

The Diary of a Young Girl

Anne Frank



About the author

Anne Frank was born in Frankfurt-am-Main on 12 June 1929. In 1933 the Franks fled from Germany to escape persecution by the Nazis and her father found a position as a manager in a company in Amsterdam. Anne was given a diary for her thirteenth birthday and began writing in it the next day. She had a passion for writing and managed to keep up her diary throughout the time her family was in hiding; her last entry was written just before the hiding place was discovered and the family was sent off to concentration camps. After the war, her diary was published and became an immediate success. It has remained in print ever since, and the story of Anne's life has been made into a Hollywood film. Most readers of the diary come away feeling that they have really grown to know the lonely girl who refused to be silenced by circumstances.

Summary

The Diary of a Young Girl, written between 1942 and 1944, is probably the most famous personal diary ever published and one of the most important literary works of the Second World War. It was written by a teenage Jewish girl whose family was forced into hiding in Amsterdam during the German occupation. It is a work which is given extra pathos by the fact that we know something which the author did not know – that her family's hiding place would be discovered and that she would end up being captured and ultimately killed in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. The diary paints a touching and honest picture of an ordinary girl growing up in extraordinary circumstances. The everyday concerns of an adolescent girl – family relationships, boyfriends, hopes and dreams for the future – are contrasted with the horrific details of a secret life in hiding under constant fear of discovery.

The book has become an important landmark in Jewish literature and history, as well as a powerful weapon against bigotry and racism.

Saturday, 13 June 1942–Friday, 21 August 1942

Anne receives a diary for her birthday. She wonders who will be interested in the thoughts of a thirteen-year-old schoolgirl and calls her diary her new friend. She describes her family: her father, a company manager; her mother; and her older sister Margot. The Franks, who are Jewish, have moved to Holland from Germany to escape persecution, but since the Germans' arrival in Holland there are now restrictions on Jews there as well. Anne's father can no longer work openly. Scared that the Germans will send them to a concentration camp, the Franks and another family, the van Daans, go into hiding, with the help of people who work for her father's company. Their hiding place, in her father's office building, is called the 'Secret Annexe'. A friend hides the door of the Annexe by building a bookcase in front of it.

Monday, 21 September 1942–Sunday, 13 June 1943

The group lives in fear of noises which could be Germans coming for them. They hear about their friends being sent to concentration camps, where people are killed with gas. Friends bring them bread and they store black market food in the attic. A Jewish dentist, Mr Dussel, joins them and they give him the sometimes playful but serious rules of living in the Annexe. He shares Anne's room and tells them how the Army is now actively looking for Jews.

Wednesday, 13 January 1943–Monday evening, 8 November 1943

Air raids make sleeping difficult and there is less food. But on Anne's birthday, her father writes something funny for her and she gets sweets from everyone. A break-in occurs at the house but the Annexe is not discovered. The Allied bombing of Amsterdam continues, but it is not safe for Anne and the others to leave the Annexe.

Sunday, 2 January 1944–Tuesday, 14 March 1944

Anne re-reads pages from her diary and reflects on the lack of love in her relationship with her mother. The quarrels continue and everyone tries to predict what will happen if the British invade Holland. Anne begins to visit Peter, who is living in the attic, regularly although her mother does not like it. The police take away the man who sells them black-market food and they are forced to eat bad food.

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Saturday, 18 March 1944–Tuesday, 11 April 1944

Anne remarks that parents should be more honest about sex with their children, and describes her admiration for Peter. She hears on the radio that diaries and letters will be important after the war, and imagines writing a book about the hardships and sufferings of the people around her. Food is a particular problem, she says. There are potatoes and beans but no other vegetables, and a piece of sausage once a week. But Anne is still thankful to be alive. She decides that she wants to be a writer.

Sunday, 16 April 1944–Afterword

There is another break-in at the house, and the police come, although they do not find the Annexe. Anne and the others realise they must be more careful. Anne gets her first kiss from Peter. She tells her father, who warns her to be careful as she and Peter are living so closely together. In the world outside, food has become very expensive and people can't earn enough to eat. Anne begins to feel less close to Peter. She learns that some Christians are now turning against Jews and reporting them to the authorities. The man who brings them potatoes is arrested, and there are quarrels over food in the Annexe. Anne fears they will soon run out of money. But BBC reports that the British and American armies are now in France give them hope that the war will be over soon. Her fifteenth birthday arrives and she still has conflicting feelings about Peter. She feels that there are two Annes, a light-hearted Anne that the world sees and a better, weaker Anne whom she keeps hidden.

Anne Frank's diary ends here. On 4 August 1944 German and Dutch police arrest the eight people who were living in the Annexe. One of their helpers finds Anne's diary and keeps it safely. The eight people from the Annexe are sent to concentration camps. All but one die in the camps. Anne and her sister Margot die from an illness in the Bergen-Belsen camp a few weeks before the British army arrives. Only Anne's father, Otto Frank, survives. He spends the rest of his life sharing the message of his daughter's diary with the world.

Background and themes

The Nazis and anti-Semitism: *The Diary of a Young Girl* gives a unique insight into the situation in which Jews found themselves during the Second World War. It is an important part of the literature of one of the most shocking episodes in human history – the Holocaust –

the extermination of over six million Jews at the hands of the German Nazi party. The Nazis believed that the Jews were an inferior race and they pursued a policy of genocide both in Germany and in the countries they occupied. At first Jews were sent to concentration camps as slave labour but eventually the camps were fitted with gas chambers in order to murder as many Jews as possible. There is now a foundation in honour of Anne Frank and the Amsterdam house that she hid in has become a museum where visitors can visit the Secret Annexe and see an exhibition on her life and the Holocaust in general.

Hardship and heroism during war: Anne Frank's family were in Amsterdam because they thought it safe. Amsterdam had had a long history of offering refuge to exiled Jews. Unfortunately, the Netherlands was invaded by Germany in May 1940 and the Germans set up an occupying administration which imposed the harsh anti-Jewish laws that Anne describes in her diary. Yet many Dutch people took great risks in helping Jews to escape or to hide from the authorities. In fact, Anne and her family were only able to survive for so long because of the bravery of their friends in Amsterdam.

Growing up: Although Anne was only thirteen when she started writing her diary, she had an adult's understanding of the world and of human relationships. She paints a vivid picture of life in hiding but she doesn't see herself as a victim and doesn't dwell on her sufferings. The diary is full of optimism and Anne's sense of humour is obvious from the way she describes her companions and some of the dilemmas she faces. She talks honestly about the changes in her body, her feelings about boys and the petty jealousies and rivalries between herself and her companions in the Secret Annexe. The book is a gripping account of a young girl's innermost feelings as she starts to become a woman.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- Discuss, write:** Ask students whether they write a diary, and if so, why. Ask them to keep a diary while they are reading this book.
- Discuss:** Ask the class to tell you anything they know about the Second World War. Ask students to come up and write a word, a date, or a fact about the war on the board. Encourage students to mention the Holocaust and the German invasion of other European countries.

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- 3 Research:** Ask students to choose a topic from the words, dates or facts that they wrote on the board in activity 2. Students, individually or in pairs or small groups, can research and prepare a one-minute presentation on the topic. Suggest that they can get information for their presentations from the library, reference books or by doing an Internet search.

Introduction

After reading

- 4 Discuss:** When students have read the Introduction (pages v–vii) read out these sentences and ask the students to correct the mistakes.
- The events in the book happen in Holland during the First World War.
 - The Frank family decide to hide in a secret house.
 - They are hiding from the Germans, who are about to invade Holland.
 - Altogether, eight people spent the next three years living in the secret home.
 - Anne writes about her boyfriend and the warm relationship she has with her mother.
 - Anne wants to travel and marry when the war ends.
 - After 1943, the war news makes the Franks family feel more hopeless.
 - Anne died just after the British soldiers arrived.

Saturday, 13 June 1942–Friday,

21 August 1942

After reading

- 5 Write, discuss:** On pages 1 and 2, Anne tells the story of her family background. Ask students to make up a questionnaire to find out about the families of their classmates. Each questionnaire should have ten questions. Start them off by writing these example questions on the board: *Where and when was your mother/father born? Where and when did your parents get married? When students have completed their questionnaires they can go around the room interviewing their classmates and filling in the questionnaires.*
- 6 Write:** Have students read the diary entry for Wednesday, 1 July 1942 (page 4). Then ask students to imagine they are Otto Frank, Anne's father, and write an entry in his diary. *Say what you and Anne said to each other after she came back from her walk with Hello, and how you felt about it.*
- 7 Predict:** By 21st August 1942, Anne is living with her sister, parents and the van Daan family in the Secret Annex. They are scared to leave the Annex and must be very quiet at night. Have students answer these questions. *What sort of problems do you think Anne will have living in the Secret Annex? What sort of problems will the group have as a whole?*

**Monday, 21 September 1942–Tuesday,
22 December 1943**

After reading

- 8 Discuss:** Divide the class into groups of three or four students. Ask each group to discuss how Anne spends her time in the Secret Annex. They then decide how they would spend their time there. Ask them to make a list of ideas and to compare it with the ideas from other groups. Then take a vote and make a 'top ten' list of activities for your class.

**Wednesday, 13 January 1943–Monday evening,
8 November 1943**

After reading

- 9 Discuss:** Divide the class into small groups to discuss the following questions:
Why do you think the British and Americans bombed Holland? Is it right to bomb cities full of innocent people in war time?

**Sunday, 2 January 1944–Tuesday,
14 March 1944**

After reading

- 10 Discuss:** Ask students to make a list of things that change during this part of the book (pages 23–30). They can think about these things:
- Anne's attitude towards her mother.
 - Anne's feelings towards Peter.
 - the behaviour of the other people in the Annex.
 - the war news.
- Divide the class into groups of three or four students. Ask each group to compare their lists.

**Saturday, 18 March 1944–Tuesday,
11 April 1944**

After reading

- 11 Discuss:** Ask students to look at Anne's entries for 19 and 22 March. Do they think Peter loved Anne or not? Ask all the students who answer 'yes' to form one team and all the students who answer 'no' to form another team and organise a debate between the teams.

Sunday, 16 April 1944–Afterword

After reading

- 12 Write:** On 4 August the police arrest Anne and her family. Imagine that Anne wrote her diary for that day. Write her diary for her.
- 13 Discuss:** Ask students if they have been writing a diary while they have been reading *The Diary of a Young Girl*. If so, what have they learnt from this experience? Ask them if they think they will continue to write it.