

# *The Reader:* in Context



Ava S, Allie O, Macy S, Martin V

# Setting

- Germany
- Post WWII - 1960s
  - Part 1: 1958
  - Part 2: 1964
  - Part 3: 1976
  - Between Hitler's national socialism (*Tätergeneration*) and the generation of the post-Second Great War (*Nachgeborenen*)
  - Controversial topic at the time
- Difficult economic recessions = loss of hope

# Inspiration

- Inspired by 1963-1965 Auschwitz trials
- Generational guilt
  - Mass murder of over six million Jews, Romani, homosexuals, and communists in Europe during the Nazi regime
  - And then integrating back into society, not easy
- Deals with post-war Germany
  - Need for these things to be acknowledged
- Change in the world's view of Germany
- Coming to terms with the past

# Time of Publication

- Book written in 1995
  - Just after period of reunification for Germany
- Makes the novel impactful when viewed through both a contemporary and post-war lense
  - Ideas of guilt and moving forward are even more present in the time of publication
  - Reunification and rebuilding (not just literally) after the still-turbulent Cold War years

# Genre

- Bildungsroman
  - Coming of age novel
- Vergangenheitsbewältigung
  - Wrestling with the past
  - Dealing with the past and recovering from it
- Parable
  - A succinct didactic story which illustrates one or more instructive lessons
  - Not necessarily true, used to illustrate a lesson

# Work in Translation

- Originally in German
  - Lose some nuances of meaning when translated in 1966
- Not everyone that reads is from Germany = different perceptions of German culture to begin with
  - Written for the post-war generation in Germany (relate differently to the book)
  - Gives foreigners a glimpse into the German sentiments at the time

# Post-War Generation

- Auschwitz liberated 1/27/45
- “Gap generation”
  - Explores how the post-war generations should approach the generation that took part in, or witnessed, the atrocities
- Guilt and shame surrounding the topic
  - Relevant to the time period--common feeling at the time
- Never wanting to repeat it again

# Illiteracy and Education

- Importance of choice - literature gives you knowledge and ability
- Humanization of the villains
  - Makes a case not for their actions, but an explanation
  - Interesting lense of: is it a justification?
- Moral illiteracy vs. actual illiteracy



# Unrest in Society

- Generational conflict expressed by the student protests
- Rapid economic recession sparks anger amongst the student population
- Student movement peaked in May 1968
  - Tens of thousands of students and workers protested against the German Emergency Act (grant the government the power to limit civil rights)
- Student protests about the bad living conditions and Nazis who still worked in the government and universities.
  - Many “normal” people they interacted with before war involved in war crimes