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Number the Stars

Heidi Schiers

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Larche, Dr. Douglas W.. *Number the Stars*. The Dramatic Publishing Company, 1996. ISBN 871297116.
\$ Listed in the publisher's catalogue. 62 pp.

Reviewer: Schiers, Heidi;

Reading Level: Intermediate;

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Historical Play; Plays; Contemporary Realistic Play;

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Holocaust; Danish Resistance Movement;

Theme: Heroism

Production Requirements: Nothing specific. Perhaps good dog barking sound effects.

Acts: 2

Run Time: 70-90 minutes

Characters: 14

Cast: 7 men, 7 women, with some doubling

Time Period: 1940s, World War II era

In World War II Nazi-occupied Denmark, fourteen-year old Annemarie Johansen does not like to get noticed, particularly by the German soldiers standing on every street corner. Encounters with them make her very nervous, and Annemarie's brazen, almost reckless younger sister often loudly teases Annemarie for being afraid. New regulations are introduced which apply to Ellen Rosen - Annemarie's best friend and Ellen's family because they are Jewish, and Annemarie faces losing her best friend under the Nazi relocation plan. As Ellen masquerades as Annemarie's older sister Lise, Annemarie and her family come to terms with Lise's death. Annemarie also comes to terms with her fears while helping the Rosens escape to Sweden, when she is all alone and runs into two Nazi soldiers. She learns that bravery is "just thinking about what you must do, and doing it," even when one is frightened.

Dr. Larche has adapted this play from the popular, Newbery Gold Medal winning book, *Number the Stars*, and has successfully captured the essence and bulk of the book and the insecurities of an adolescent who feels that she must be brave in a scary and uncertain world. Young audiences can relate to this play, finding courage to stand strong and help those in need, even when it is scary and the consequences are unknown. Families can appreciate and learn from the simple and honest relationship of the Johansen family. During a time of war, when butter, sugar and cupcakes are scarce, the Johansen family has everything they truly need: each other. Their affection towards each other is abundant. Annemarie attempts to be patient with her precocious and sometimes annoying younger sister, Kirstie, while her parents act as good examples to their children, willing to risk their own lives and defy injustice in order to help their friends. There is a great deal of trust between Annemarie and her parents. For example, when Ellen is separated from her parents and worries about them, Annemarie reassures Ellen that her parents are safe because Annemarie's Papa said so. Mrs. Johansen trusts Annemarie to go out on her own in order to deliver a very valuable package to the fleeing Jews. Audiences can also learn lessons about what true friends will do for each other, even if they are young, for even young people can perform heroic acts in real and even simple ways.

The play could best be accomplished in a small and intimate space. Set requirements are few, leaving the designer to be as extravagant or minimal as desired, but the script lends itself to a more simplistic design. Since in certain scenes much of the action occurs offstage, there could be a great deal of empty space to fill. This is particularly true in the case of the Nazi soldier questioning Annemarie and feeding her lunch to the two barking big dogs just offstage. Another possible awkward scene is when the girls stand on the coast of the sea next to a whole world of water where, the script mentions, the girls attempt to wade in the cold waters of the Baltic sea.

The scenes are short and move the story along, but the excessive use of blackouts make the play seem choppy. Fluid transitions between scenes will allow the audience to stay connected to the world of the play and not snap them out of the action, left to wonder about the time. Although the ending is abrupt and very storybook, a great lesson can be learned from Annemarie and her family through this play. They

did everything they could, and then placed their trust in the hands of Him who numbers the stars. This is courage.