

All the Light We Cannot See

By Anthony Doerr

Book Summary:

WINNER OF THE 2015 PULITZER PRIZE
FOR FICTION NATIONAL BOOK AWARD
FINALIST NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
WINNER OF THE CARNEGIE MEDAL FOR
FICTION

A beautiful, stunningly ambitious novel about a blind French girl and a German boy whose paths collide in occupied France as both try to survive the devastation of World War II.

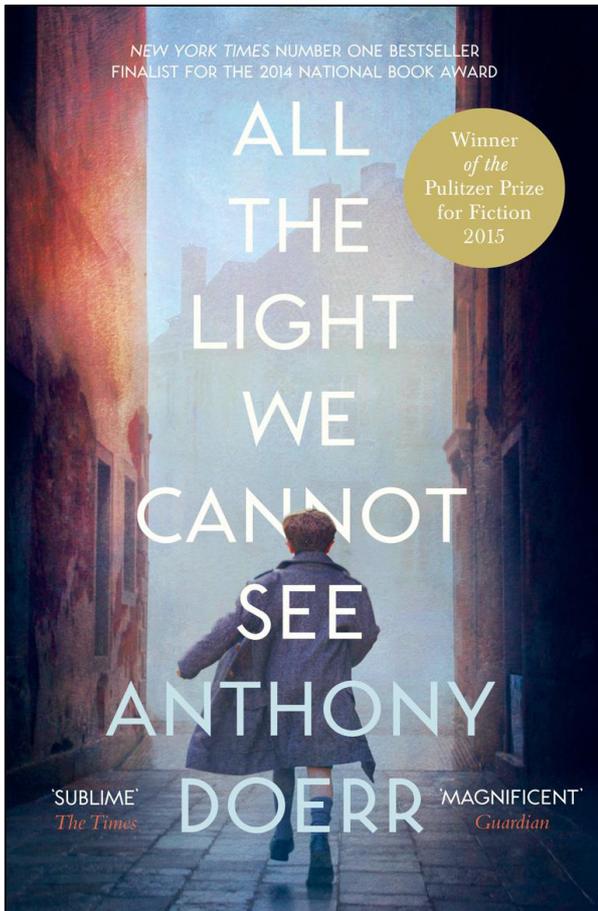
Curriculum Areas and Key Learning Outcomes:

English, Literacy and Language

Themes

Hope, aspiration, destiny, morality, persecution, fear, propaganda

Appropriate Ages: 14+



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Notes by: Rachel Ford

CONTENTS

- **Introduction**
- **About the author**
- **Study notes on themes and curriculum topics:**
 - Curriculum area: English
 - Literacy and language
 - Themes: hope, aspiration, destiny, morality, persecution, fear, propaganda

Questions for reading and discussion

Author inspiration

Bibliography

About the author of the notes

Introduction

When Marie-Laure goes blind, aged six, her father builds her a model of their Paris neighborhood, so she can memorize it with her fingers and then navigate the real streets. But when the Germans occupy Paris, father and daughter flee to Saint-Malo on the Brittany coast, where Marie-Laure's agoraphobic great uncle lives in a tall, narrow house by the sea wall. In another world in Germany, an orphan boy, Werner, is enchanted by a crude radio. He becomes a master at building and fixing radios, a talent ultimately makes him a highly specialized tracker of the Resistance. Werner travels through the heart of Hitler Youth to the far-flung outskirts of Russia, and finally into Saint-Malo, where his path converges with Marie-Laure. Deftly interweaving the lives of Marie-Laure and Werner, Doerr illuminates the ways, against all odds, people try to be good to one another.

About the Author

Anthony Doerr is the author of five books, *The Shell Collector*, *About Grace*, *Four Seasons in Rome*, *Memory Wall* and now *All the Light We Cannot See*.

Doerr's short fiction has won three O. Henry Prizes and has been anthologized in *The Best American Short Stories*, *The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*, and *The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Fiction*.

He has won the Rome Prize, and shared the New York Public Library's Young Lions Fiction Award with Jonathan Safran Foer. In 2007 *Granta* placed Doerr on its list of the "21 Best Young American novelists." In 2015 *All the Light We Cannot See* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Doerr lives in Boise, Idaho, with his wife and two sons.

Study notes on themes and curriculum topics

This text will be useful in addressing the Australian Curriculum: English objectives for year 10.

Learning Outcomes

Students will have the opportunity to:

- Interpret and compare how representations of people and culture in literary texts are drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1633)
- Present an argument about a literary text based on initial impressions and subsequent analysis of the whole text (ACELT1771)
- Explore and reflect on personal understanding of the world and significant human experience gained from interpreting various representations of life matters in texts (ACELT1635)
- Investigate and experiment with the use and effect of extended metaphor, metonymy, allegory, icons, myths and symbolism in texts, for example poetry, short films, graphic novels, and plays on similar themes (ACELT1637)
- Analyse text structures and language features of literary texts, and make relevant comparisons with other texts (ACELT1772)
- Create literary texts, including hybrid texts, that innovate on aspects of other texts, for example by using parody, allusion and appropriation (ACELT1773)
- Use interaction skills to present and discuss an idea and to influence and engage an audience by selecting persuasive language, varying voice tone, pitch, and pace, and using elements such as music and sound effects (ACELY1811)
- Plan, rehearse and deliver presentations, selecting and sequencing appropriate content and multimodal elements for aesthetic and playful purposes (ACELY1741)
- Use comprehension strategies to interpret and analyse texts, comparing and evaluating representations of an event, issue, situation or character in different texts (ACELY1744)

- Create imaginative, informative and persuasive texts that present a point of view and advance or illustrate arguments, including texts that integrate visual, print and/or audio features (ACELY1746)
- Review and edit students' own and others' texts to improve clarity and control over content, organisation, paragraphing, sentence structure, vocabulary and audio/visual features (ACELY1747)
- Use a range of software, including word processing programs, flexibly and imaginatively to publish texts (ACELY1748)

This text will be useful in addressing the Australian Curriculum: English objectives for year 10.

Learning Outcomes

Students will have the opportunity to:

- Understand that people's evaluations of texts are influenced by their value systems, the context and purpose and mode of communication (ACELA 1565)
- Analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of a wide range of sentence and clause structures as authors design and craft texts (ACELA 1569)
- Compare and evaluate a range of representations of individuals and groups in different historical and social and cultural contexts (ACELT 1639)
- Evaluate the social, moral and ethical positions represented in texts (ACELT 1812)
- Identify, explain and discuss how narrative viewpoint, structure, characterisation and devices including analogy and satire shape different interpretations and responses to a text (ACELT 1642)

- Compare and evaluate how 'voice' as a literary device can be used in a range of different types of texts such as poetry to evoke particular emotional responses (ACELT 1643)
- Creating literary texts with a sustained 'voice', selecting and adapting appropriate text structures, literary devices, language, auditory and visual structures and features for a specific purpose and intended audience (ACELT 1815)

- Analyse and evaluate how people, cultures, places, events, objects and concepts are represented in texts, including media texts, through language, structural and/or visual choices (ACELY 1749)
- Identify and analyse implicit or explicit values, beliefs and assumptions in texts and how these are influenced by purposes and likely audiences (ACELY 1752)
- Use comprehension strategies to compare and contrast information within the and between texts, identifying and analysing embedded perspectives, and evaluating supporting evidence (ACELY 1754)
- Create sustained texts, including texts that combine specific digital or media content, for imaginative, informative, or persuasive purposes that reflect upon challenging and complex issues (ACELY1756)
- Review, edit and refine students' own and others' texts for control of content, organisation, sentence structure, vocabulary, and/or visual features to achieve particular purposes and effects (ACELY1757)
- Use a range of software, including word processing programs, confidently, flexibly and imaginatively to create, edit and publish texts, considering the identified purpose of the characteristics of the user (ACELY 1776)

This text will be useful in addressing the Australian Curriculum: English objectives for Senior Secondary Unit 1.

Investigate the relationships between language, context and meaning by:

- explaining how texts are created in and for different contexts (ACEEN001)
- analysing how language choices are made for different purposes and in different contexts using appropriate metalanguage; for example, personification, voice-over, flashback, salience (ACEEN002)
- evaluating the impact of description and imagery, including figurative language, and still and moving images in digital and multimodal texts. (ACEEN007)
- Analyse and evaluate how responses to texts, including students' own responses, are influenced by: purpose, taking into account that a text's purpose is often open to debate (ACEEN008)

Create a range of texts:

- using appropriate form, content, style and tone for different purposes and audiences in real and imagined contexts (ACEEN011)
- drawing on a range of technologies in, for example, research, communication and representation of ideas (ACEEN012)
- combining visual, spoken and written elements where appropriate (ACEEN013)
- using strategies for planning, drafting, editing and proofreading (ACEEN016)
- using accurate spelling, punctuation, syntax and metalanguage. (ACEEN017)

Reflect on their own and others' texts by:

- analysing textual evidence to assess the purpose and context of texts (ACEEN018)
- investigating the impact and uses of imaginative, interpretive and persuasive texts. (ACEEN020)

Pre-reading and reading strategies

Students can find working with literary fiction difficult at times. By providing the student support through pre-reading and reading strategies, students are better able to engage and work with literary texts.

The following strategies use prediction to help students connect the text with their prior ideas as well as engage with the new knowledge and information they will gain from the text.

The novel is called *All the Light We Cannot See* and features a young French girl who becomes blind at a young age and a young German boy who is gifted with electronics. The novel is set just prior to the outbreak of World War II.

Questions

- Why do you think Anthony Doer chose this title, setting and these protagonists?
- Do you think the girl and the boy will meet? Why/why not? If they do, what do you predict will happen?

The novel is broken in fourteen sections: part zero to part thirteen. Each part covers a different time period, predominantly in relation to World War II. The parts do not

follow a sequential time sequence, rather the author has approached the novel using disjointed time sequences.

Activity:

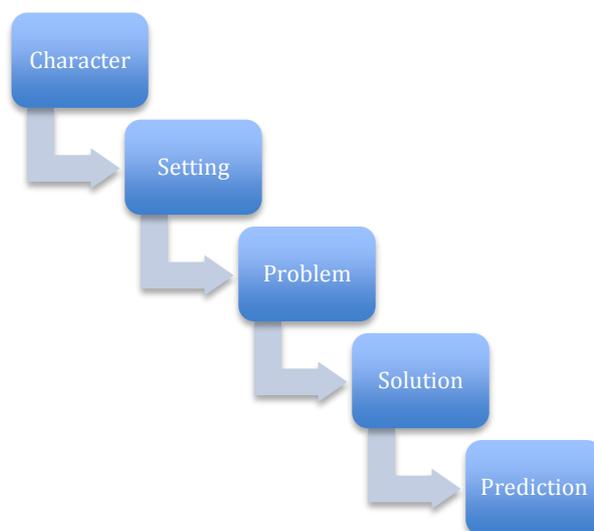
Use the part titles to create a timeline. Divide the class into small groups and allocate each group one or two time periods. Using a KWL chart or similar, students research the major events that take place in France and Germany during their allocated time period. The students complete the timeline and as they read the book they annotate any events that occur in the book, and add to the timeline.

Activity:

At the end of section, create a prediction chart (see black line masters) for what the students think will happen in the next section. At the end of the novel, compare the prediction chart to

Activity:

Create a summary of each section as students read. The summary should follow the flow chart below with the students identifying the character, the setting, the problem/s faced by the character, the solution to the problems faced by the character (if any) and a prediction for the next chapter/section.



Literacy and language

All the Light We Cannot See is an example of **literary fiction**. Literary fiction is not necessarily a genre, but there are characteristics which books of this type share.

First person narrative – limited, multiple. The limited first person perspective means the reader is limited to the same knowledge as the protagonist. First person narrative can help the reader to make a stronger emotional connection to the protagonist and the challenges they experience in the text. However, because we are hearing directly from the protagonist, they can sometimes seem self-involved. In this case, the author will use the other devices, especially a companion or confidant to help the reader stay connected to the protagonist. The use of multiple first person narratives, including the

Activities:

- Students choose a song, that has more than one 'character' singing in it, for example (note: the youtube links are for teacher reference purposes only)
 - *Where the Wild Roses Grow* Nick cave and The Bad Seeds
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDpniE1LUvE&feature=youtu.be>
 - *I wanna be like you* The Jungle Book
<https://youtu.be/9JDzlhW3XTM>
 - *Under Pressure* David Bowie and Freddie Mercury
<https://youtu.be/geY0f6peEtc>
 - *Don't Give Up* Peter Gabriel and Kate Bush
<https://youtu.be/VjEq-r2agqc>
- Rewrite the song so that it only has the point of view of one character,
- Rewrite the song so that it is told from the point of view of a third person,
- Compare and contrast the two new versions of the song with the original and discuss how the change in narration effects the change in interpretation by the audience.
- Choose one section of the narrative and rewrite it in first or third person. Using a think, pair, share strategy to identify the ways the narrative has changed and how this changes the interpretation of the narrative.

Allegory, sometimes referred to as universal allegory, is where a theme or character is representative of a larger theme or concept. Doerr uses the device of allegory throughout the novel to draw the reader's attention to themes and issues that affect the character regardless of their ethnicity and social status, as well as to

demonstrate that many of the challenges that people faced during WWII are still present today.

In the chapter titled 'Heaven' (Part Five) Marie-Laure asks Madame Manec '*Don't you ever get tired of believing, Madame? Don't you want proof?*'. Whilst Marie-Laure is referring to the concept of heaven and indirectly to the belief that her father will return from the prison camp, Doerr uses allegory to question the universal concepts of faith, hope and belief.

Activity:

In small groups, identify three to five other examples of allegory. Analyse and evaluate each example and present the findings to the class.

Denouement is the final resolution of a usually intricate plot. It is the end result of the dramatic action that has taken place. A denouement can be quite dramatic and leave the reader feeling extremely satisfied in relation to the text. A denouement can be without great dramatic tension leaving the reader dissatisfied in relation to the feature of the characters.

Activity:

Identify the denouement and use this to create a multi-modal text that shows the resolution of the action.

Activities:

- Students read the novel have them identify moments of foreshadowing in the chart (see black line masters). Students should predict what they think will happen and then compare their predictions with the action in the novel.
- Choose one incident in book three and create a narrative, in Judith's voice, that foreshadows this event. Students choose where they would put this event, justifying their choice in terms of narrative progression and keeping the reader hooked into the novel.

Imagery and **evocative** language help in painting the picture for the reader. Evocative language creates an emotional connection to the content rather than using factual language. Imagery helps to create a strong visual picture for the reader. Imagery and evocative language are often linked to setting, but can also be connected to a character's thoughts and feelings as well as a character's senses and a character's motivations.

The Frenchman's voice is velvet. His accent is different to Frau Elena's, and yet his voice is ardent, so hypnotizing, that Werner finds he can understand every word.

In this example, Doerr uses evocative language—velvet, ardent, hypnotizing—to create an image of a person so powerful that they are able to influence the course of Werner's life. This voice encourages in Werner a love of science and engineering that he will be driven to pursue in his life, even though his destiny at the start of the narrative appears to be working in the mines as his father and his peers did/do.

Doors soar away from their frames. Bricks transmute into powder. Great distending clouds of chalk and earth and granite spout into the sky.

In this example, Doerr uses imagery to paint a poetic picture of the destruction of the city, focusing on the physical beauty of the aftermath of the bombing, from the point of view of the city, which is a sharp juxtaposition to how this would be seen from the perspective of a person, particularly one of the protagonists.

Activity:

Choose three examples of imagery and three examples of evocative language. Evaluate each of these use of imagery and describe the picture they create for the reader.

Intertextuality occurs when a writer references another piece of literature in order to create another level of meaning for the reader. The most prevalent example of intertextuality in *All the Light We Cannot See* is the references to the books that Marie-Laure reads, or has read to her.

The 'Sea of Flames' is another example of intertextuality. Whilst this story is not a single, identifiable text, the stone represents a tradition or morality based stories, fables and tales that have been told throughout history.

Activities:

- List all of the books that is read by or to Marie-Laure and discuss:
 - What these books are about.
 - How the books reflect what is happening to Marie-Laure and other characters in the narrative (where appropriate).
 - The additional levels of meaning these create for the reader.
 -
- Discuss the following quote as a class.

One week in Saint-Malo becomes two. Marie begins to feel that her life, like Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea, has been interrupted halfway through. There was Volume One, when Marie-Laure and her father loved in Paris and went to work, and now there is Volume Two, when Germans ride motorcycles through these strange, narrow streets and her uncle vanishes inside his own house.
- Brainstorm all of the stories, fables and tales that the students know that are similar to 'The Sea of Flames', then complete the following:
 - Identify what the moral is for each story.
 - Identify what the moral is for 'The Sea of Flames'.
 - Compare and contrast the moral for all of the stories, including the 'The Sea of Flames', using a Venn diagram or similar.

Setting is not only the time and place of a narrative, but can also be about the mood and the interaction between place and mood.

Activity:

Choose one of the chapters in part zero that focuses on setting for example 'Saint-Malo' or 'Number 4 rue Vauborel' and analyse how setting is used to introduce the reader to the time, place, mood and characters of the ensuing narrative.

Symbolism is when an author uses a tangible or physical idea to represent something abstract.

The boys spend that entire first morning in their new white outfits...

The white uniforms the boys are wearing are a symbol of purity, much like a wedding dress, representing the aspiration of the Nazi Party to create a world that was dominated by the supreme race (identified by the Nazi's as the Aryan race).

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Symbols can also be allegorical in their nature.

'It's a book, sir,' ...

'Is it a Jew book?' says Herribet Pomsel. 'It's a Jew book, isn't it?'

In this example, the book represents knowledge, and individual thought, something feared by the Nazi Party. The fact that the book is Jewish, represents, to the Nazi Party, impurity. On an allegorical level, these concepts represent a universal fear of knowledge by oppressive powers. This kind of censorship is often designed to prevent any opposition towards the religious, cultural or spiritual position of the ruling party. Notable book burnings have occurred throughout history from the destruction of tablets at Ebla circa 2240 BCE to the burning of *The Harry Potter Series* in several states in the United States in 2006.

Activity:

Working individually, identify five examples of symbolism in the narrative. Analyse the examples and describe for the class what the author is asking of the reader with each example.

Tragedy is a series of unfortunate events. The use of tragedy can create empathy in a reader, creating an increased desire for the protagonist to succeed. Judith, Lucas and several of the characters experience a series of unfortunate events until the very end of the novel.

Activity:

Create a chart that follows the tragedy that faces one character and the ways the character overcomes each tragedy. Annotate the chart with the language features that are used in association with the tragedy, for example allegory.

Themes

Hope, aspiration and destiny

Hope for the future, the aspiration to succeed beyond your 'station' in life and the predetermined path that may be your destiny, form the spine of the narrative. Marie-Laure and Werner constantly battle with the hope in the face of devastating events as well as aspiring to have a future that seems to be beyond their ability to control.

Marie-Laure tries to calculate the chances that one might contain Madame Manec's peaches, the white peaches from Languedoc that she'd buy by the crate and peel and quarter and boil with sugar. The whole kitchen would be filled with their smell and colour, Marie-Laure's fingers sticky with them, a kind of rapture. Two cans Etienne had missed.

But to raise one's hopes is to risk them falling further. Peas. Or beans. These would be more than welcome.

In this example, Marie-Laure is not only hoping for the peaches because they are a preferred food, but she is hoping for the peaches as they remind her of a joyous and safe time in her life. Having faced a multitude of disappointment in her life, Marie-Laure is afraid to hope for the peaches in case the can turn out to be something less palatable. The less palatable options not only represent what she needs to eat, but also her fading hope that she will be reunited to her father, and on a larger scale, that the war will end and that she will return to her home in Paris.

The resistance group, led by Madame Manec, is an example of group aspiration. This group, despite facing an impoverished and repressed future, chooses to reject the destiny that appears to be predetermined, and to fight their oppressors in the hope of achieving the future that they want.

Madame Manec brushes Marie-Laure's hair in long absentminded strokes. 'Seventy-six years old,' she whispers, 'and I can still feel like this? Like a girl with stars in my eyes?'

Whilst hope can demotivate Werner at times, it also operates as a motivational factor. When Volkheimer tells Werner to 'Think of your sister' whilst they are trapped, he is encouraging him to stay positive in regards to their situation and therefore hopeful that they will survive the seemingly hopeless situation.

Activities:

- *'Your problem Werner,' says Frederick. 'is that you still believe you own your own life.'* Discuss.
- Identify examples of hope that each character experiences. Analyse these examples and discuss what the examples reveal about the character.
- Evaluate the importance of aspiration and determination in the lives of Marie-Laure and Werner.

Morality

Throughout the novel, Doerr asks the reader to reflect on what they think is 'right' and if extreme circumstances can justify a person not doing what may be considered to be the moral or 'right' thing.

A number of the minor characters can be seen to set the moral 'pulse' or 'compass' for the other characters. Jutta is one character who does this, she sets a moral pulse for Werner.

Jutta opens her eyes but doesn't look at him. 'Don't tell lies. Lie to yourself, Werner, but don't lie to me.'

Activities:

- Investigate the six stages of moral development identified by Kohlberg and complete the following:
 - Identify 4 major and 4 minor characters in the narrative.
 - Create a graphic organiser to represent the six stages of moral development.
 - Place each character on the organiser at the level that you think is indicative of their development and provide a reason for the decision.

<http://www.simplypsychology.org/kohlberg.html>

- In small groups, find three to four examples of a character facing a moral crisis or choice and discuss the following:
 - What is the crisis or choice that the character is facing?
 - What factors are making it difficult for the character to do what they believe is the right thing?

Persecution and fear

Persecution and fear are powerful tools for controlling and manipulating people and communities. All of the characters in the novel are confronted by persecution and fear at some point in the novel. The persecution can be on a large scale for example a national level or a school level. The persecution can also be on a smaller scale, for example the boys at the school's constant persecution of Frederick as a weaker child.

Fear can be an extremely potent motivator. Fear of rejection, fear of new ideas, fear of losing someone we love, can cause a character to react in non-traditional ways.

Activities:

- Brainstorm all the examples of persecution that are in the novel. Brainstorm modern examples of persecution. Compare and contrast the examples of persecution using a compare and contrast chart or similar.
- Brainstorm all the examples of fear that are in the novel. Categorise these examples for example fear of rejection, fear of new ideas, fear of being exposed etc.
- Persecution and fear of religious and other ideals still exists today. Choose an example of modern day religious or political persecution and conduct research using the internet and other tools. Use the research to create a short text, in any genre.

Propaganda

Propaganda has been used by governments and political parties to motivate the citizens for centuries. In the novel, propaganda is alluded to by the characters with references to the government reports and statements.

Songs are a powerful example of propaganda during war time as they generate a sense of nationalism and encourage people to fight for their nation, and if necessary, sacrifice their own life.

Activities:

- List the examples of propaganda used throughout the narrative. Choose three examples and analyse how propaganda motivates the actions of the characters.
- Deconstruct and discuss the song sung Werner's school. Research other songs sung during WWI or WWII and compare and contrast these with the song that the boys sing.
*O take me, take me up into the ranks
So that I do not die a common death!
I do not want to die in vain, what
I want is to fall on the sacrificial mound.*
- Identify examples of modern propaganda and discuss these as a class.

Questions for reading and discussion:

Create a character trait chart for each of the characters in the novel (see Black line masters).

As students read the novel ask them to reflect on what “All the Light We Cannot See” means. After concluding the text, write a several paragraphs, using stream of consciousness, starting with the sentence “Marie-Laure and Werner teach us that humanity is the light that the human race cannot see...”

Light—both the presence and absence of light—is a theme, a character, a symbol and an allegory in the narrative. Read each of the examples of light below and discuss what they mean.

Part One: The professor

And yet the world it constructs in the mind is full of light.

Part One: Flight

The whole city is dark. No street lights. No lights in windows.

Part Two: Hotel of bees

But he cannot find his field light. He cannot even stand up.

Part Five: Fredrich

...he knows each time that it is merely a trick of the light, he cannot stop his eyes from seeing corpses...

Part Seven: White City

Why light lamps when the darkness will inevitable snuff them?

Choose one of the following and write a ‘farewell’ letter:

- Daniel to Marie-Laure
- Marie-Laure to Werner
- Werner to Jutta
- Another character of your choosing

After the meal, little Siegfried Fischer, no older than five, walks around the table and tugs Werner's sleeve and hands him a photograph he has torn from the newspaper. In the picture, six fighter-bombers float above a mountain range of clouds. Spangles of sun are frozen midglide across the airplanes' fuselages. The scarves of the pilots stretch backward.

Siegfried Fischer says, 'You'll show them, won't you?' His face is fierce with belief; it seems to draw a circle around the hours Werner has spent at the Children's House, hoping for something more.

'I will,' Werner says. The eyes of all the children are on him. 'Absolutely I will.'

In the moment, Werner represents not only the hopes and aspirations of the children in the orphanage, but the hopes and aspirations of all children who have experienced misfortune and loss. Discuss.

'How about the Whelk? I think I would like to be the Whelk.'

'The Whelk. That is an excellent pseudonym.'

'And you, Madame? What would you like to be?'

'Me,' Madame Manec's knife pauses. Crickets sing in the cellar. 'I think I would like to be the Blade.'

Discuss the choice of pseudonym by Marie-Laure and Madame Manec in reference to their characters and the events that unfold in the narrative.

'No one wins in war, but everyone loses.'

Discuss.

Author inspiration

In some reviews of the novel, Anthony Doerr has been criticised for being too 'even handed' in his comparison of the French and the German experiences of WWII. Discuss this viewpoint and present your own giving examples from the text.

Prediction chart

Chapter title	Prediction – pre-reading	Post reading	Summary

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Structured overview

Title of the novel

Chapter Title	Chapter Title	Chapter Title
Key Events	Key Events	Key Events
Key Quotes	Key Quotes	Key Quotes
New characters	New characters	New characters
Any other information	Any other information	Any other information

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Foreshadowing chart

Chapter title	Quote - event	Prediction	Comparison

Compare and Contrast chart

Topic One _____

Topic Two _____

How they are alike

How they are different

Character trait chart

Trait	Evidence

Additional resources with activities

Anthony Doerr on *All the Light We Cannot See*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYBK3Lsx7aI>

Activity: choose an event or a location and use this as the starting point for a short narrative in any style or genre.

Anthony Doerr on *Dialogue*

<https://youtu.be/zkYPrbT3IQc>

Anthony Doerr on *UO:Today*

<https://youtu.be/7x-CEbhfCyU>

Activities: Watch the video and take notes.

Write a series of interview questions for Anthony Doerr based on *All the Light We Cannot See*.

'The rise and rise of Anthony Doerr'

<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/the-rise-and-rise-of-anthony-doerrs-novel-all-the-light-we-cannot-see-20160127-gmeihq.html>

'The book I wish I'd Written'

<http://dailyreview.com.au/caroline-lea-the-book-i-wish-id-written/37587>

'Anthony Doerr's sprawling Pulitzer Prize winning novel'

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/may/17/all-light-we-cannot-see-review-anthony-doerr-pulitzer-prize>

Activities: Read and summarise the reviews

Write your own review of the text.