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# Salt to the Sea

Abigail Packard

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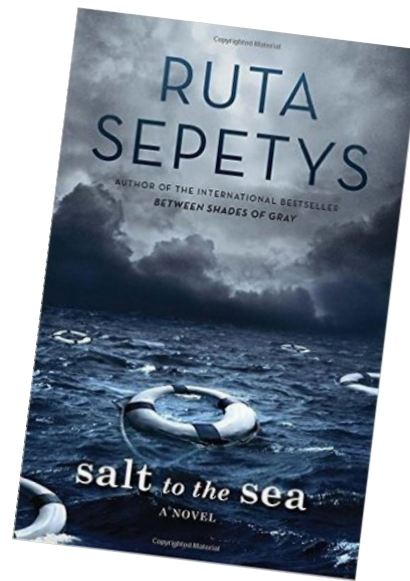
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# Book Review

**Title:** Salt to the Sea  
**Author:** Ruta Sepetys  
**Reviewer:** Abigail Packard  
**Publisher:** Philomel Books  
**Year:** 2016  
**ISBN:** 9780399160301  
**Pages:** 400  
**Interest Level:** Young Adult  
**Rating:** Outstanding



## Review

Joana is a nurse in training from Lithuania. Florian is a Prussian artist running from the work he did for the fuhrer. Emilia is a pregnant girl fleeing her homeland of Poland. Alfred is an enthusiastic German soldier set on enforcing the fuhrer's standards. Joana, Florian, and Emilia end up in a refugee group that is walking through the frozen German landscape, desperately trying to survive and blend in amidst the turmoil caused by WWII. Each has their secrets, but they begin to trust and even love each other. During their struggles, Alfred composes letters in his head to his love interest about his experiences as part of the German naval force. Joana, Florian, Emilia, and Alfred all cross paths when they board a German ship, the Wilhelm Gustloff, bound for safety. But when the ship is attacked by Russian missiles, they are forced to escape one of the greatest maritime disasters of all time. Joana and Florian manage to escape on a lifeboat, but Alfred perishes in the disaster and Emilia sacrifices herself in order to save her newborn child.

Ruta Sepetys's *Salt to the Sea* is a stunning work of historical fiction. Centered on a little-known story, the narrative that Sepetys so carefully and beautifully creates expounds upon an otherwise saturated genre set in the WWII era. Told in short snippets from Joana, Emilia, Florian, and Alfred's point of view, the story of survival, trust, and even love blossoms in stark contrast to history's horrid landscape. Sepetys deftly works writing magic as she develops each character rich with secrets, emotions, and conflicting views. Readers will easily find connections to these palpable characters. Moreover, Sepetys guides the reader to important, universal themes through raw scenes of violence, abuse, and sorrow. *Salt to the Sea* can comfortably sit between *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Number the Stars*, and *The Book Thief*, reiterating and adding to these stories of humanity's triumph despite the terrors of such a war-torn era.

\*Contains mild language, severe violence, and severe sexual content.