1. The reader as a ‘Book Thief.’

Books have always been a valued and valuable part of history, society and education. As children we are taught to treat books with respect: not to throw them and not to draw in them for example. Some people’s lives are devoted purely to their love of books, reading and the written word. These may be authors, illustrators, librarians or even book collectors.

An important thread that runs through the course of the novel, and which gives it its title of ***The Book Thief***, is the extraordinary lengths that Liesel will go to, and the risks she is willing to take, in order to fuel her love and passion of books, reading and learning. Other characters, such as Hans Hubermann, Rudy Steiner and Ilsa Hermann, were also conspirators in not only Liesel’s quest for books, but also their love and devotion to Liesel herself.

“He continued down to the water’s edge, showing her the book’s location. ‘Over there!’ he stopped and pointed and ran further down, to overtake it. Soon, he peeled off his coat and jumped in, wading to the middle of the river.

Liesel, slowing to a walk, could see the ache of each step. The painful cold. When she was close enough, she saw it move past him, but he soon caught up. His hand reached in and collared what was now a soggy block of cardboard and paper. *‘The Whistler!’* the boy called out.” (p326)

Some of us are born with an innate sense of the love of books and reading, while for some it grows and strengthens as we mature.

• If you were a ‘Book Thief’, which book do you love enough to go to extraordinary lengths to secure?

• Alternatively, what do you hold dear? What is it, and what would you be prepared to do in order to ensure its safety and safekeeping?

• Also, to what lengths would you go to save or rescue something of value to your best friend?

1. Words….

The Book Thief is also a novel about the power of words. [Adolf Hitler](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=25567) and his Nazi Party rose to power in no small part through the sheer power of words, delivered through violent speeches, propaganda, and Hitler's seminal book Mein Kampf. Hitler denounced the Jews, the Communists, and the influence of recent enemies like France as he delivered a message of nationalism, Aryan racial superiority, and the promise that he would remake Germany into a world power that would dominate Europe for the benefit of the German people. In the midst of a worldwide Great Depression, when the German economy lay in ruins after the nation suffered an embarrassing defeat in World War I, Hitler's message was persuasive - and dangerous. After coming to power, Hitler pursued a policy of rapid militarization and the systematic extermination of those the Nazis considered to be social undesirables: communists, homosexuals, the disabled, gypsies, Poles, Soviets, opponents to the Nazi regime, and the Jews. Hitler ordered that these people be sent to death camps and murdered, and he used the German state machinery - from the secret police who sought hidden Jews, to the conductors who drove the trains, to the guards who oversaw the concentration camps -- to achieve this end.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the German people were not necessarily intent on murdering millions of Jews and others. Yet Hitler's sheer persuasiveness, along with his total control of Germany's police and media, compelled average Germans to go along with the Holocaust. The Book Thief emphasizes both the danger of words and their potential redemptive value. On Hitler's birthday, [Liesel Meminger](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=25495) defies the Nazis and steals a smoldering book from a public burning of banned literature. Her friend, the Jewish refugee [Max Vandenburg](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=25497), hides the map and key to a safe house in a copy of Mein Kampf. Later, Max rips out pages from the book, washes them in white paint, and draws on them a story that is entirely different from the virulent anti-Jew material that Hitler originally wrote. The Book Thief illustrates that just as words can impel human beings to commit horrific atrocities, words can counteract this vileness. Words can forge a remarkable friendship between a hidden Jew and a German girl, words can defy the Nazis when Hitler's propaganda is erased, and beauty and kindness are planted on his pages.

1. The Standover Man:

The pictures and stories that Max draws and writes during his time in the Hubermann’s cellar are an important part of the novel. They helped to keep him alive by passing time, providing him with a mental and creative release, as well as proving to be vitally therapeutic in making sense of the many thoughts, feelings and emotions he experienced as a result of his confinement.

1. Before reading *The Standover Man* in the novel, look at the drawings only

(minus the accompanying text).

• What story do you think the pictures are telling?

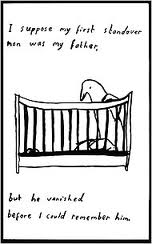
• Who are the two characters?

• What is their relationship?

• What are they talking about or discussing?

• What is the significance of the last page?

Ultimately, what message is Max trying to make?

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Based on all this, list some key points about the idea of the power of words and / or books.

Then construct a theme statement.