

The Secret *of the* Village Fool

Discussion Questions

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- Why do you think people called Anton Suchinski the “village fool”?
- Why did Anton risk his own life to protect the lives of Milek, Munio, Mama, Tata, Eva and Zipora?
- Why did the six people in Anton’s care need his protection?
- How did Milek’s feelings about Anton change from the beginning of the story to the end?
- Why do you think the six survivors wanted to help Anton years later? Why did he need help then?
- What does “Righteous Among Nations” mean? How does someone become recognized as a Righteous Gentile?
- What does the word “Holocaust” mean? How is it used to describe events that took place during WWII? Why?

Making Connections

- Have you ever wanted to stand up for someone who was being treated unfairly but didn’t know how or were afraid to do so? Or have you ever wished someone would stand up for you? Write a journal page about how you felt or about what you might do if this happened.
- Have you and your family ever helped a neighbour or has a neighbour ever helped you? Write one paragraph describing the situation.
- If you had to leave your home and go into a hiding place for a year, what items would you need to survive? Make a list. Including the words in that list write a story about what it is like to live

in hiding. Writing prompts: Why did you have to leave your home? Who are you hiding with? Who are you hiding from and why?

- Anton was not someone you would think of as a hero, and yet he risked his own life to save six other people. What is a hero? Can you make a list of Anton's qualities and actions that made him one? Do you or someone you know have those same qualities?
- During the story of *The Secret of the Village Fool*, the village of Zborów, where Anton lived, was in Poland. Now it is in Ukraine. Find a map of Poland and Ukraine during WWII. Now find a map today. How have the borders of each country changed and why?
- After the war, Milek and Munio and their parents moved from Poland to the United States. Eva moved to Uruguay and Zipora moved to Israel. The culture and language was different in each case. What would some of the challenges be if you moved from one country to another? How would you make friends in your new country?

Activities

- To help keep the boys occupied, Zipora teaches them how to play Cat's Cradle. It is a game played by two or more people. There are some basic instructions here: www.wikihow.com/Play-The-Cat%27s-Cradle-Game. Can you create new figures?
- While Tata told stories to everyone in hiding, Milek pressed pieces of straw into the dirt walls to make pictures to go with the stories. Using regular drinking straws and glue/tape and paper, can you make a picture to illustrate a scene from *The Secret of the Village Fool*? Alternative method: Press straws or popsicle sticks, or twigs into clay or play dough to make your picture.
- Retell the story orally. Sitting in a circle, begin with one person telling the first scene of the book. Change to the next person for the next scene. Continue taking turns to the end. Alternative method: In groups act out the story as a play.
- Anton could not read or write. Can you "write a letter" to your best friend without using words? Work in pairs and exchange letters. Can your friend understand your letter? Can you understand your friend's? What are some of the challenges of "writing" a letter without using words?

