



Rip to the Rescue by Miriam Halahmy

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About the Book

It's 1940 and Nazi bombs are raining down on London, but thirteen-year-old bike messenger Jack has just discovered something unbelievable: a stray dog with a surprising talent.

Jack navigates the smoky, ash-covered streets of London amid air raid sirens and falling bombs, dodging shrapnel and listening for cries for help, as a bike messenger for fire crews. When Jack finds a dog, miraculously still alive after the latest Nazi bombing of London, he realizes there's something extra special about the shaggy pup—he can smell people who are trapped under debris.

With his new canine companion, nicknamed Rip because of the dog's torn ear, maybe Jack can do more than just relay messages back-and-forth—he can actually save lives. And if Jack's friend Paula is right about the impending Nazi invasion, he and Rip will need to do all they can to help Jewish families like hers.

Discussion Questions

- Jack Castle lies about his age to become a messenger boy in England during World War II. What are the duties of those serving as messengers? Discuss why Warden Yates doesn't question the ages of the messenger boys. Why is so important to Jack to serve the war effort? How do his duties give him purpose? Explain why Jack doesn't tell his mum and dad about his work. How does he know that his secret is safe with his grandfather?
- Explain the meaning of *shell-shocked*. How does this explain Jack's father's behavior? Discuss how his father's words hurt Jack and cause him to question where he really belongs. Why is Jack reluctant to tell Mum that his dad told him he wished he had never been born? Discuss the moment Jack realized his dad's courage in the Great War. How does Jack's father display courage when he and Jack's mum are buried in rubble? Discuss the changes in Jack's family after he and Rip rescue his parents.



- Jack has been bullied at school. Rocky gave him the name “Deaf Nellie.” How does name-calling lead to bullying? Explain why Jack doesn’t tell Warden Yates that he is deaf in his left ear. How does Jack eventually gain the respect of Rocky and all who have bullied him?
- Jack thinks there is something mysterious about Paula’s family. Why does Jack wonder if they are spies? Describe his reaction when he learns that they are Jewish. How does this explain Paula’s worries about an “invasion”? Discuss how the experiences of Paula’s cousin Gerda in Germany contribute to her worry about her family’s safety.
- Becky, Paula’s little sister, becomes friends with Ned Purdy. Explain why this concerns Jack. How does Jack gain an understanding of Ned after he sees how Ned and his family live?
- How does Jack discover Rip? Describe the moment when Jack learns that Rip has a special talent of finding people buried in rubble. How does Warden Yates react to Rip? Why is Rip safe at Jack’s grandfather’s flat, but not in Jack’s parents’ home? At what point do Jack and Rip become a real rescue team? How does Rip become a part of Jack’s family by the end of the novel?
- Jack has always longed for friends. Describe his friendship with Paula. How do Rocky and his gang become Jack’s friends? Why does having friends bring Jack new problems? Explain how Jack feels when Becky proclaims that they are “Jack’s gang.”
- *Theme* is the underlying message or big idea of a novel. Discuss how the author reveals the following themes: *belonging*, *service*, *bravery*, *courage*, *fear*, *pride*, and *bullying*. How do these themes connect to Jack’s inner conflict? Explain how Jack’s inner conflict is resolved.
- Read the Author’s Note at the end of the novel. What part of the story is based on fact, and what part is fiction? *Setting* refers to the time and place of the novel. It is an important element of historical fiction. What British words or terms does the author use to create an accurate setting? How does the author’s description of Jack and Rip’s work as a rescue team create a clear understanding of what was happening on the home front in England during World War II?

Guide prepared by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

About the Author



Miriam Halahmy, author of *Rip to the Rescue*, is a poet, special-needs educator, and novelist. She has worked with refugees in schools as well as in workshops she’s led for PEN and the Medical Foundation for the Care of the Victims of Torture. Her books include *Saving Hanno*, *Behind Closed Doors*, and *Hidden*, which was nominated for the Carnegie Medal.

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