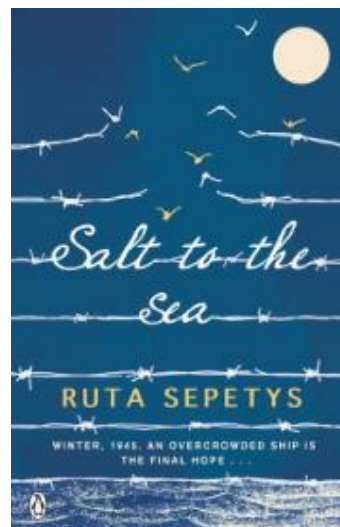


2017 Carnegie Medal shortlist Talking Points

Title: **Salt to the Sea**
Author: **Ruta Sepetys**
Publisher: **Puffin**



UNTOLD STORIES

Had you heard of the story of the sinking of the Wilhelm Gustloff before reading this book?

The author has said, *“History, particularly hidden history, is absolutely a passion of mine”* – what do you think she means by “hidden history”? And what do you think the appeal is?

East Prussia in the winter of 1945 is not a setting most readers will be familiar with – how well does the author bring it to life for you?

HISTORICAL FICTION

If you read the “author’s note”, you’ll know that Sepetys did a lot of research to write this book; why do you think doing that detailed historical research is important, given that this is fiction anyway?

And why might a writer choose to write fiction about it in the first place, rather than a work of historical fact? What does the fictionalising add to the reader’s experience?

FOUR STORIES IN ONE

The narrative point of view moves between characters (teenagers from Germany, Poland, Lithuania and East Prussia); how well do the strands fit together and complement one another?

What does each of the main characters’ strands contribute to the big picture?

There were of course millions of people affected by war, and many thousands on the ship, and we’re just getting a glimpse of a tiny handful of lives (a few small tragedies among the vast tragedies) – how well do you think the author uses these characters to make us understand a wider picture, something beyond just their particular experiences?



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SECRETS AND GUILT

Each teenager has things they have to keep secret, or guilt they carry around with them – what are these particular burdens for: **Joana?** **Florian?** **Emilia?**

What does the fact that even the good people all have dark secrets say about the world they've been living in?

ALFRED

Alfred is not by any measure one of the novel's "good" characters – why do you think his part of the story is included alongside the others?

Is some attempt made by the author to get us to understand him, or even to sympathise him, or is he his purely irredeemably nasty?

Is it important, do you think, for fiction to help us try to understand even characters like this?

ENDING

As we approach the final stages of the story, how have the relationships between the main characters shifted?

How do you feel about the very end, and the fate of these characters you've hopefully come to love?

Is there some hopeful message about humanity to be found among the wreckage?

SOME OTHER QUESTIONS...

If you've read the author's *Shades of Gray*, did you notice the loose connection between the books?

Sepetys herself is the daughter of a refugee; did reading the stories in her book make you think differently about the often brutal experience that refugees are still going through in our world today?

The book is published in the UK as a "young adult" novel, but in some countries Sepetys is considered an adult writer, not a YA writer. Do you have strong feelings about how a book like this should be categorised for a particular readership, or does it not matter?

AND FINALLY...

Does this Carnegie-shortlisted book deserve to win? Why, or why not?