

TEACHING GUIDE

ODIN'S PROMISE:

A Novel of Norway

First Book of the PROMISE Trilogy

by Sandy Brehl

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Odin's Promise is historical fiction for middle-grade readers, depicting the first year of German occupation of Norway as seen through the eyes of a young girl.

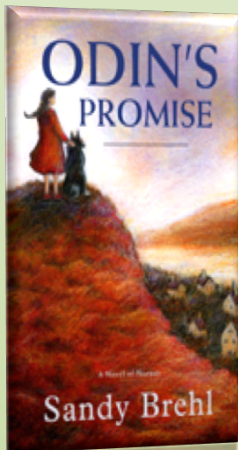
Eleven-year-old Mari grew up tucked safely under the wings of her parents, grandma, and older siblings. When Hitler's troops invaded Norway in 1940 under the guise of "occupying a friendly country," Mari is forced to grow beyond her "little girl" nickname and comfortable patterns to deal with harsh new realities.

At her side for support and protection is Odin, her faithful elkhound.

After Mari witnesses a terrifying event on the mountainside, truths are revealed: the involvement of her family and friends in the resistance; the value of humor in surviving hard times; the hidden radio in her grandma's cottage, and more

Odin, not one for quiet resistance, makes an enemy of soldiers who patrol the area.

The year will bring many challenges, as Mari confronts danger, develops her inner strength and voice, and finds she is able to endure hardship and heartache.



Coming in 2016:
BJORN'S GIFT:
Book Two in the
Norway Trilogy.

Book Three
scheduled for 2017

Grades 4 and Up

What People Are Saying...

Winner of Midwest Gold Medal for Children's Fiction, 2014

“Mari, a Norwegian girl, is forced to grow up fast when Nazi soldiers occupy her village in 1940. Readers will cheer for Mari as she discovers her inner strength – and the courage to help celebrate Norway’s spirit of resistance.”

–**Kathleen Ernst,**
author of the Caroline Abbott series from American Girl

“Not since Marie McSwigan’s *Snow Treasure* have I read such a book about the heroic roles children played in the resistance movement in Norway during WWII.”

– **Carole Estby Dagg, author of *The Year We Were Famous***

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“Love of dog, love of family, and love of country – all are woven together in this beautifully written, emotionally taut novel of one girl’s coming of age during war time. Realistic yet hopeful.”

– **Gayle Rosengren, author of *What the Moon Said* and
– *Cold War on Maplewood Street***

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“This book is brilliant, and I can say without hesitation that it is one of the best middle grade books I have read this year.” –

MotherDaughterBookReviews.com

Best Girl-Empowering Books of 2014 (Ages 9–12)

– **A Mighty Girl**

–

Ten Best Indie Middle-Grade Novels of 2014

– **ForeWord Magazine**

THEMES

- Human Rights
- Resistance, courage, loyalty, concern for others
- Responsibilities of everyday citizens in times of war or local disturbances
- Not all choices are free, and individuals must determine their own paths
- World War II, Hitler's Aryan beliefs
- Jewish history in Norway

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Language Arts:

- Assume the role of Mari or other characters, writing to support specific choices. Describe what will happen in the summer after the story ends.
- Write in the style of a news reporter, taking positions that oppose the occupying forces after the danger has ended.
- Report on an event from the story, or one from that time period discovered through research.

Social Studies:

- Using maps found during research, identify the location in which this story occurs. List various benefits this area offers for the occupying forces.
- Research the ways propaganda was used to persuade local citizens to support the Germans and join the Norwegian Nazi party. Make a PRO/CON list indicating reasons to join or refuse.

Art:

- Locate and draw/label maps of Norway and northern Europe at that time.
- Locate examples and draw or otherwise create bunad of the Hardanger area of Norway.

VOCABULARY

(Both Norwegian and German glossaries are provided at the back of the book for words used from those languages.)

Chapter One-

riveted substantial smug exiled

Chapter Two and Three-

waxwings barter savored invasion

Chapter Four, Five, and Six

confiscated interrogation gullible engulfed embellished swaggering

Chapter Seven, Eight, and Nine

granite undeniably tucks flinched porridge traitor previous
wrung

Chapter Ten, Eleven, and Twelve

kilo surveyed underground deflated

Chapter Thirteen and Fourteen

logic circumstances poultice comfrey umpteenth

Chapter Fifteen, Sixteen, and Seventeen

injection marrow tolerating script siblings bleak scoured urchins
optimism

Chapter Eighteen, Nineteen, and Twenty

gorging escalated audible thrush emerged lanky fjord
occupation shuffled clods haunches humiliation resistance refuge
irritation proclamation stubbly swine propaganda grudgingly spewing
bile subsided

Chapter Twenty-One, Twenty-Two, and Twenty-Three

thresholds momentarily obligation bough barracks persistent
confiscated crochet suspicious grosgrain antenna justified cringed
eavesdropping black-market notes elaborate festering ruse
heirlooms dowry chest scrounge obsessed silhouette

Chapter twenty-Four, Twenty-Five, Twenty-Six, and Twenty-Seven

detect ominous hesitate swaddling summon belligerent
dissuade bargaining

Chapter Twenty-Eight, Twenty-Nine, and Thirty

gnawed brunette annual grain flourish alter vaguely debated
elite swooning

Chapter Thirty-One, Thirty-Two, Thirty-Three, and Thirty Four

homily accompaniment smorgasbord embroidery crook plentiful
executed rousing rendition expedition spitz aloft
rucksack

Possible Discussion Questions

**Whether reading in guided groups or independently, before continuing from one chapter to the next, make predictions about what you expect to happen and compare your earlier predictions to what actually happens as you read on.*

Chapter 1.

Mari didn't speak to her neighbor, Mr. Meier, or even act like she knew him. What was she afraid might happen? What would you have done in her place?

Why was Odin's promise so important to Mari?

Start a character chart or web for Mari from what you know so far. Continue to add traits and notes as you learn more about her.

Chapter 2.

Mari was surprised at the way her mother acted when she was late coming down from the mountain. Explain why her mother might act that way.

Chapter 3.

Mari wants to talk about what happened on the mountain. Explain why her family won't include her in that discussion. Have you ever felt your family was leaving you out of important conversations? Do you think they were making a good choice to do that? Explain why.

If you were Mari would you eavesdrop? Why or why not?

How do you think Mari feels about being "little one" and "baby girl"? How would you like that nickname and being treated as she is?

Chapter 4.

What are some reasons that Norwegians might join the Nazi party?

Why would a neighbor, someone who knew Mr. Meier for many years, turn him in for having a hidden radio?

Mari's grandma (Bestemor) added a special ending to the Emperor's New Clothes. What do you think she was trying to tell Mari?

Chapter 5.

Mari speaks up boldly when Scarecrow and The Rat threaten Odin. This is not the way she acted on the mountainside. What do you think caused this change?

Why do you think Mrs. Nilssen is so eager to share the news with Mari's grandma?

Chapter 6.

Explain why Mari and Mrs. Nilssen felt so differently about what happened in the village. Grandma told Mari, "A victory like you had today is one of self-respect. It is a victory for truth. In the end, truth will win. Until that time comes, hope and love and laughter are the small victories we need to keep us going." How do you think Mari feels about this idea? How does this fit with the story of The Emperor's New Clothes?

Chapter 7.

In the five months since the Germans arrived as “friends” of Norway, what kinds of hardships have Mari, her family, and her village been suffering? Why would food become scarce so quickly after the occupation began?

What were the hardest things about that first day of school for Mari? Explain your choices. How do you feel on the first day of school?

Do you think Mari will wear the red nisse cap, or not? Why? Would you?

Chapter 8.

Several of Mari’s classmates and their families left the village. Where did they go, and why? Why do her classmates know so much more about why people are leaving and other things happening in the village?

How do you think Mari felt about being called brave, about her classmates thinking she is in the resistance?

Chapter 9.

Mari has been classmates with Greta for years, who seems to feel differently about Mari after this first day. What kinds of questions would Mari have about the changes?

What might the package have in it, and why do you think it upset Mari’s mama and grandma.

Chapter 10.

What are some of the difficult and frightening truths Mari has learned in a single day? Do you think it was harder for Mari to handle the new information she was given, or to not have answers to so many questions? Which would be harder for you, and why?

Chapter 11.

Mari’s conversation with her family makes her feel she needs to grow up fast. What lets you know she is trying to do that already?

Chapter 12.

What was Grandma’s secret, and why did she share it with Mari? Why did Grandma teach Mari each step in hiding the secret correctly?

Chapter 13.

Mari learned even more difficult secrets that night. What do you think caused her to worry the most, and why? What would worry you most?

Chapter 14.

Choose examples of messages Mari passed to the other villagers and explain why they were used and sounded harmless. Do you think Mari should trust Greta or not? Why?

Chapter 15.

Mari is terrified and angry about what happened to Odin. Who does she blame? Why?

Why do you think the soldiers were so quick to attack Odin?

Chapter 16.

How much time has passed since Odin was hurt? What is helping Odin recover? What life lessons does Dr. Olsen share with Mari?

Chapter 17.

What kinds of jobs could Greta be doing at her father's pharmacy? How could newspapers, paperclips, and jokes fight the German occupiers?

Chapter 18.

Why is Mrs. Nilssen's news so upsetting? Discuss some of the reasons why the army would order this for the entire country. Was Mari being reasonable in refusing to have a soldier at their house for Christmas?

Chapter 19.

How does the harness work out for Odin? What makes Lise's return so special? What do you think made Mari so upset?

Chapter 20.

How were Mari's worries about Lise resolved? How did the family deal with Mari's feelings about the unwanted Christmas visitors?

Chapter 21.

What was Mari doing in secret? What was the soldier looking for? How did Mari's family manage to resist the rules at Christmas?

Chapter 22.

What surprised you about the dinner conversation? Which of your holiday traditions would you miss most if someone made rules against them? Why was Mari so upset with Bestemor?

Chapter 23.

Why is Mari's family giving up treasures for bartering? What makes Mrs. Gunderson's gift so special? Does Mari trust Greta yet? How do you know?

Chapter 24.

Why did Scarecrow come to Mari's house? Why was Bjorn in trouble? How was Odin involved?

Chapter 25.

Why aren't Mari's parents going to get the doctor to help? Have you ever dealt with something like this? Do Mari's feelings and actions feel familiar or different from yours. Explain.

Chapter 26.

Does Mari act the way you would, or not? Explain. Why Mari is sleeping on the sofa instead of going to bed? Do you think Papa's (Chapter 25) and Bestemor's advice will help Mari? Explain.

Chapter 27.

Which soldier caused the tragedy? How? Why is Mari angry with Bjorn? How would you feel in her place?

Chapter 28.

What does Mari learn about Astrid at lunch together? Would Astrid's talk have helped you or not? Explain.

Chapter 29.

How is Mari dealing with the tragedy? What are some ways others are trying to help her? What was so surprising about Mari's birthday gathering?

Chapter 30.

Mari helps Astrid and her family. What does that tell you about Mari now compared to the start of the story? What dangers could the students and Mr. Jensen face in the next school year?

Chapter 31.

Mari's family planned to provide traditional foods and clothing for the wedding. What surprised them and how was it solved?

Chapter 32.

Why is Per in trouble? What does Mari do to help? What would you have done? Explain?

Chapter 33.

Why did the flag play such an important part in the wedding?

At the school celebration, what decision did Mari have to make? Do you agree with her choice or not? Explain.

Chapter 34.

Why were Per and Bjorn spending so much time together? Why was it the right time for Bjorn to make his choice? Why does Mari make her own hard choice the end of the book?

Suggestions to support/modify content and comprehension activities for learners who rely on additional support:

Activate prior knowledge, especially from general experience:

- 1) Have you watched the movie, *THE SOUND OF MUSIC*? If so, what role did the soldiers play in the story?
- 2) Discuss bullying- that people can be bullies, but countries can be bullies, too- using greater power to take over other countries
- 3) If the readers have any understanding of racism, skinheads, etc.. use this background to discuss Aryanism. If that is not in the reader's experience or appropriate, discuss beliefs about racial superiority as they arise in the story. If it IS within the learner's experience, use background knowledge to compare to Hitler's Aryan superiority beliefs and the references in the story.

Develop background knowledge using picture books and other visual sources to establish mental images relevant to the story, including but not limited to

:

- 1) **The Lily Cupboard**, by Shulsmith Levy Oppenheim 9780064433938
- 2) **The Butterfly**, by Patricia Polacco 9780142413067
- 3) **Let the Celebrations Begin**, by Margaret Wild 9780763670139
- 4) **The Yellow Star** by Carmen Agra Deedy, Henri Sorensen 978-1561452088
- 5) **Irena's Jar of Secrets** by Marcia Vaughan 978-1600604393

Guides to some of these titles and many other resources can be found at the website for teaching about the Holocaust: <http://www.holocaust-trc.org>

Use other visual resources to get a sense of the place and time.

- 1) This is a short film of actual YtreArna-currenttimes, and it plays music, which can be turned off, of course. It gives a pretty accurate sense of the very mountainous, small town place. Many of these homes are more than a hundred years old and are ones I pictured while writing. The difference would be some of these roads would be gravel roads or cobblestone streets, etc. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C97G9MzlUM4>
- 2) This clip is from that earlier era, is narrated in Norwegian, (which can be turned off) and shows cars, clothing, etc much more typical of the story. It includes some excellent views of the fjord (which could be confusing without a visual image). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3UcBPs4M2PI>
- 3) This is a longer clip, which you can preview and share as much as might be helpful to individuals or groups. It shows school settings, from the outdoors as well as within classrooms, it might give a sense of the historic era, just to anchor the story in a past time. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OMn92rRtrMk>
View and choose if any would be helpful.

CONFUSING WORDS:

The use of Norwegian and German terms could be confusing. It can be fun to use a few of them in casual conversations/activities just so the idea of other languages won't be so strange. The best example is NEI (Pronounced NIE) for no, TAKK for thanks or thank you. That leads to NEI, TAKK (No, thanks) or TUSEN TAKK (A thousand thanks, or thank you very much). The other is the use of BESTEMOR instead of grandma or grandmother, even though both are used throughout the book. Picturing Mama and Papa is easy, but a young learner could think there are two separate characters, Grandma and Bestemor unless that is discussed. Find out if a nickname is used for grandparents in their families (Gaga, Oma, MiMi, Nana, Grammy, etc.)

The actual Norwegian for Mama is MOR and for Papa is FAR, but the story uses labels that are more familiar since so many other actual terms were being used throughout.

There are many other examples, including German ones, but just addressing a few should make the others seem less confusing/upsetting when they pop up. Context clues are intentionally provided but even if they aren't effective, the storyline itself should carry through in most cases. Knowing in advance that other languages can pop up should make it less of an issue. Foreign words or phrases are always in italic font so that readers know to look in the back matter if they need help.

Big Picture/synopsis – simplified:

Eleven-year-old Mari lives in a very small village on a mountainside in Norway. She lives with her Mama, Papa, and Grandma, who she often calls Bestemor. She has one sister who lives in a far off city where she goes to college, and one brother who is also much older. He is an adult and works at a bank in the village. Mari spends most of her time with her dog, ODIN, and she is very shy. She is also very smart, but since she is the baby of the family, her nickname is Baby Girl or Little One, and she counts on her family to keep her safe.

Mari goes to the village school and knows almost everyone in the village. She is in sixth grade and has always had the same teacher and the same classmates, so they are almost like family to her.

When Hitler was in charge in Germany he tried to take over all the other countries around them. Norway was not fighting the Germans and promised not to fight ANY other country. But Hitler wanted to take over Norway anyway to take control of their land and coastline and food supplies. He sent his armies and navy to take over, but he pretended they were coming to be friendly, to protect the people of Norway from the countries he was fighting. When that happened, Mari knew it was bad but she was sure her family would protect her. Then she learned how terrible things really were and what she might have to do for herself and her country.

Planning/predicting:

The titles for the chapters in the table of contents could help in tracing/reviewing the plot and scope of the story, especially as it stretches out over a full year. Making a timeline (simple- follows a school year, from August just before school starts to June after school lets out) and adding short notes or key words as the story unfolds could help sustain/retain story elements and changes in the character.

In general, I'd advise to only pursue aspects of the story that the learner grasps well and seems to care about. Treating each chapter or episode as a freestanding story could work better than trying to maintain understanding of the full story.

Another option is to deal with the whole or parts of the story in "chunks". The plot breaks/transitions are organized below:

Part One: Learn about Mari and her life, as well as the changes that frighten and confuse her (First five chapters, pages 1-38)

Part Two: Learning about local resistance (Chapters 6-11, pages 39-75)

Part Three: Mari takes a stand, joins in resistance activities (Chapters 12- 16, pages 76-109)

Part Four: New friends, holiday time with family (Chapters 17-22, pages 110-147)

Part Five: Dangers grow (Chapters 18-23, pages 148-181)

Part Six: Birthday, Wedding, and Good-Bye (Chapters 24-end, pages 182- end)

Common Core Standards

From: <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>

"The Common Core asks students to read stories and literature, as well as more complex texts that provide facts and background knowledge in areas such as science and social studies. Students will be challenged and asked questions that push them to refer back to what they've read. This stresses critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills that are required for success in college, career, and life."

Standards develop from grade to grade, but the English/Language Arts Literacy standards for fourth and fifth grade reflect the nature of the standards that are addressed in this study guide and apply to succeeding grades:

RL.4-7.1, 4-7.2, 4-7.3, and RL5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 (Key Ideas and Details);

L.4-7.4 and L.4-7.5 (Vocabulary Acquisition and Use)

RL5.4, 5.5, and 5.6 (Craft and Structure)

RI.4-7.9 (Integration of Knowledge and Ideas)

RL5.9 (Compare/contrast Stories in the Same Genre/Theme)

RL5.10 (Level of Complexity)

W. 4-7.1, W4-7.2, and 4-7.3 (Writing various text types and purposes)

W.4-7.7, 4-7.8, 4-7.9 (Research to Build & Present Knowledge)

Recommended titles relating to Norway's role during the Second World War include:

Casanova, Mary. [The Klipfish Code](#). 9780547744476

The year is 1942, and Norway is under Nazi occupation. Despite her grandfather's warnings, twelve-year-old Marit has decided to take action.

Lowry, Lois. [Number the Stars](#). 9780547577098

In 1943, during the German occupation of Denmark, ten-year-old Annemarie learns how to be brave and courageous when she helps shelter her Jewish friend from the Nazis.

McSwigan, Marie. [Snow Treasure](#). 978014240224

In the bleak winter of 1940, Nazi troops parachuted into Peter Lindstrom's tiny Norwegian village and held it captive. Nobody thought the Nazis could be defeated—until Uncle Victor told Peter how the children could fool the enemy. It was a dangerous plan.

Preus, Margi. [Shadow on the Mountain](#). 9781419711596

Based on a true story, this rcounts the adventures of a 14-year-old Norwegian boy named Espen during World War II. After Nazi Germany invades and occupies Norway, Espen and his friends are swept up in the resistance movement.

Visit the “For Teachers” tab on the website to download more extensive lists, including picture books.

Internet sources for research include:

Book trailer is available to use as introduction:

<http://www.sandybrehl.com/tag/book-trailer/>

A seven-minute archival video shows the earliest days of German invasion of Norway: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7bIFqE35bY>

Dense background content on the decisions surrounding Norway's invasion:

http://www.history.army.mil/books/70-7_02.htm