

*The Hiding Place*  
by Corrie ten Boom  
(with Elizabeth and John Sherrill)

A Teacher's Guide for Socratic Discussion  
by Ryan Pfeiffer



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# INTRODUCTION



CenterForLit’s teacher guide series is intended to assist teachers and parents in conducting meaningful discussions of literature in the classroom or home school. It is important to note that they are **not** intended to be workbooks for the student, but rather models and guides for discussion leaders. Questions and answers follow the pattern presented in *Teaching the Classics*, CenterForLit’s flagship literature seminar. Though the concepts underlying this approach to literary analysis are explained in detail in that seminar, the following brief summary presents the basic principles upon which this guide is based.

The *Teaching the Classics* approach to literary analysis and interpretation is built around **three unique ideas** which, when combined, produce a powerful instrument for understanding and teaching literature:

**First:** All works of fiction share the same basic elements — **Context, Structure, and Style**. A literature lesson that helps the student identify these elements in a story prepares them for meaningful discussion of the story’s themes.

**Context** encompasses all of the details of time and place surrounding the writing of a story, including the personal life of the author as well as historical events that shaped the author’s world.

**Structure** includes the essential building blocks that make up a story, and that all stories have in common: Conflict, Plot (which includes *exposition, rising action, climax, denouement, and conclusion*), Setting, Characters, and Theme.

**Style** refers to the literary devices used by authors to create the mood and atmosphere of their stories. Recognition of some basic literary devices (alliteration, simile, personification, metaphor, etc.) enables a reader not only to understand the author’s themes more readily, but also to appreciate his craftsmanship more fully.

**Second:** Because it is approachable and engaging, *children’s literature* is the best genre to employ in teaching the foundational principles of literary analysis. Children’s books present these building blocks in clear, memorable language, and are thus treasure mines of opportunities for the astute teacher — allowing him to present Context, Structure, and Style with ease to children and adults alike. Having learned to recognize these basic elements in the simple text of a classic children’s story, a student is well prepared to analyze complex works suitable for his own age and level of intellectual development.

**Third:** The best classroom technique for teaching literary analysis and interpretation is the *Socratic Method*. Named after the ancient gadfly who first popularized this style of teaching, the Socratic method employs the art of questioning, rather than lecturing, to accomplish education. Based upon the conviction that the process of discovery constitutes the better part of learning, our program uses well-placed questions to teach students how to think, rather than dictating to them what to think.

The *Teaching the Classics* seminar syllabus supplies a thorough list of Socratic questions for teachers to use in class discussion. The questions are general enough to be used with any book, but focused enough to lead the

student into meaningful contemplation of the themes of even the most difficult stories. Questions on the list are arranged in order of difficulty: from grammar-level questions which ask for the mere fact of a story, to rhetoric-level questions which require discussion of ideologies and transcendent themes. Properly employed, this list can help teachers engage their classes in important discussions of ideas, and can also provide a rich resource for essays and other writing assignments! Used in conjunction with a good writing program, *Teaching the Classics* produces **deep thinkers** at any age.

The questions used in this guide have been taken directly from the Socratic list, and will therefore be familiar to the seminar alumnus.

More information about *Teaching the Classics* may be found at [www.centerforlit.com/teaching-the-classics](http://www.centerforlit.com/teaching-the-classics).

Happy reading!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adam Andrews", with a long, sweeping underline.

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# QUICK CARD



<p><b>Reference</b></p>	<p><i>The Hiding Place</i> by Corrie ten Boom, with Elizabeth and John Sherrill. ISBN: 0553256696</p>
<p><b>Plot</b></p>	<p>The ten Booms, a Christian family in Holland, aid Jewish people as part of an underground resistance network during World War II. They are then discovered and imprisoned with those they sought to help. Corrie and her sister Betsie are sent to the infamous women's concentration camp Ravensbruck. There, amid the atrocities of the camp, they experience the miraculous provision of God. Betsy remains compassionate toward her tormentors. Corrie becomes bitter. Betsy prophesies their freedom, but dies incarcerated. Corrie, however, is released on a technical error one week before her age group is executed. She becomes a renowned evangelist dedicated to preaching the love and forgiveness of God.</p>
<p><b>Setting</b></p>	<p>A home and watch shop known as "the Beje" in Haarlem, Holland. Primarily set from 1940-1945, the book does cover the entirety of Corrie ten Boom's life from 1892 until her death in 1983. Other settings include Scheveningen Prison in The Hague, Netherlands; Vught Concentration Camp in southern Holland; and Ravensbruck Concentration Camp north of Berlin, Germany (all during 1944). The title refers, at the literal level, to the secret room the family constructs behind a wall in Corrie's room to hide their Jewish houseguests from the Nazis.</p>
<p><b>Characters</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ten Booms, a Dutch family of watchmakers and repairmen. They are devout Christians, who dedicate themselves to housing and helping Jews during the Holocaust.</li> <li>• Corrie ten Boom (main protagonist)</li> <li>• Betsie ten Boom, Corrie's sister</li> <li>• Casper ten Boom, Corrie's father</li> <li>• Cornelia Johanna Arnolda Luitingh ten Boom, Corrie's mother</li> <li>• Willem ten Boom, Corrie's brother</li> <li>• Arnolda "Nollie" van Woerden, Corrie's sister</li> <li>• Christiaan "Kik" ten Boom, Corrie's nephew</li> <li>• Pieter "Peter" van Woerden, Corrie's nephew</li> <li>• Tante Jans, Tante Bep, and Tante Anna, Corrie's live-in aunts in the Beje</li> <li>• Christoffels, an itinerant Jewish watchmaker employed by the ten Booms</li> <li>• Herman Slurring (known as "Pickwick"), worked for the resistance in Holland</li> <li>• Harry Karel de Vries (aka "The Bulldog"), a Jewish convert to Christianity</li> </ul>

<p><b>Characters, cont.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Otto, the German Nazi who apprentices with the ten Booms before the war</li> <li>• Meyer Mossel (aka Eusebius “Eusie” Smit), a Jew hiding with the ten Booms</li> <li>• Jan Vogel, a Dutchman who helps the Nazis persecute the Jews</li> <li>• Lieutenant Rahms, the German officer who questions Corrie in Scheveningen prison</li> <li>• The Snake, female Nazi guard who terrorizes the women in Ravensbruck Camp</li> <li>• Many other minor characters</li> </ul>
<p><b>Conflict</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When the ten Booms are caught, what will remain hidden from the Nazis and what will be exposed? (Man vs. Society; Man vs. Man)</li> <li>2. Will Corrie and Betsie survive prison and the concentration camps? (Man vs. Society, Man vs. Self)</li> <li>3. More specifically, will Corrie’s faith survive her experience in the camp? (Man vs. Society; Man vs. Man; Man vs. Self)</li> </ol> <p><i>World War II and the Holocaust provide the major opportunity for conflict within the story.</i></p>
<p><b>Theme</b></p>	<p>The spiritual refuge of God; He is the true hiding place that no outside forces can invade. Eternal freedom of the soul comes from God; He is the origin and provider of all good things, including love, forgiveness, hope, and joy.</p>
<p><b>Literary Devices</b></p>	<p>Foreshadowing Similes Symbolism (i.e. the hiding place, the vitamin bottle, the release, the ant, the suitcase)</p> <p><i>The Hiding Place</i> is a nonfiction biography composed in part by authors with journalistic backgrounds, so it is less literary in nature, but maintains a straightforward yet engaging style.</p>

# QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: SETTING



*The following questions are drawn from the “Setting” section of the Socratic List, found in Appendix A, pages 80-81 of the Teaching the Classics syllabus.*

## **Where does the story take place? In what country or region does the story happen? (1a)**

The first nine chapters, which is about three-fifths of *The Hiding Place*, establish the setting of Haarlem, Holland. Holland is the far west region of the Netherlands in Western Europe that borders the North Sea. The town of Haarlem is northwest of Amsterdam, and it is still known as a beautiful, medieval town with old rows of businesses and homes, winding brick streets, and magnificent churches. A majority of the story (about chapter five until the end) is set after May 10, 1940. On that day Nazi Germany invaded the Netherlands, and after only five days the nation fell to Hitler’s forces. Thus, Holland in this story is an occupied land without an autonomous government.

In chapters ten through fifteen (the end of the book) the story takes place in a series of prisons away from Haarlem. These chapters begin with the arrest and incarceration of the protagonist, Corrie ten Boom, and her household on February 28, 1944. After spending a night in the Haarlem jail, they are sent to Scheveningen Prison on February 29. Though Scheveningen was a Dutch prison (located in The Hague), it was used by the Gestapo to house and interrogate thousands of resistance fighters. By June of 1944, Corrie and her sister Betsie are transferred to Vught Concentration Camp in southern Holland. After only a few months the sisters are sent via train to the infamous Ravensbruck Concentration Camp for women, which was about 50 miles north of Berlin. Betsie dies in Ravensbruck; Corrie is released due to a clerical error on December 30, 1944. Extremely malnourished, Corrie makes her way to Berlin and then back to the Netherlands.

Though a majority of the story takes place in Haarlem, the chapters set in prison, particularly at Ravensbruck, are key to the conflict and themes of *The Hiding Place*. Corrie calls them “deep pits” and argues that God’s love is deeper still. Indeed, close attention to the settings of these heinous places is essential for students to fully appreciate the Christian messages of hope, forgiveness, and love that ten Boom hopes to relay through her story.

## **Does the story happen in one spot, or does the action unfold across a wide area? (1c)**

The authors of the story use both confined spaces and a sense of almost unfathomable size in conjunction with one another to contrast individual purpose and importance within the overwhelming horror of the Holocaust. One of the confined spaces in *The Hiding Place* is the Beje, the home at which the ten Booms live. The first chapter of the book is entitled, “The One Hundredth Birthday Party,” which describes an enormous celebration in 1937 for the anniversary of the ten Boom watch shop at 19 Barteljorisstraat, which to this day is a famous street of shops in Haarlem. The little watch shop with its floors of living space above housed generations of ten Booms; it was the only home that Corrie, Betsie, and their father would ever know before their arrest. It is at once a

constraining and enormous place.

In Corrie's youth her three siblings and three aunts lived in the Beje along with her parents. Once her mother and the aunts had passed away, and two of her siblings had married and moved, her father would open the house to foster children. Later when the war was raging, the ten Booms began housing Jews and resistance fighters in the rooms that once housed the extended family. From the descriptions, the Beje always seems to be cramped, but because of the number of people the ten Booms care for and the many people they know in the community, the constraint of the setting in that one small home becomes interwoven with something much larger. Physically small, the space is made spiritually vast by the love it contains.

The constraining particularities of the Beje are described in detail multiple times in the book. For example, on the day of the hundredth anniversary of the shop, Corrie hears the doorbell ring early in the morning, and recalls:

*I opened my bedroom door and plunged down the steep twisting stairway. These stairs were an afterthought in this curious old house. Actually it was two houses. The one in front was a typical tiny old-Haarlem structure, three stories high, two rooms deep, and only one room wide. At some unknown point in its long history, its rear wall had been knocked through to join with the even thinner, steeper house in back of it—which had three rooms, one on top of the other—and this narrow corkscrew staircase squeezed between the two. (2)*

This old Dutch house on a cramped cobblestone street housed generations of ten Booms who rarely ventured away from the town. Yet it was destined to be an important place in the network of the Dutch resistance against the Nazis. Early on in the occupation, the ten Booms began allowing Jews to stay in their home, and they needed to find ways to care for them and get them to farms in the countryside to be hidden. Corrie's brother Willem, who also was helping Jews, told her to "develop your own sources" for getting them cared for and sent to safety (80). It was because of this that Corrie realized "we were friends with half of Haarlem! We knew nurses in the maternity hospital. We knew clerks in the Records Office. We knew someone in every business in the city!" (83)

Indeed, that old house, from which the ten Booms rarely ventured, was perhaps their greatest asset: because of their rootedness to that place over nearly a hundred years, they had formed such deep ties in the community that they had already built the necessary connections for running an underground operation. Before long,

*there were eighty Dutchmen—elderly women and middle-aged men along with our teenagers—working in 'God's underground'...most of these people never saw one another; we kept face-to-face contacts with as few as possible. But all knew the Beje. It was headquarters, the center of a spreading web: the knot where all threads crossed. (97)*

Furthermore, the architecture of the peculiar old house proved to be essential not just to the setting, but to the entire book; for, it allowed them to build a "hiding place." Through connections in the resistance, an anonymous man, who was actually one of the finest architects in Europe, came to the Beje to build a secret room for hiding Jews in the case of a raid. Corrie would later recall that:

*[The architect] started up the narrow corkscrew stairs, and as he mounted so did his spirits. He paused in delight at the odd-placed landings, pounded on the crooked walls, and laughed aloud as the floor levels of the two old houses continued out of phase. "What an impossibility!" he said in an awestruck voice. "What an improbable, unbelievable, unpredictable impossibility! Miss ten*



*Boom, if all houses were constructed like this one, you would see before you a less worried man.”*  
(87)

At the top of the steps in Corrie’s bedroom, a false brick wall was added to create a secret room for Jews to hide in during raids by the Nazis; and when that raid finally came, the Gestapo agents said to their leader, “we’ve searched the whole place...if there’s a secret room here, the devil himself built it” (132). The Beje—this small home and business where a majority of the book happens—was part of an ongoing resistance effort that had influence throughout the Netherlands. It is a setting that is simultaneously restricted and far-reaching.

The settings in the latter two-fifths of the book are also restricted yet reaching. In Scheveningen, as well as the two concentration camps, Corrie and Betsie are able to retain copies of the Bible to read with the other inmates through a series of events they term miracles. In their respective cells at the prison and especially in Barrack 28 at Ravensbruck, the two sisters continued to pray with, worship with, and witness to women of many different nationalities. Barrack 28 was meant for 400 women, but due to overpopulation it housed about 1,400 as more prisoners were sent into Germany away from the Allied advance. (194) Furthermore, the unsanitary conditions within the barracks caused the guards to avoid entering the building and made of it a haven for the prisoners. To Betsie, in particular, this was something to be thankful for; it was a blessing from God. As Corrie recalls:

*in the sanctuary of God’s fleas, Betsie and I ministered the Word of God to all in the room. We sat by deathbeds that became doorways of heaven. We watched women who had lost everything grow rich in hope. The knitters of Barracks 28 became the praying heart of the vast diseased body that was Ravensbruck, interceding for all in the camp—guards, under Betsie’s prodding, as well as prisoners. We prayed beyond the concrete walls for the healing of Germany, of Europe, of the world—as Mama had once done from the prison of a crippled body (211).*

This question of the nature of bondage and freedom pervades the story as a guiding motif. The women were prisoners, yet in that one spot they miraculously have an influence on the inmates and guards who walk at liberty throughout the prison; the story happens in one spot, but ten Boom is adamant that that does not mean the action of the story was limited to those confined spaces. In fact, ten Boom suggests that the guards are the real prisoners in the camp, bound by their barbaric cruelty and hatred. When Corrie responds with hatred to their abuse, Betsie challenges her to find her liberty in forgiveness. In forgiveness, Betsie rises above her circumstances.

### **How long of a period does the story cover? A few minutes? A single day? A whole lifetime? (2b)**

In the first chapter, “The One Hundredth Birthday Party,” the year is 1937, but in this chapter Corrie says that that “was a day for memories,” and indeed chapters two, three, and four take the story further back in time from her childhood in the 1890s up until the Nazi invasion. Chapters five through nine cover the period of occupation and resistance by the ten Booms, about May 1940 until their arrest in February of 1944. Chapters ten through fifteen follow Corrie through her incarceration at Scheveningen and the concentration camps, which was about ten months (February 28, 1944 to December 30, 1944). Chapter fifteen also includes her immediate postwar efforts to help refugees. The epilogue summarizes the rest of Corrie’s life, from about 1946 until her death in 1983. Thus, the book does act as a biography covering the life of Corrie ten Boom, although it particularly focuses on her time working in the underground and as a political prisoner of Nazi Germany.

**Does the story happen in a particular year, era, or age of the world? What historical events may have just preceded the period of the story? Do these events help explain the actions of characters, the action of the story, or its mood? (2d)**

As has been expressed above, the story takes place primarily during World War II, which began with the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, and ended in Europe on May 8, 1945. As was the case in World War I, the Netherlands planned to stay neutral and uninvolved with the war, but Hitler invaded regardless on May 10, 1940, and Queen Wilhelmina fled to England where she established the Dutch government-in-exile. The flight of the Queen destroyed morale in the Netherlands; the small nation surrendered after only five days.

A central tenet of Nazism was ethnic cleansing, and traditional statistics report that approximately six million Jews were killed in death camps. The ten Boom family, however, were Dutch, and Betsie, Casper and Corrie's nephew, Kik, all died as "political prisoners" for aiding in underground efforts. The Nazis were not the first to practice systemic antisemitism, but it came to a fever pitch in Germany after World War I. Germany was in economic shambles, and because Jewish people were stereotyped as usurers and corrupt financiers, they were easily blamed. Together with supposed scientific explanations of the physical attributes of Jews, Nazis claimed that they were ethnically impure and less than human. It was common for Nazi speeches to refer to Jews as "rats." Some people in German occupied territories, including Holland, were similarly brainwashed by Nazi ideology. Corrie witnessed that "Nazism was a disease to which the Dutch, too, were susceptible, and those with an anti-Semitic bias fell sick of it first" (67).

*The Hiding Place*, of course, centers around the ten Booms' resolve to stand up to the antisemitic policies of the Nazi regime, and inspires an inherently dismal topic with hope.

**Among what kinds of people is the story set? What is their economic class? How do they live? Are they hopeful? Downtrodden? Depressed? Why? (1h)**

One of the most important elements of the setting is that of the family. The ten Boom family reflects Christian society, which welcomes strangers and aliens, widows and orphans, giving them a home. These values find their counterpoint in the Nazi society that enslaves the Jews and the ten Booms who shelter them. These conflicting values drive the plot of the story forward and even shape the interior conflict Corrie experiences as she struggles to love her persecutors in the camp.

**In what time of life for the main characters do the events occur? Are they children? Are they just passing into adulthood? Are they already grown up? How does setting the story in this particular time of the characters' lives affect the story? (2e)**

The strength of Corrie and Betsie, as well as their father, Casper ten Boom, is astounding when one considers their ages. Corrie was born in 1892, meaning she was 52 when first arrested and 53 when she left Ravensbruck. Betsie was 57 when arrested and died in Ravensbruck at age 58. Their father was 84 when he was arrested, and he died only ten days thereafter. An important moment with respect to Casper's age comes when the crowd of new inmates is being processed into Scheveningen and the Gestapo chief sees the old man. Corrie recalls:

*The chief interrogator's eye fell on Father. "That old man!" he cried. "Did he have to be arrested? You, old man!" Willem led Father up to the desk. The Gestapo chief leaned forward. "I'd like to send you home, old fellow," he said. "I'll take your word that you won't cause any more trouble. I could not see Father's face, only the erect carriage of his shoulders and the halo of white above*



# QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CHARACTERS



*The following questions are drawn from the “Characters” section of the Socratic List, found in Appendix A, pages 82-83 of the Teaching the Classics syllabus.*

## **Who is the story about? (3)**

Asking students about characters in general in *The Hiding Place* may prove to frustrate them, for there are a great many characters in the book; too many, even, to list in this guide! It seems as though a new character appears on every page—one of the struggles of teaching a biography. More recent editions of the story include a ten Boom family tree and a family timeline in the appendix. These can likewise be found online. Instead of requiring a full account of the story’s characters, ask students to note those most significant to the plot line. Who is the main character? Who opposes her interests? Are there foils within the story? Heroes or heroines? Included here is a brief description of the story’s central characters.

### ***Corrie ten Boom***

The story’s protagonist and a co-author of this biography, Corrie tells her story in the first person. A skilled watch repairer, Corrie works in her father’s watch repair shop until the age of 51, when she is imprisoned for underground activities undermining the Nazi regime. Since her one great love, a man named Karel, declined to marry her, she remains single, living at home with her father and her unmarried sister, Betsie. (65) In simple obedience to the teachings of the Bible, the family opens their home to orphans and any who approach them with need. This simplicity of faith marks the ten Boom family’s character throughout the story.

A devout Christian, Corrie knows the significance of forgiveness. Yet she struggles to forgive and to love her enemies, wrestling with bitterness as the events of the story unfold. In fact, Corrie’s struggle with bitterness toward her Nazi persecutors marks the major story conflict. This inner conflict sets the scene for what is arguably the most significant miracle in a story about miracles. After the war, Corrie travels the world, evangelizing and telling her story of God’s faithfulness and redemptive love to thousands of people. When, after a talk in Germany, a former S.S. guard from Ravensbruck comes up to shake her hand, she recognizes him as one who had been particularly cruel to her and Betsie. She recalls:

*I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give Your forgiveness. As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand, a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. (238)*

Corrie’s salvation in Jesus Christ is the most important thing in her life; for, it is through God that the hope, forgiveness, love, and peace she and Betsie exemplify in their trials can be possible at all. All these things come from God’s grace, not Corrie’s own efforts. Corrie realizes in that moment with her enemy,

“that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world’s healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself” (238). The strength to witness to others and survive in concentration camps, the hope to carry on, the power to forgive people who murdered family, friends, and neighbors: these things are not the most important things in life; for none of them are truly possible but by the grace of God.

In all of Corrie’s stories, whether forgiving the S.S. guard, or rejoicing amid the horror of the lice and fleas in the barracks at Ravensbruck, or avoiding “the special temptation of concentration-camp life: the temptation to think only of oneself,” Corrie testifies to the power of Christ, working in and through her. Acknowledging her own deficiencies and ruthlessly exposing her sins, she magnifies the miracle in each of these experiences: “There is no pit so deep that God’s love is not deeper still” (217). Corrie’s story is a testimony of God’s faithfulness and grace, especially in the worst of circumstances. This she shares in her ministry of speaking, writing, and teaching for nearly four decades after her release from Ravensbruck. In keeping with Betsie’s prophetic dream, she opens places of refuge and rehabilitation for concentration camp refugees as well as for Dutch people who aided the Nazis and were socially ostracized after the war.

### ***Elisabeth “Betsie” ten Boom***

The eldest of Corrie’s siblings, Betsie suffers from anemia and cannot have children; she therefore makes a conscious decision to remain unmarried. Though she originally works as a bookkeeper in the watch shop for her family, when she is in her thirties and Corrie in her late twenties, the girls switch roles. Due to Betsie’s illness, she prefers housework. Corrie takes up the work in the shop and discovers a love for business.

When she is imprisoned, Betsie’s character emerges, pushing her to the forefront as the story’s heroine. Once returning to solitary confinement in Scheveningen from interrogation, Corrie walks past Betsie’s cell (which included a few other women) and sees that:

*unbelievably, against all logic, this cell was charming...the straw pallets were rolled instead of piled in a heap, standing like little pillars along the wall, each with a lady’s hat atop it. A headscarf had somehow been hung along the wall. The contents of several food packages were arranged on a small shelf...even the coats hanging on their hooks were part of the welcome of that room, each sleeve draped over the shoulder of the coat next to it like a row of dancing children. (163)*

Betsie’s skill as a homemaker, her gift of hospitality, uplifts everyone she encounters.

Beyond hospitality, Betsie embodies Christian charity and forgiveness. She sees imprisonment not as a loss of her mission in the underground helping Jews, but rather a new opportunity for showing love to the lost and witnessing to them. And Betsie’s love does not stop with her fellow prisoners, but extends to her persecutors. Transferred to the concentration camp at Vught, Betsie remarks to Corrie, “what better way could there be to spend our lives?...These young women. That girl back at the bunkers. Corrie, if people can be taught to hate, they can be taught to love! We must find the way, you and I, no matter how long it takes” (175). In fact, Betsie’s compassion for the guards mystifies and angers Corrie. Where “[Corrie] saw a gray uniform and visored hat; Betsie saw a wounded human being” (175).

Even in Ravensbruck, Betsie assures her sister, “‘Give thanks in all circumstances!’ That’s what we can do. We can start right now to thank God for every single thing about this new barracks” (198). This includes thanking God for the fleas, a circumstance Corrie finds nearly unbearable. But much later, when the sisters learn that their guards refused to enter the barracks because of the rampant bugs, it becomes



clear that Betsie's ability to rejoice in all circumstances is no Pollyanna foolishness, but an incredible gift of faith in her God. Betsie's joy gives her an unparalleled peace, which she maintains even on her deathbed in a camp where as many as 93,000 people perished.

Betsie's faith and selflessness underscore the drama of Corrie's anger and bitterness, making her a foil for the protagonist. Corrie's memories of Betsie amid their incarceration paint an almost saint-like picture of her. Indeed, the term "sainthood" is especially appropriate given Corrie's description of her sister immediately following her death: "In front of me was the Betsie of Haarlem, happy and at peace. Stronger! Freer! This was the Betsie of heaven, bursting with joy and health. Even her hair was graciously in place as if an angel had ministered to her" (219). Betsie serves as a model of Christian maturity for Corrie.

Importantly, this biography was written based on Corrie's memories. Surely, if Betsie had survived to write her own biography she would have recorded her own struggles in heart and mind. Had Betsie been able to tell her version of events, it is very likely that she would not have taken the credit for her courage; she, too, would have said that her ability to rejoice and forgive were gifts from God, rather than indications of strong willpower.

### **Casper ten Boom (aka "Father" and "Opa")**

The patriarch of the ten Booms, Casper is beloved by everyone in Haarlem, including the children who call him "Haarlem's Grand Old Man." A skilled watchmaker and repairer, Casper loves his craft to a fault: he cares little for business and often forgets to charge customers for the repair work he does. Always kind, Casper's worldview is expressly Christian, shaped by the incredible amount of Scripture he has committed to memory. Though he is very old by the time of his family's work for the underground, Casper is dedicated to protecting the Jewish people who come to the Beje. He is troubled by anti-semitism, telling Corrie, "I pity the poor Germans...they have touched the apple of of God's eye" (69). Father's leadership and faith guide the entire family and give them the strength of character necessary to obey God in the harrowing circumstances they experience.

### **Cornelia Johanna Arnolda Luitingh (aka "Mama")**

Corrie's mother, Casper's wife, suffers from anemia and is often very sick. Even so, she is known throughout Haarlem for her kindness, generosity, and joy. After a cerebral hemorrhage, she is left in a coma for two months. The final three years of her life, she requires help to walk and is only able to speak the words "yes," "no," and "Corrie"—excepting a miraculous circumstance when she is able to sing a hymn at Nollie's wedding. She dies in 1921 at age 63, leaving a heritage in her children.

**Willem ten Boom:** Corrie's brother. Originally a well-educated minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, he later runs a nursing home and works with the resistance to help Jews escape to the countryside.

**Arnolda "Nollie" van Woerden (ten Boom):** Corrie's older sister (by two years) who also helps house Jews.

**Christiaan "Kik" ten Boom:** Willem's son; Corrie's nephew. Born in 1920, he works in the resistance until his eventual imprisonment. He dies after his consignment to Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp in Germany, perhaps on a death march.

**Pieter "Peter" van Woerden:** Nollie's son; Corrie's favorite nephew. An amazing natural musician, he wins a position as an organist at a Dutch Reformed Church in the village of Velsen. Shortly after the

Nazis outlaw the “Wilhelmus” (Dutch National Anthem), Peter plays it at the end of a church service. When the Gestapo learns of this, he spends time in prison.

**Tante Jans:** Mama’s sister; Corrie’s aunt. A very devout woman, Tante Jans writes religious pamphlets and organizes charitable donations. When it becomes clear she will die of diabetes, her sisters comfort her by reminding her of the great funds she has raised and of talks she has given for the Church. To all this Tante Jans gives a powerful prayer that would stay with her nieces in their trials of imprisonment decades later: “Dear Jesus, I thank You that we must come with empty hands. I thank You that You have done all—all—on the cross, and that all we need in life or death is to be sure of this” (39).

**Tante Anna:** Oftentimes the homemaker at the Beje because of Mama’s poor health, Tante Anna is the last of the four sisters to die at age 64 in 1924. Even before her death, Casper begins taking in foster children to fill the emptying rooms at the Beje.

**Tante Bep:** The eldest of Mama’s sisters, Tante Bep is a governess for many years before coming to live at the Beje and is never satisfied with her circumstances in life. She dies of tuberculosis at age 70 in 1911.

**Christoffels:** Originally a traveling clock repairman for outdoor clocks in the countryside, Casper ten Boom hires the elderly Christoffels to work in the family shop. Though reclusive, Christoffels always joins the family for morning Bible reading and remains very devoted to the family. The ten Booms’s young apprentice from Germany, Otto, having imbibed growing Nazi sentiments regarding the uselessness of the aged and infirm, begins to harass Christoffels, eventually physically assaulting him.

**Herman Slurring (known as “Pickwick”):** A wealthy man who frequents the watch shop, the portly and beloved old man would become an important ringleader in the Dutch underground and help the ten Booms, supplying them luxury goods purchased on the black market. He too, is discovered by the Gestapo when the operation at the Beje is uncovered. Seeing him taken onto a prison bus is a great blow to morale. Corrie recalls that “stumbling past us between two soldiers, hatless and coatless, came Pickwick. The top of his bald head was a welter of bruises, dried blood clung to the stubble on his chin. He did not look up as he was hauled onto the bus” (135). Though his case is never explained, Pickwick is released from prison, and he rides with Corrie in a limousine from Willem’s house to Nollie’s after she returns from Ravensbruck.

**Karel:** A classmate of Willem’s at seminary, Karel is Corrie’s only love interest. He more or less misleads her into believing they might have a future together.

**Harry de Vries (aka “The Bulldog”):** An ethnically Jewish man in Haarlem with a small shop and two bulldogs. Corrie and her Father called him “the bulldog” because he looks like his two pets. Though his wife is not Jewish and both are Christians, he is eventually imprisoned anyway.

**Otto (antagonist):** A young German, Otto comes to the Beje with excellent references, looking to be an apprentice. Casper hires him, but even in those pre-war years Otto is fully committed to Nazi ideology and mistreats Christoffels because he is old. Willem explains to Corrie: “Germany is systematically teaching disrespect for old age” because they “have no value to the state” and effectively need to be eliminated when they do not hold positions of power. (59) He also refuses to attend the ten Boom’s morning Bible readings because they read through the Old Testament as well as the New Testament; the former he believes to be “the Jews’ ‘Book of Lies’” (58). He is the only employee Casper ever fires, and he later revisits the Beje as a Nazi Captain, eager to parade his success in the Third Reich. He nearly recognizes the covert activities being conducted from his former place of employment.







# QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CONFLICT AND PLOT



*The following questions are drawn from the “Conflict” and “Plot” sections of the Socratic List, found in Appendix A, pages 84-86 of the Teaching the Classics syllabus.*

## **Do Corrie and her family attempt to overcome something—a physical impediment or an emotional handicap? (5b)**

Conflict in *The Hiding Place*, a biography, can be tricky to parse out because problems and solutions in real-life are often too complex to follow a traditional story chart formation. Still, though the individual chapters are episodic in nature, containing small conflicts that move the story forward, the biographers artistically arrange these vignettes to follow two major conflicts.

The first of these involves Corrie’s desire to shelter the Jews from the exploitation and abuse of their Nazi persecutors. She would offer them a “hiding place.” (Man vs. Society, Man vs. Man) It is explicit from the beginning of the story that the ten Booms will undergo “adventure and anguish, horror and heaven.” This foreshadowing suggests that they will inevitably be arrested in their secret work to hide and help the Jewish people. With all the comings and goings of resistance workers, they are sure to be discovered. The narrative remains suspenseful, however, since the reader does not know when their work in the Beje will be discovered or what it will ultimately accomplish: How and when will the family be caught? Who will be implicated in the crimes? Will the hiding place suffice to successfully save the hidden Jews? How much will be compromised, and how much will remain hidden?

Next, Corrie wants, with her family, to survive her internment. This second major conflict has to do with Corrie and Betsie’s imprisonment. Will they survive their incarcerations in the prisons and concentration camps? How? Will they be freed? (Man vs. Society, Man vs. Man) Of course, this conflict resolves differently for the two women, but the climactic moment in terms of plot actually centers around Betsie’s death, underscoring Corrie’s role as the story’s primary protagonist.

Yet this issue of survival goes much deeper than a literal release from incarceration for Corrie. In fact, merely surviving the camps won’t be enough for her. She needs to be delivered from her hatred for her oppressors. The story argues that this hatred is itself a strong prison. Therefore, the third major conflict involves the internal struggle Corrie experiences as she wrestles with the age old problem of pain and suffering. Will she retain her faith in the face of her persecution? Will she become bitter and callous like her torturers? Will she find grace to forgive her enemies, in keeping with her Christian beliefs? (Man vs. Self)

Likewise each chapter (and oftentimes even separate sections within the chapters) contains its own respective mini-plot. For example, the third chapter, “Karel,” relates the conflict concerning Corrie’s romance with Karel. Having indicated to Corrie that their relationship was possibly moving towards marriage, Corrie carries on a correspondence with him, despite his warnings that he would not marry

someone of a lower class. This small conflict comes to its climactic moment when Karel visits the Beje to introduce the family to his fiancée. Father comforts the understandably devastated Corrie, resolving the tension within her heart in telling her,

*Corrie...do you know what hurts so very much? It's love. Love is the strongest force in the world, and when it is blocked that means pain. There are two things we can do when this happens. We can kill the love so that it stops hurting. But then of course part of us dies, too. Or, Corrie, we can ask God to open up another route for that love to travel. God loves Karel—even more than you do—and if you ask Him, He will give you His love for this man, a love nothing can prevent, nothing destroy. Whenever we cannot love in the old, human way, Corrie, God can give us the perfect way.*  
(44-45)

Thus, even through the seemingly unrelated conflicts that serve to develop the story's characters, readers are given a foreshadowing of the story's rich themes. These will sustain Corrie as she struggles within the concentration camp against her oppressors and the hatred they provoke within her heart. Consequently, it can be a good exercise to have students take smaller sections of this work (whether that be a scene, chapter, or period of the book) and consider them episodically, noting their conflict, climax, and resolution. This can make the story more manageable to think and write about and help students identify the larger climactic moments and themes within the story as they are intimated in miniature.

### **Is the conflict a Man vs. Society struggle? (6j)**

The first two major conflicts could be considered Man vs. Society struggles. The primary question up until the ten Booms' arrest regards their resistance efforts: **Can the Jews stay hidden? Can the underground activities of the ten Booms be hidden?** These are anxious chapters because anyone in the community could betray them. In addition, during the Nazi occupation, many Dutch people were willing to inform on resistance members in order to protect themselves and their families. The Nazi government rationed and controlled the food supply at the time of the story, instituted early curfews, and outlawed Dutch national identity. The ethnic cleansing policies of the Nazis resulted in the oppression and incarceration of the Jewish people. These circumstances represent Man vs. Society and Man vs. Man conflicts.

The second major conflict (**Will the sisters survive the concentration camp?**) is also a Man vs. Society conflict since it is the Nazi government that runs the concentration camps where the sisters are imprisoned. There is a telling moment when Corrie and Betsie are being marched from the train to Ravensbruck. Corrie remembers that “we passed a number of local people on foot and in horse drawn wagons. The children especially seemed wonderful to me, pink-cheeked and healthy. They returned my stares with wide-eyed interest; I noticed, however, that the adults did not look at us but turned their heads away as we approached” (189). Do these adult Germans feel shame for what their country is doing? Or are they simply ignoring the fact that there is an extermination camp up the road from their village? These onlookers are complicit in the policies of their invaders; perhaps they are ashamed. Perhaps they see the persecution as ugly, but justified. Corrie and Betsie would never call these people their enemies, but they remain part of the larger society that persecutes them. The ten Booms fought back against the evils of society, and for that, they became its victims.

### **Is the conflict a Man vs. Himself struggle? (6k)**

Clearly, Nazi Germany is the enemy in the story; yet, it is difficult to find any anger from the protagonists toward their persecutors. Matthew 5:44 says, “Love your enemies and pray for those who

persecute you.” This admonition explains Betsie’s mindset especially. At one point in Vught Concentration Camp, Corrie acknowledges her hatred for her abusers: “I knew if Jan Vogel stood in front of me now, I could kill him” (179). The man who betrayed Holland and reported the ten Booms for personal gain, the spy and informant Jan Vogel, becomes an object of extreme hatred for Corrie. Yet, when she brings up Vogel to Betsie, asking, “Don’t you feel anything about Jan Vogel? Doesn’t it bother you?” her sister responds, “Oh yes, Corrie! Terribly! I’ve felt for him ever since I knew—and pray for him whenever his name comes into my mind. How dreadfully he must be suffering!” (180). This shocking forgiveness for the man who betrayed them to the evil authoritarian society for personal gain provokes Corrie to realize the great sin she harbors in her own heart. She learns from Betsie, and prays, “Lord Jesus...I forgive Jan Vogel as I pray that You will forgive me. I have done him great damage. Bless him now, and his family” (180).

Corrie and Betsie also adopt this attitude of forgiveness toward their guards. When a guard at Ravensbruck mocks and slashes Betsie, Corrie begins to try to rush the guard with her shovel, but Betsie steps in front of her to stop her and says of her whip-mark, “Don’t look at it, Corrie. Look at Jesus only” (205). Furthermore, at Betsie’s prodding, the sisters pray for the prisoners as well and even for “the healing of Germany, of Europe, of the world” (211). **While Nazism, the government and society that brought such concentration camps and policies of extreme abuse into being, supplies the primary antagonistic force in *The Hiding Place*, the protagonists likewise struggle inwardly to respond to their enemy with a radical love and forgiveness from God.**

**Are there larger issues (a larger context or frame in which conflict exists and forms a background for the story)? (7f)**

The larger background conflict in *The Hiding Place* is, of course, World War II. The Axis powers were comprised of Nazi Germany under the dictator, Adolf Hitler; fascist Italy under the dictator, Benito Mussolini; and Imperial Japan under the emperor, Hirohito. The main nations of the Allied forces included the Soviet Union, Great Britain, the United States, and France (although the French were already defeated by June of 1940 when our story’s conflict begins). While the war forms an important backdrop to the action of *The Hiding Place*, be sure students do not conflate what they know about history with the plot of the book. For example, it would not be right to say that the antagonist in *The Hiding Place* is Adolf Hitler. Hitler is mentioned at times in the book as part of the larger background conflict, but he is not directly involved with any part of the plot. Rather, the movement and philosophies of the Nazi government occasion and inform the conflict in the story.

**What events form the highest point or climax of the story’s tension? Is the climax a spiritual or physical one? (9d)**

The primary question up until the ten Booms’ arrest regards their resistance efforts: **Can the Jews stay hidden? Can the underground activities of the ten Booms be hidden?** We learn in the chapter on the raid that the hiding place for the Jews in the Beje is not discovered by the Gestapo, but it also becomes clear that the ten Booms will not be able to hide their involvement in resistance efforts. Students may think that the climax of this conflict is when the Gestapo barges into Corrie’s room, where she lies sick, her Jewish guests hiding behind the wall of the room. An officer demands that Corrie tell him where the Jews are hidden, and she denies the accusation. To this he says “and you don’t know anything about an underground ring, either. We’ll see about that” (127). At this moment, the Jews are concealed, but it is clear that Corrie is going to be arrested.

The problem with identifying this scene as the climactic moment is that it feels rather forced as a “turning point.” Yes, the ten Booms have been discovered, but the reader anticipated that from the

start. The author does not explicitly state if those harbored Jews would be saved. (In fact, readers do not learn that they make it away safely until the middle of chapter ten.) What the future holds for the ten Booms remains unclear in this scene. In truth, this moment of plot development only serves to set the stage for the story's major conflict. Thus, it belongs to the story's rising action.

Given the explicitly Christian cast of *The Hiding Place*, it makes sense that a more proper climax to the first major conflict be spiritual in nature. This comes when all the people arrested at the Beje are waiting to be taken to Scheveningen Prison, and they crowd around Casper ten Boom to pray. Corrie recalls:

*A group had gathered around Father for evening prayers. Every day of my life had ended like this: that deep steady voice, that sure and eager confiding of us all to the care of God. The Bible lay at home on its shelf, but much of it was stored in his heart. His blue eyes seemed to be seeing beyond earth itself, as he quoted from memory: "Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word...Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." (134-35)*

Indeed, the title of the book invokes Psalm 119:114 in double meaning. We learn here that the title "The Hiding Place" does not just refer to the physical space behind Corrie's bedroom wall, but it also refers metaphorically to the refuge of God.

This first conflict invites the reader to wonder how successfully the ten Booms will hide. At this point it becomes clear that, even though they can no longer hide themselves from the Nazis, all hope is not lost for the family; God remains a hiding place for their hearts. This relocates the significance of the hiding place from the physical realm to the spiritual, setting in motion a new set of story problems that can only be answered by faith in God.

The second possible climax, related to the question of whether Corrie and Betsie will survive Ravensbruck, is likewise spiritual in nature and concerns a series of three visions that Betsie, in her illness, relates to Corrie: The first vision concerns a large house, larger than the Beje, "to which people who had been damaged by concentration-camp life would come until they felt ready to live again in the normal world" (212). Betsie describes it in detail, with its inlaid wood floors and inset statues, sweeping staircase, and expansive gardens. Betsie's second vision suggests that she and Corrie would transform a German concentration camp into a recovery home for people who had been "warped by [the Nazi] philosophy of hate and force." There, such people would learn a better way from Corrie and Betsie. Betsie envisioned the modified camp, without barbed wire, replaced by window boxes and growing flowers. Betsie's third vision announces the sisters' impending release from the camp: "By the first of the year, Corrie, we will be out of prison!" (217) Of course, this release happens in a way antithetical to what Corrie hopes, an example of circumstantial irony.

When Corrie tries desperately to get into the hospital to see Betsie, another inmate takes her to the reeking washroom, where the recently deceased are stored along a wall. In the room is a nurse, and Corrie recalls,

*I raised my eyes to Betsie's face. Lord Jesus—what have You done? Oh Lord, what are You saying? What are You giving me? For there lay Betsie, her eyes closed as if in sleep, her face full and young. The care lines, the grief lines, the deep hollows of hunger and disease were simply gone. In front of me was the Betsie of Haarlem, happy and at peace. Stronger! Freer! This was the Betsie of heaven, as if an angel had ministered to her. (219)*

As with that first possible climax, which invites a movement away from a physical hiding place to

a spiritual one, here the climactic moment takes a similarly ironic turn. The conflict has been driven by the question of whether or not the sisters would survive, and when that question is answered by Betsie's death, readers discover that onlookers observe the miracle of eternal life as if written on Betsie's face in her death. In this way, both sisters are freed from Ravensbruck: Corrie, malnourished and sick, is released to a war-torn continent by a clerical error on Christmas Day; Betsie, to eternal paradise. "There are no "ifs" in God's kingdom. I could hear her soft voice saying it. His timing is perfect. His will is our hiding place" (224). Corrie characterizes Betsie's death as a release equal to her own and in keeping with her sister's prophetic visions.

**While Nazism, the government and society that brought such concentration camps and policies of extreme abuse into being, supplies the primary antagonistic force in *The Hiding Place*, the protagonists likewise struggle inwardly to respond to their enemy with a radical love and forgiveness from God. (Man vs. Himself)**

As the sisters endured their incarceration, they struggled against hatred for their abusers and growing temptation to think only of themselves. "Selfishness had a life of its own." This selfishness took several forms: moving to the center of the group during roll call to avoid the chill of the wind, hiding the yeast compound that sustained Betsie's health from the other needy women, hoarding blankets and other sources of warmth. "Oh this was the great ploy of Satan in that kingdom of his: to display such blatant evil that one could almost believe one's own secret sins didn't matter" (214). Corrie sees her own selfishness during a Bible study one evening, confessing it before the other women, her joy returning. Though Betsie continues to sicken physically, her spirit never wanes; if anything, it burns ever more brightly in her weakness, lighting the way for Corrie and the other women. Even the notorious "Snake," the female guard who had been the bane of the girls' existence, was warmed by this glow. When Betsie was rendered too ill to stand for the morning roll call the second day running, the cruel guard intervenes, calling for a stretcher to carry her to sickbay. "There beside our bed, stood the Snake. Beside her two orderlies from the hospital were setting down a stretcher. The Snake straightened almost guiltily as I approached. 'Prisoner is ready for transfer,' she snapped. I looked at the woman more closely: Had she risked fleas and lice to spare Betsie the sick-call line?" (217)

Even at her weakest, Betsie continues to use her meager strength to encourage her sister and the others with the hope of God's faithfulness. As the orderlies carry her beyond the barracks, she urges Corrie: "...must tell people what we have learned here. We must tell them that there is no pit so deep that He is not deeper still" (217). This message would become the hope that Corrie preaches after her release, and Betsie's joy even in the bleakest moments of her incarceration substantiate its truth. Betsie's fortitude under persecution that would lead even to her death, and the peace that transforms her lifeless face, mark good candidates for climactic moments of the story. Both substantiate her survival, regardless of her physical condition. Likewise, Corrie's willingness to embrace the truth Betsie continually holds up to her and to repent of her hatred and selfishness suggest her equal survival. Her physical release forms a kind of anti-climax. She has already survived the worst of the torture and evaded a deeper destruction.

**After the climax of the story, did you wonder how it would end? How does it end? How are the "loose ends" tied up? Were all of your questions answered? (10a)**

Corrie's subsequent ministry of restoration, which fulfills the three visions Betsie shared with her just before her death, form the story's denouement. After her release by means of a "clerical error," Corrie returns to the Beje and, feeling restless, attempts to resume her work with the underground. She finds herself incapable of doing so, which highlights once again the true nature and source of her strength. Instead, Corrie now feels called to speak of her experience in the camps and all that she had









# QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: THEME



*The following questions are drawn from the “Theme” section of the Socratic List, found in Appendix A, page 87 of the Teaching the Classics syllabus.*

## **Is the protagonist changed in her mind or heart by the events of the story? Does she begin to act differently? In what way? (11a,b)**

Throughout the story, Corrie struggles against bitterness, hatred, and selfishness. She finds it difficult to forgive those who persecute her and her family. Led by Betsie’s example and taught by the scriptures, she repents of these sins, asking God to give her the forgiveness she cannot find within her own heart. She testifies to the miraculous answer to that prayer and to God’s enduring faithfulness and love in the face of suffering and persecutions.

*And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness anymore than on our goodness that the world’s healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself. (238)*

God, Corrie learns, is the great provider. Corrie’s submission to God’s will comes about through the diverse circumstances of suffering that she and her sister endure throughout the war. She returns home changed. Even so, her heart needs healing, and she knows that she is not alone. Others too need healing and hope.

While at the outset of *The Hiding Place*, readers are introduced to a Beje bustling with life, at the end of the book, Corrie finds the home lonely and desolate. She is the only member of the household remaining. Upon her return, Corrie remembers the words of her father to the Gestapo chief: “I will open my door to anyone in need.” Inspired, she decides to open the Beje as a home for the “feeble-minded.” The bookkeeper, Toos, finds watch repairmen trained by Casper to carry on the business of the watch shop, but Corrie recalls that she “spent less and less time in the shop; whatever or whoever I was looking for was not there. I loved the people in my care, but the house itself had ceased to be home” (233). Corrie’s feelings of displacement and loss were not appeased by her homecoming.

Things simply could not be the same as they were before her internment, and Corrie felt certain that she was being called to a new work. She began to speak in churches and Bible studies, telling her story. After one such talk, an old, aristocratic widow, Mrs. Bierens de Haan, who had known Tante Jans from her charitable work, approached Corrie with a story of her own: One of her sons had yet to return from the war. Mrs. van Haan was heartbroken and prayed ceaselessly for his safety. Only recently, she had dreamt that he would in fact return, and that when he did, she would open her home to Corrie for a ministry of healing and recovery for suffering nationals. Corrie was struck by the vision, and she promised Mrs. de Haan that she too would pray for his return.

Mrs. de Haan's son does indeed return, and, in keeping with her premonition, the widow offers her mansion as she had promised. When Corrie visited Mrs. de Haan to view the property, she was struck by the home, which was just as Betsie had envisioned it, complete with inlaid wood floors, extensive gardens, and leaded glass windows. All was as Betsie had foreseen.

Corrie would turn the home into a center for survivors of the Holocaust, in keeping with Betsie's vision, and this would not be the only place of its kind. By 1946, Corrie likewise received opportunity to take control of a former German concentration camp. Together with a relief organization, she renovated it according to Betsie's vision, painting the buildings, removing the barbed wire, and adding cheerful window boxes. There in these redeemed buildings, staff would welcome victims of the war for restoration and healing.

In the years that followed, Corrie traveled to over 60 countries on several continents to witness to God's powerful love and faithfulness. In addition, she put her story in a print version, and sold over 2 million copies. Over time, she came to understand her suffering in terms of God's larger plan of redemption, and herself in terms of His call to minister His gospel to a worldwide community of believers. She would intone Betsie's words to the end: "There are no 'ifs' in God's kingdom. I could hear her soft voice saying it. His timing is perfect. His will is our hiding place" (224).

### **Does this story deal with a universal theme like the ones listed in the syllabus? (13a)**

The universal themes in *The Hiding Place* partake of conversations regarding the nature of faith and the nature of God—most particularly, the relationship between the two in light of the problem of sin and suffering. Corrie testifies that God works His sovereign will in spite of man's sin and rebellion. No evil can thwart His redemptive purposes. She comes to know and declare that "there is no pit so deep that He is not deeper still" (217). God's love overcomes hatred and resurrects the dead. This message of hope and its derivative call for forgiveness are key themes within the story, but for Corrie ten Boom, it is only through God's grace that people are able to extend forgiveness to others. Hope, forgiveness, love, and joy, are all miracles. Only God can work these things in the human heart, and He will for those who ask.

These themes are most evident in the moments in the book where Psalm 119 is quoted. "Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word... Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." Places where this "hiding place" is invoked bear scrutiny. Encourage students to watch for such passages and mark them in their text.

The idea of God as a hiding place is best encapsulated by what Corrie ten Boom writes on the final page of the book: "I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself" (238). When Corrie began to succumb to the temptation of selfishness in Ravensbruck, trying to take control of things by her own willpower, the "joy and power imperceptibly drained from [her] ministry" and "[her] prayers took on a mechanical ring. Even Bible reading was dull and lifeless" (214). Eventually, Corrie realizes that her "real sin," in her own words, "was not that of inching toward the center of a platoon because I was cold. The real sin lay in thinking that any power to help and transform came from me" (214). Indeed, God's powerful miracles bring hope and life to Corrie; it is He who shields His people from the destructive power of sin that leads to death. His love triumphs over their hatred.

Corrie does not take any of the credit for her strength, hope, or survival. She makes it abundantly



# QUESTIONS ABOUT STYLE: LITERARY DEVICES



The following questions are drawn from the “Literary Devices” section of the Socratic List, found in Appendix A, pages 88-90 of the Teaching the Classics syllabus.

Note: The literary elements in *The Hiding Place* do not play as big of a role as they ordinarily would in a work of fiction. As a biography, the style is kept more straightforward so it will not distract from the main point of a biography: the story of the person’s life. As with all good books, however, literary devices add depth and texture to the mere facts of the story, and the authors here have included them to a modest, appropriate extent.

**Simile—Does the author use the words “like” or “as” in making comparisons between two dissimilar things to convey images and meaning more powerfully? (16b,d)**

Similes are some of the most common formal imagery used in *The Hiding Place*. Some examples include:

“His real name was Herman Sluring; Pickwick was the name Betsie and I used between ourselves because he looked so incredibly **like the illustrator’s drawing** in our copy of Dickens” (2). (Note that Corrie is also making an **allusion** here to *The Pickwick Papers*.)

“Her eyes when she saw me there were **like a guilty child’s**” (51).

“One question ached through all of Holland **like a long-held breath**” (60).

“This young girl paced constantly, from morning until the overhead light bulb went off at night, six steps to the door; six steps back, dodging those sitting on the floor; back and forth **like an animal in a cage**” (142-43).

“As my health returned, I was able to use my eyes longer. I had been sustaining myself from my Scriptures a verse at a time; now **like a starving man**, I gulped entire Gospels at a reading, seeing the whole magnificent drama of salvation” (150). (Also note that “gulped” here extends the metaphor, for Corrie is not literally swallowing the pages of the book.)

“I felt **like a student who has crammed for a difficult exam** and then is tested on only the most elementary material” (160).

“The heat from the roof pressed **like a weight on my head**” (176).

“Just when it seemed like those in the middle must suffocate or be trampled to death, we worked out a kind of system where, by half-sitting, half-lying with our legs wedged around one another **like members of a sledding team**, we were able to get down on the floor of the car” (186).

*“From the crest of the hill we saw it, like a vast scar on the green German landscape; a city of low gray barracks surrounded by concrete walls on which quart towers rose at intervals” (189).*

**Foreshadowing—Does the author provide any clues in the story of things to come in the plot? (17a)**

While the authors do not foreshadow future events with hints or clues, they create a similar effect with instances of foretelling. Foretelling is more direct than foreshadowing in that the author explicitly states something about the future that is going to happen rather than keeping those facts in suspense. This makes sense in this biography because most readers will already know the rough outlines of the story before they begin to read the story’s specifics.

An obvious example of foretelling comes in the first chapter when Corrie says that,

*It was a day for memories. A day for calling up the past. How could we have guessed as we sat there—two middle-aged spinsters and an old man—that in place of memories were about to be given adventures such as we had never dreamed of? Adventure and anguish, horror and heaven were just around the corner, and we did not know (7).*

Another instance of foretelling is when Corrie says that, at the Beje, “daily came dozens of workers, reports, appeals. Sooner or later we were going to make a mistake” (109). Of course that mistake, talking to Jan Vogel, comes in the next chapter. The Raid and arrest of the ten Booms is not a plot point that the authors attempt to hide for a surprise; they tell the reader that it is coming. As a result, the reader is encouraged to contemplate the events of the plot in light of their outcome. For example, is the suffering of the ten Boom family worth while? And what if our knowledge that all will be well is akin to Betsie’s own faith in the future?

**Symbolism—Does the author use any objects, persons, pictures, or things to represent an idea in the story? (17i)**

Nollie’s blue sweater in the story appears to be a symbol, though different interpretations could connect it with different ideas. During Nollie’s stay in prison for hiding a Jew, she asked for her family to bring her her blue sweater with flowers embroidered over the pocket. (111) Later, Nollie gives that same sweater to Corrie when she is in Scheveningen, and she miraculously holds onto it all the way into Ravensbruck, where the thin, sickly, old Betsie wears it nonstop up to her death. The nurse would not give the sweater back to Corrie because of the black lice that infest it. (220) The sweater may be symbolic of the hope of returning to family; it was by this sweater that the family identified Nollie at the train station when she returned home from prison. (118) As long as Corrie and Betsie have the sweater, they harbor the hope of that same return home to Haarlem; and at Betsie’s death that hope of her returning home dies too. (Or does she, in fact, presage the return to a better home?)

Another symbol is flowers. There are tulips growing outside of Lieutenant Rahms’ office, which symbolize his humane goodwill. Later in the book, as Betsie is nearing death, she has a vision of their future work. Betsie says:

*“...a camp, Corrie, a concentration camp. But we’re...in charge...” I had to bend very close to hear. The camp was in Germany. It was no longer a prison, but a home where people who had been warped by this philosophy of hate and force could come to learn another way. There were no walls, no barbed wire, and the barracks had windowboxes. “It will be so good for them...watching things grow. People can learn to love, from flowers....” (215-16)*



# QUESTIONS ABOUT CONTEXT:



*The following questions are drawn from the “Context” section of the Socratic List, found in Appendix A, pages 91-92 of the Teaching the Classics syllabus.*

*Note: Given that Corrie ten Boom is the main character as well as one of the authors of this story, this section will primarily focus on context with respect to Elizabeth & John Sherrill.*

## **Who are the authors? (18)**

In addition to Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place* is authored by Elizabeth and John Sherrill. The extent to which the Sherrills contribute to crafting the narrative is unclear. The “Since Then” epilogue suggests that the Sherrills ghost-wrote the story based on interviews they conducted with ten Boom.

Though John Sherrill passed away in 2017, he and his wife will always be associated with one another in the world of editing and publishing. The couple met on a ship going to Europe and were married in Switzerland in 1947. Devout evangelical Christians, the Sherrills both worked as writers (and as one another’s editors) until 1970 when they founded the Christian publishing company Chosen Books. The first book they published was *The Hiding Place*. Elizabeth has written over thirty books (many of which were co-authored by John), and she remains a big name in Christian publishing. The two were long-time writers for the magazine *Guideposts*, and their experience in journalism and magazines is definitely on display in the accessible, relatively straightforward prose style of this biography.

## **Was the author a believer in a particular religion? (21a)**

While Corrie ten Boom was raised in the Dutch Reformed Church (which is associated with the doctrines of Calvinism), her work more broadly is typically associated with the entire range of Protestant Christian denominations. Elizabeth and John Sherrill likewise are not associated with one denomination so much as they are an important part of Protestant Christian publishing and journalism in general. This ecumenical, “gospel sharing” perspective on Christianity, which may profitably reach many people on a wide theological foundation, is the approach to religion evident in the text of *The Hiding Place*. The authors’ Christian worldview and evangelical motives pervade the story.

## **NOTES:**

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# ESSAY QUESTIONS FOR WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:



*Hints for effective writing assignments can be found on pages 73-74 of the Teaching the Classics syllabus and chapter 6 of Reading Roadmaps.*

1. When the Gestapo agent offers to send Corrie's father home from the prison, Casper replies, "If I go home today...tomorrow I will open my door again to any man in need who knocks." What role does Father play in Corrie's survival, and how do his words here and elsewhere affect Corrie throughout the duration of the story?
2. Compare and contrast the characters of Corrie and Betsie. Pay careful attention to how they each respond to their aggressors throughout the story. What themes do they embody by these responses?
3. Many miracles are recorded in this biography. Identify these and explain their relationships to themes in the story. What is their purpose in the narrative?
4. According to the story, what is the nature of sin? And how might man be redeemed of its consequences?
5. Whereas some readers identify a Man vs. Society struggle within the story, still others argue that it is Corrie's internal struggle that drives the plot. How are these conflicts related? How do these two conflicts resolve, and what diverse themes emerge from each?
6. According to the story, what is the purpose of pain and suffering in the economy of God?
7. What kind of God sustains Corrie and Betsie throughout their ordeal in the prison camps? According to the story, what is the nature of God?

*NOTE: A motion picture adaptation of The Hiding Place was made available in 1975. This film version can be viewed in full on YouTube.*



# STORY CHARTS



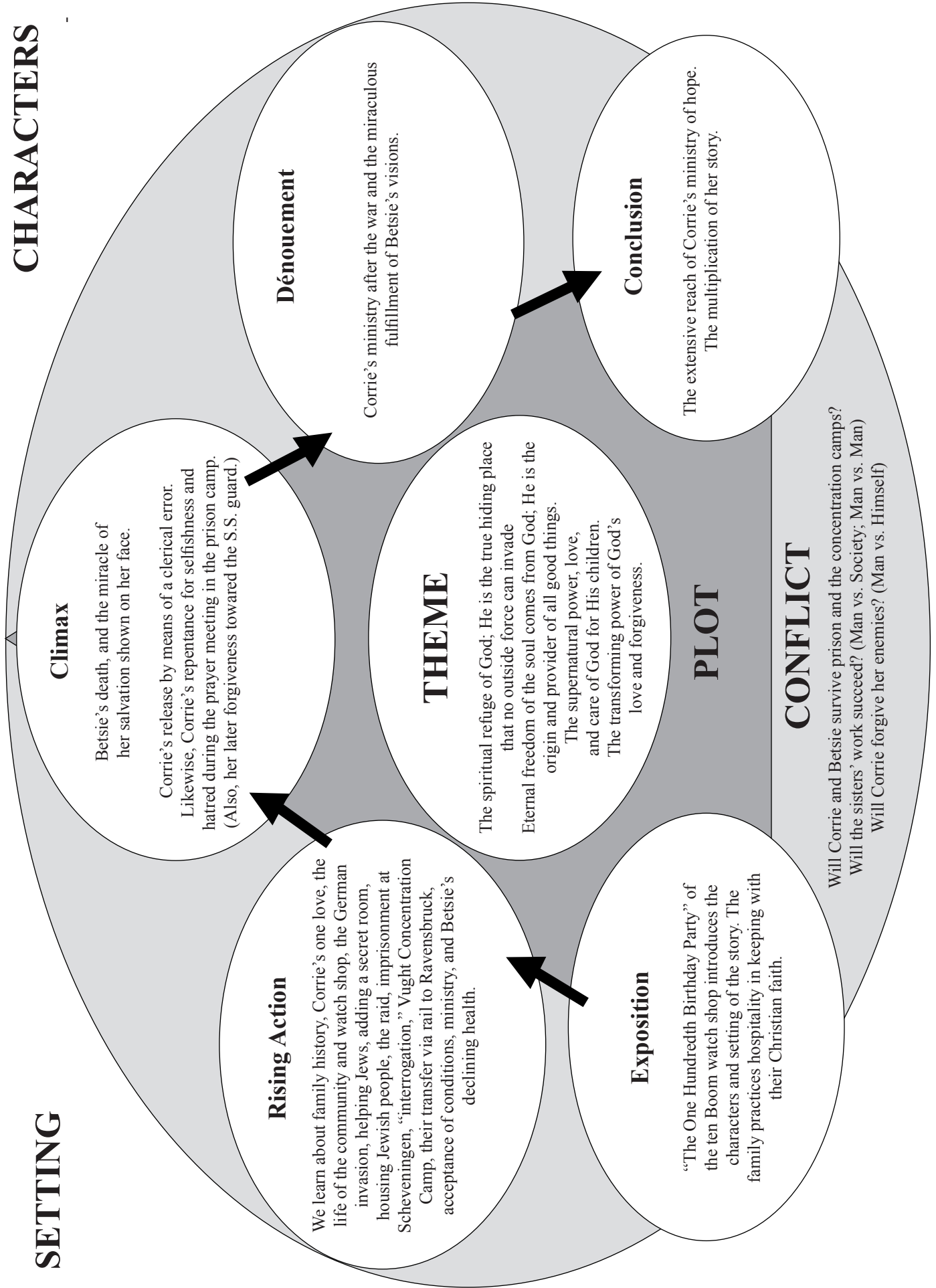
The following pages contain story charts of the type presented in the live seminar *Teaching the Classics*. As is made clear in that seminar, a separate story chart may be constructed for each of the conflicts present in a work of fiction. In particular, the reader's decision as to the *climax* and central *themes* of the plot structure will depend upon his understanding of the story's central conflict. As a result, though the details of setting, characters, exposition, and conclusion may be identical from analysis to analysis, significant variation may be found in those components which appear down the center of the story chart: Conflict, Climax, and Theme. This of course results from the fact that literary interpretation is the work of active minds, and differences of opinion are to be expected — even encouraged!

For the teacher's information, one story chart has been filled in on the next page. In addition, a blank chart is included to allow the teacher to examine different conflicts in the same format.

# Story Chart: *The Hiding Place*

## CHARACTERS

## SETTING



### Climax

Betsie's death, and the miracle of her salvation shown on her face.

Corrie's release by means of a clerical error. Likewise, Corrie's repentance for selfishness and hatred during the prayer meeting in the prison camp. (Also, her later forgiveness toward the S.S. guard.)

### Rising Action

We learn about family history, Corrie's one love, the life of the community and watch shop, the German invasion, helping Jews, adding a secret room, housing Jewish people, the raid, imprisonment at Scheveningen, "interrogation," Vught Concentration Camp, their transfer via rail to Ravensbruck, acceptance of conditions, ministry, and Betsie's declining health.

### THEME

The spiritual refuge of God; He is the true hiding place that no outside force can invade  
Eternal freedom of the soul comes from God; He is the origin and provider of all good things.  
The supernatural power, love, and care of God for His children.  
The transforming power of God's love and forgiveness.

"The One Hundredth Birthday Party" of the ten Boom watch shop introduces the characters and setting of the story. The family practices hospitality in keeping with their Christian faith.

### Exposition

The extensive reach of Corrie's ministry of hope. The multiplication of her story.

### Conclusion

### CONFLICT

Will Corrie and Betsie survive prison and the concentration camps?  
Will the sisters' work succeed? (Man vs. Society; Man vs. Man)  
Will Corrie forgive her enemies? (Man vs. Himself)

# Story Chart: *The Hiding Place*

**SETTING**

**CHARACTERS**

