

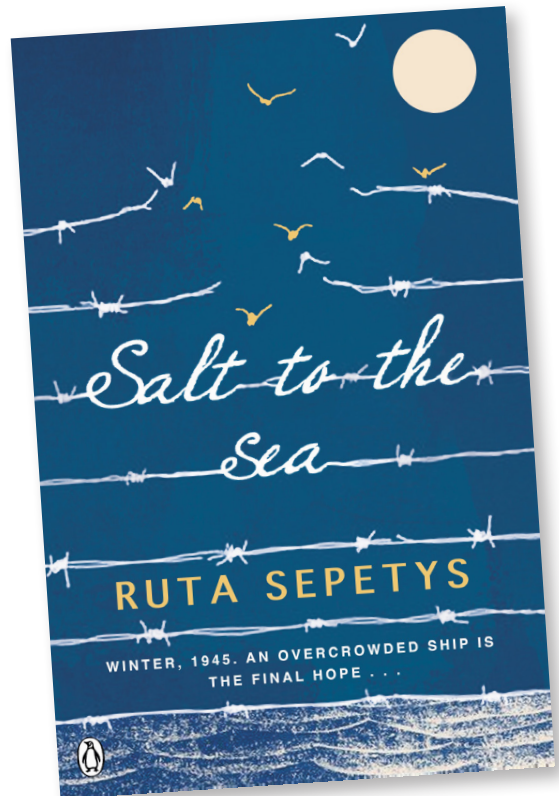
# SALT TO THE SEA

by Ruta Sepetys

Puffin

Shortlisted for the 2017 Carnegie Medal and the Amnesty CILIP Honour

*'A haunting and beautiful novel that breathes life into one of World War II's most terrifying and little-known tragedies'* – Judging panel



**Disrespect for human rights has led to horrific acts that have outraged people across the world. We all want a world where people can enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want. If these rights are made law, then people will be protected from tyranny and oppression.**

Preamble, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

This heartbreaking story takes place during World War II. It follows four young people on the Wilhelm Gustloff, a German ship promising freedom to those desperate to escape the advancing Russian Army. It tells a true but largely forgotten tragedy – the ship had over 9,000 refugees on board, including about 5,000 children, when it was sunk by a Soviet submarine. Nearly all were drowned.

‘War is catastrophe. It breaks families in irretrievable pieces. But those who are gone are not necessarily lost.’

Clara

## HUMAN RIGHTS THEMES IN THIS STORY

Discrimination, xenophobia and racism; war crimes including genocide and sexual violence; right to life and to safety; right to an identity; right to healthcare, food, clothing and housing; refugee rights; women’s rights; children’s rights.

## YOU CAN TALK ABOUT...

### The characters

- Each of the four main characters has a secret. How does it define them and their actions?
- To begin with, the four main characters don't even trust each other enough to exchange names. By the end, we see how connected they all are, even with Alfred. What do they have in common?
- Which character inspires you the most?
- Why do you think the author chose to include Alfred's point of view? What does his perspective show about Nazi ideology and rule?

### Discrimination and duty to others

- Why might Eva behave in the way she does?
- What might motivate Alfred? How can he think and act in the way that he does?
- What do you think about Mrs Kleist's actions?
- How can we change people's attitudes and behaviour?

### Human rights abuses in conflict

- The author doesn't shy away from the horrors of war. Give examples. Although this is fiction, they are based on a true story. How does that make you feel?
- Who was responsible for human rights abuses committed by Russian and German soldiers under orders from Stalin and Hitler?
- Do you have any answers to Florian's questions? 'What had human beings become? Did war make us evil or just activate an evil already lurking within us?'
- How do you feel when you read Alfred's rhyme to remember the groups of people who were declared racial, social and political enemies by Hitler?

### Safety and asylum

- Why does the Shoe Poet think that Joana might want some poison for herself?
- Why did the grandfather of the estate house dress in his uniform then kill his family and himself?
- The scenes at the dock and when the ship is sinking are horrific. Why would people risk such danger?
- You've seen news reports of Syrian refugees in their dinghies. How does that make you feel now?

### ACTIVITY

Many children today are like Klaus and Hannika – they are refugees and separated from their families. Imagine you have fled the country you call home and made it to the UK. But you are alone. Write a letter to your family describing who you have met, what life is like and how you feel. Think about whether you have been welcomed and how different people have responded to you.

### RESEARCH

Research the sinking of the Wilhelm Gustloff. It remains the worst single naval disaster in history. Why isn't it widely known? What happened? Who died, and who got to live? Why is it important to tell this story?

Find out about European Refugee movements in World War II including how many came to Britain and how they were treated.

## We are all born free and equal

The atrocities of World War II sparked a determination to protect the rights of all human beings, everywhere. On 10 December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The preamble says it must be shared, learned by children and be a part of all our lives.

For a simplified version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights go to [www.amnesty.org.uk/udhr](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/udhr)

For more free educational resources from Amnesty International go to [www.amnesty.org.uk/education](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/education)



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