



# BookBrowse

## The Blood Years

by Elana K. Arnold

**Please be aware that this discussion guide will contain spoilers!**

1. Rieke's relationship with Astra is arguably the most fundamental to her sense of self. Describe this relationship, and how Rieke defines herself in terms of it, in Part I vs. Part V. How do Rieke and Astra change in relation to one another over the course of the novel?
2. Consider the paratextual material (the Czernowitz timeline, author's note, and reading list). What are your thoughts about Rieke's fictionalized account being bookended by this historical research? How does this information and your own knowledge (or knowledge gaps) about the political, military, and genocidal events in Romania and wider Europe during the Holocaust shape your reading and understanding of Rieke and other characters? What's the effect of juxtaposing details of historical context with Rieke's narrative, which is hallmarked by a lack of consistent information regarding what is happening to Jews in her city and across the continent?
3. "A person has to have morals. If not, what is a person?" (pg. 160) Describe what Opa is asking here. What answers does the novel provide to this question? How would you answer it?
4. The novel is told in chronological order and emphasizes Rieke's experience of time. By contrast, how would you describe her experience of space throughout the novel? Consider the narrative being set in a single city, whose most drastic of changes to its space(s) impact only its Jewish population. What are the spaces that Rieke occupies or identifies with in the novel's different parts? Opa says that time is cyclical; how is Rieke's shrinking and expanding experience of space a similar cycle? How does space change her and how does she change space over the course of the novel?
5. Discuss the role of power in the narrative. What does power look like? Who has it, who doesn't, and why? Is there more than one kind of power? How does Opa's insistence that "we can love more persistently than they can hate" (pg. 101) relate back to power?
6. Consider the role that bearing witness plays in your reading. If you're unfamiliar with the concept and its relationship to trauma, take a moment to look it up. In her author's note, Elana K. Arnold describes her novel as a mosaic of broken plates (pg. 291); how do bearing witness and your role as the novel's reader fit into this analogy? How does bearing witness to Rieke's story relate to Elana's invitation for you to "look back" and "look around" (pg. 294)?

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