people are for the ongoing Holocaust. While they are all citizens of a nation in the process of killing millions of innocent people, some, like Rosa and Hans, quietly defy the Nazis by hiding a Jew, while others are defenseless children who cannot possibly be held responsible for crimes planned before they were even born.

1. "*The word shaker and the young man climbed up to the horizontal trunk. They navigated the branches and began to walk. When they looked back, they noticed that the majority of onlookers had started to return to their own places. In there. Out there. In the forest.*

*But as they walked on, they stopped several times, to listen. They thought they could hear voices and words behind them, on the word shaker's tree.*"

excerpt from Max's story "The Word Shaker," p. 450

In Max's story, Hitler grows a forest of propaganda-bearing trees, yet a young girl ("the word shaker") plants an indestructable tree that grows miles high from a seed of friendship. She stays at the top of the tree until her friend ("the young man") meets her there. When they climb down, the tree falls, smashing a large part of Hitler's forest. They walk down the tree trunk, and although most of the indoctrinated people return to Hitler's forest, others quietly follow the two friends. Despite the violent against Jews in Nazi Germany, there were a number of Germans who disagreed, if only quietly, with Hitler's persecution. Max's story aims to encourage Liesel to be brave and willing to counter words of hatred with words of love; these final lines suggest that others would be willing to follow her if she took such a stand.

1. "I am haunted by humans."

Death, the last line of the novel, p. 550

*The Book Thief* is framed by Death's contemplation of the worth of humanity, and Death's inability to reconcile the remarkable cruelty and the remarkable compassion of which human beings are simultaneously capable. Liesel's life story contains elements of both, and by the end of the novel, Death appears to be no more capable of judging humanity than at the novel's outset. Thus, Death tells Liesel that it is "haunted" by humans, just as humans are haunted by Death. A jaded metaphysical being so used to dying could only be fearful of -- and, at times, amazed by -- those who live

## Monday, April 23, 2012

### quotes: The Book Thief

Ready yourself for gorgeousness.  
  
pg. 27:

The day was gray, the colour of Europe.  
Curtains of rain were drawn around the car.

pg. 30:

All told, she owned fourteen books, but she saw her story as being made up predominantly of ten of them. Of those ten, six were stolen, one showed up at the kitchen table, two were made for her by a hidden Jew, and one was delivered by a soft, yellow-dressed afternoon.

pg. 44 - 45:

Each night, Liesel would step outside, wipe the door, and watch the sky. Usually it was like spillage—cold and heavy, slippery and gray—but once in a while some stars had the nerve to rise and float, if only for a few minutes. On those nights, she would stay a little longer and wait.  
“Hello, stars.”  
Waiting.  
For the voice from the kitchen.  
Or till the stars were dragged down again, into the waters of the German sky.

pg. 58

Mr. Steiner was a remarkably polite man under normal circumstances. Discovering one of his children smeared charcoal black on a summer evening was not what he considered normal circumstances. “The boy is crazy,” he muttered, although he conceded that with six kids, something like this was bound to happen. At least one of them had to be a bad egg.

pg. 60

Point five: Somewhere, far down, there was an itch in his heart, but he made it a point not to scratch it. He was afraid of what might come leaking out.

pg. 62

People on the street stood and watched, some with straight-armed salutes, others with hands that burned from applause. Some kept faces that were contorted by pride and rally like Frau Diller, and then there were the scatterings of odd men out, like Alex Steiner, who stood like a human-shaped block of wood, clapping slow and dutiful. And beautiful. Submission.

pg. 173

As he looked uncomfortably at the human shape before him, the young man’s voice was scraped out and handed across the dark like it was all that remained of him.

pg. 174

\*\*\* A SMALL BUT NOTEWORTHY NOTE \*\*\*  
I’ve seen so many young men over the years who think they’re running at other young men.  
They are not.  
They’re running at me.

pg.177

Still no one stepped forward, but a voice stooped out and ambled toward the sergeant. It sat at his feet, waiting for a good kicking. It said, “Hubermann, sir.” The voice belonged to Erik Vandenburg. He obviously thought that today wasn’t the appropriate time for his friend to die.

pg.179

“This is Max,” the woman said, but the boy was too young and shy to say anything. he was skinny, with soft hair, and his thick, murky eyes watched as the stranger played one more song in the heavy room. From face to face, he looked on as the man played and the woman wept. The different notes handled her eyes. Such sadness.  
Hans left.  
“You never told me,” he said to a dead Erik Vandenburg and the Stuttgart skyline. “You never told me you had a son.”

pg. 185

The darkness stroked him.  
His fingers smelled of suitcase, metal, Mein Kampf, and survival.

pg. 189

“When death captures me,” the boy vowed, “he will feel my fist on his face.”  
Personally, I quite like that. Such stupid gallantry.  
Yes.  
I like that a lot.

pg. 193

They left, without looking back.  
It tortured him.  
If only he’d turned for one last look at his family as he left the apartment. Perhaps then the guilt would not have been so heavy. No final goodbye.  
No final grip of the eyes.  
Nothing but goneness.

pg. 208

Thank you.  
For Max Vandenburg, those were the two most pitiful words he could possibly say, rivaled only by I’m sorry. There was a constant urge to speak both expressions, spurred on by the affliction of guilt.  
How many times in those first few hours of awakeness did he feel like walking out of that basement and leaving the house altogether? It must have been hundreds.  
Each time, though, it was only a twinge.  
Which made it even worse.  
He wanted to walk out—Lord, how he wanted to (or at least he wanted to want to)—but he knew he wouldn’t. It was much the same as the way he left his family in Stuttgart, under a veil of fabricated loyalty.  
To live.  
Living was living.  
The price was guilt and shame.

pg. 216

For the first few weeks in front of the fire, Max remained wordless. Now that he was having a proper bath once a week, Liesel noticed that his hair was no longer a nest of twigs, but rather a collection of feathers, flopping about on his head. Still shy of the stranger, she whispered it to her papa.  
“His hair is like feathers.”  
“What?” The fire had distorted the words.  
“I said,” she whispered again, leaning closer, “his hair is like feathers…”  
Hans Hubermann looked across and nodded his agreement. I’m sure he was wishing to have eyes like the girl. They didn’t realize that Max had heard everything.

pg.220

\*\*\*THE SWAPPING OF NIGHTMARES\*\*\*  
The girl: “Tell me. What do you see when you dream like that?”  
The Jew: “…I see myself turning around, and waving goodbye.”  
The girl: “I also have nightmares.”  
The Jew: “What do you see?”  
The girl: “A train, and my dead brother.”  
The Jew: Your brother?”  
The girl: “He died when I moved here, on the way.”  
The girl and the Jew, together: “Ja—yes .”

pg. 238

She walked down the basement steps. She saw an imaginary framed photo seep into the wall—a quiet-smiled secret.

pg. 241

A book floated down the Amper River.  
A boy jumped in, caught up to it, and held it in his right hand. He grinned.  
He stood waist-deep in the icy, Decemberish water.  
“How about a kiss, Saumensch?” he said.  
The surrounding air was a lovely, gorgeous, nauseating cold, not to mention the concrete ache of the water, thickening from his toes to his hips.  
How about a kiss?  
How about a kiss?  
Poor Rudy.

pg. 242

Yes, I know it.  
In the darkness of my dark-beating heart, I know. He’d have loved it, all right.  
You see?  
Even death has a heart.

pg. 251

He was twenty-four, but he could still fantasize.

pg. 303

“How about a kiss, Saumensch?”  
He stood waist-deep in the water for a few moments longer before climbing out and handing her the book. His pants clung to him, and he did not stop walking. In truth, I think he was afraid. Rudy Steiner was scared of the book thief’s kiss. He must have longed for it so much. He must have loved her so incredibly hard. So hard that he would never ask for her lips again and would go to his grave without them.

pg. 307

It was a year for the ages, like 79, like 1346, to name a just a few. Forget the scythe, Goddamn it, I needed a broom or a mop. And I needed a vacation.

pg. 309

They keep triggering inside me. They harass my memory. I see them tall in their heaps, all mounted on top of each other. There is air like plastic, a horizon like setting glue. There are skies manufactured by people, punctured and leaking, and there are soft, coal-coloured clouds, beating like black hearts.  
And then.  
There is death.  
Making his way through all of it.  
On the surface: unflappable, unwavering.  
Below: unnerved, untied, and undone.

pg. 313

\*\*\*CHRISTMAS GREETINGS FROM MAX VANDENBURG\*\*\*  
“Often I wish this would all be over, Liesel, but then somehow you do something like walk down the basement steps with a snowman in your hands.”

pg. 215

In the course of the night, Max was visited seven times.

\*\*\*MAX VANDENBURG’S VISITOR SCORE SHEET\*\*\*

Hans Hubermann: 2

Rosa Hubermann: 2

Liesel Meminger: 3

pg. 321

The feather was lovely and trapped, in the door hinges of the church on Munich Street.

pg. 326

Rain like gray pencil shavings.

pg. 398

Somewhere near Munich, a German Jew was making his way through the darkness. An arrangement had been made to meet Hans Hubermann in four days (that is, if he hadn’t been taken away). It was at a place far down the Amper, where a broken bridge leaned among the river and trees.  
He would make it there, but he would not stay longer than a few minutes.  
The only thing to be found there when Papa arrived four days later was a note under a rock, at the base of a tree. It was addressed to nobody and contained only one sentence.

\*\*\*THE LAST WORDS OF MAX VANDENBURG\*\*\*

You’ve done enough.