



## The War within These Walls

*Aline Sax , Caryl Strzelecki (Illustrator) , Laura Watkinson (Translator)*

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**The War within These Walls** Aline Sax , Caryl Strzelecki (Illustrator) , Laura Watkinson (Translator)

It's World War II, and Misha's family, like the rest of the Jews living in Warsaw, has been moved by the Nazis into a single crowded ghetto. Conditions are appalling: every day more people die from disease, starvation, and deportations. Misha does his best to help his family survive, even crawling through the sewers to smuggle food. When conditions worsen, Misha joins a handful of other Jews who decide to make a final, desperate stand against the Nazis. Heavily illustrated with sober blue-and-white drawings, this powerful novel dramatically captures the brutal reality of a tragic historical event.

## The War within These Walls Details

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Author : Aline Sax , Caryl Strzelecki (Illustrator) , Laura Watkinson (Translator)

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# From Reader Review The War within These Walls for online ebook

## Dorcas says

This is a graphic novel about the ghetto uprising in Poland WW2.

It is a difficult book to rate. By giving it two stars I'm not saying its a bad book but it definitely wasn't for me. It's also a difficult book to classify. I would put it as YA but the subject matter and illustrations are quite violent at times and I'm not sure I could recommend it to any young adult I know.

The illustrations themselves are finely executed and there's tons of them. They did help to tell the story but ultimately it is a very dark and depressing one. Yes, WW2 *was* dark and depressing but this book seems to focus on the violent imagery: starvation, brutality of soldiers, people being incinerated in the sewers by "Nazi pigs" with flame throwers etc. Not something I could recommend.

CONTENT:

VIOLENCE: Strong

PROFANITY: D's and "Nazi Pigs"

MY RATING" PG-13

\*I received a free ebook from netgalley in exchange for my honest opinion

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## Penny Peck says

The battle between the Germans and those trapped in the Warsaw Ghetto during WWII is the main focus of this novel that should attract a teen audience. The format of the book is really inviting - a novel in free verse is paired with distinctive b&w illustrations making this a hybrid between a graphic novel and a novel in poetry. The main character, Misha, is fictional but there are real life people featured as well, making this historical fiction that is moving and with a gravitas and authenticity that will grab the reader. High school history teachers will find this a great book for a class reading assignment.

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## Alex (not a dude) Baugh says

The War Within These Walls is a slim graphic novel based on a real event. Narrated by teenage protagonist Misha, it follows the fate of his Jewish family living in Poland at the start of WWII. Little by little the Nazis made life untenable for the Jews in Poland. Eventually, the Jews were all moved into various ghettos around Poland, Misha and his family found themselves living the the Warsaw Ghetto.

With little food and people dying of starvation every day, Misha begins to sneak out of the ghetto at night to find food to smuggle in for his family. Soon, his younger sister Janina starts following him and when he insists she stop when the Nazis were starting to hang smugglers, she leaves the ghetto on her own and doesn't return.

Then, the Nazis announced that the Jews were going to be resettled in the east to have a better life. People thought that might be a good thing until the freight trains with only cattle cars arrive. As the Nazis swarmed the ghetto to find anyone who tried to hide, Misha realizes that they were going east to be killed not resettled.

Hiding from the Nazis during the raid, Misha meets a young man named Mordechai Anielewicz and his life as a Jewish resistance fighter begins. As he meets other Jews in the resistance, Misha feels a sense of renewed hope. The Nazis planned to liquidate the ghetto on April 19, 1942, a date that coincided with the Jewish holiday of Passover. But they were never expecting to meet resistance, but Misha, Mordechai and the other Jews for back, culminating in what we know call the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

Using sparse text accompanied by stark black and white pencil, pen and ink illustrations against a black or white pages, *The War Within These Walls* is one of the most powerful books I have read about the Holocaust and the Warsaw Ghetto. The slim design of the physical really imparts the sense of how increasing narrow the Nazis made world for the Jews in Europe, while the height reminded me of how Misha saw the freedom of birds who had the freedom could just fly away from the ghetto.

And it is a grim novel, full of despair, but how could it not be. One of the most poignant parts of the story was the disappearance of Janina after she runs away from the ghetto. I could really feel Misha's agony not knowing what happened to her - did she survive or was she captured and killed? Like so many many Jewish families caught in the the Nazi reign of terror who never saw their loved ones again and never learned what became of them.

By the end, I could really see how Misha and the other resistance workers saw hope in what they were doing even though it proably would spell certain death for them.

This is a heart breaking novel in its very simplicity, but not to be missed for mature teen readers interested in the Holocaust and WWII.

At the end of *The War Within These Walls*, there is a short biography about Mordechai Anielewicz, who was indeed the leader of the resistance within the Warsaw Ghetto. He was born in 1919 and killed on May 8, 1943 during the Uprising. He was only around 24 uears old at the time.

This book is recommended for mature readers age 14+

This book was purchased for my personal library

This review was originally posted at The Children's War

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## **Beth Wozencraft says**

*The War Within These Walls* was an interesting book to read as it was basically a graphic novel with illustrations on each page and short paragraphs or even just a single word per page. Because of this format it was easy to read, yet still powerful. In fact I found the use of single words to be especially powerful. Single words such as "Food" stood out because it was the only word on the page. It showed how no words could describe the starvation people suffered while confined to the Warsaw ghettos. The illustrations also added to the dire circumstances the Jewish people experienced during the Holocaust. Overall, I enjoyed the book and its unique format. I think, however, that it could have gone into more detail about the Holocaust. Since it really just stayed at the surface level, other sources would need to be used in order to explore the Holocaust

more in depth. I think it would be interesting to use this book as a springboard for a unit on the Holocaust, since it is so quick and graphic.

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### **Claudia says**

We know a bit about the Warsaw Ghetto, and the walling up of Jewish citizens during the war. We know a little...but this book forces us to SEE. To watch children slowly starve to death, to see families crammed into one room, to see people rounded up and taken away, never to return.

I didn't know much about the Warsaw Uprising, the short-lived, heroic, revolt by young Jewish kids who decided a death fighting for their cause meant more than a slow death by starvation or a fast execution.

Told through the eyes of a fictional Jewish boy, we learn about the real hero of the uprising, young Mordechai Anielewicz, the spiritual leader of this doomed endeavor.

I remember reading *THE PIANIST*, but I don't remember anything about the uprising in that book...

My only complaint is the book was too short, with a story that was too surface. I will now dig for more information.

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### **Lauren says**

Powerful. Thought-provoking. These are the two main words that come to mind after reading the novel, *The War Within These Walls*. What is considered a fast read, allows the reader to experience from the point of view of the main character, Misha who is living in the Warsaw ghetto during the Nazi regime. This story takes you on the journey of Misha and the absolute horrors that he encountered living in the ghetto. This story is one of the unwavering power of the human spirit and how even in the darkest times in history, there are those who still burn with light and perseverance. The simple yet powerful illustrations add to the "feels" of this novel through the facial expressions of the characters as they live their lives inside of the walls. A recommended read for any person who is moved by the stories of the Jewish people during WWII.

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### **Patrick says**

Misha is a young Jewish man who watches firsthand the deterioration Warsaw Jews under the heinous yoke of Nazi occupation. When it is too much to take, when his only choice is to fight or die, he joins with a small force of Jewish resistance to rise up and fight the occupiers, knowing that he fights not for victory but for an honorable death.

Sax and Strzelecki work well together in creating a gritty and dark picture of the Nazi occupation of Warsaw during World War II. The black and dark blue inks create a dismally monochromatic Warsaw ghetto, and the scratchy sketches of Polish Jews convey a hopelessness that the first-person narrative complements. Readers will feel the same fury that Misha does as he watches the Nazis choke the life out of his family and friends, and as he realizes that his people are being systematically murdered in death camps. The conclusion is poignant and open-ended, leaving readers with some exposed emotion that the author chooses to leave

unsatisfied.

The only complaints I have are that the illustrations are a touch too cartoonish for the subject matter, though it may have been a deliberate choice to appeal more readily to a younger audience.

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### **Elizabeth Westlund says**

The War within These Walls follows Misha, a young Jewish teen during the time of World War II. His family is relocated into a crowded ghetto where conditions are deplorable. The format of this book is shorter passages of text accompanied by black and white drawings that depict the events of the story, such as his daring escapes through a manhole or the funeral cart that passes through each day. Eventually, as Misha loses more and more of what is important to him and he learns of the death camps, he makes the decision that he must do something to fight back against the Nazis.

The sensory details that the author presents evoke an immediate response of anxiety and horror for what those who really experienced such events went through during this time period. The colorless drawings accurately reflect this feeling of despair and add to the mood of the story.

Though this novel is not traditional in structure and has briefer text and illustrations, that does not mean that the content is necessarily appropriate for younger readers. This book may be best utilized at the eighth grade level or above due to some of the graphic nature. It would definitely work with a unit on the Holocaust/WWII. There would be much to explore with students, such as what the parakeet represents, and how Misha changes as a character.

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### **Lizzie says**

The War within These Walls focuses on the story of a Jewish man living in the Warsaw Ghetto during WWII. Though the main character is fictional, the author highlights characters that are based on real people who organized to fight against Nazi occupation. The book provides information about the harsh and cruel conditions of life in the ghetto as well as details about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

The illustrations are simple (dark greens and blues), and these illustrations and minimal text contribute to a somber atmosphere. This book is a quick read, but the story will stick with the reader long after finishing the book.

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### **Kathleen says**

This is an excellent book about the experiences of Jews in the Warsaw ghetto during WWII. The book is considered teen fiction, and is only 175 pages. Though it's fiction, it isn't written in the style of a typical novel. With minimal text, the author superbly conveys the horrors of the people during this time. Misha (the main character) displays courage throughout the book, putting himself at great risk in order to secure food for his family. Misha is aware of a tragedy that happens to his sister, but he can't bear to tell his mother the truth about it, which creates a terrible weight upon his shoulders. This is another example of how he tries to take care of his family - not telling his parents the truth, knowing it might destroy them.

Ultimately Misha becomes a member of the Jewish resistance, literally taking on the Nazis. This is a crucial part of the book, and it sets it apart from other novels about the Holocaust. The Jewish resistance is a heroic effort in the face of evil, and it's not deeply addressed in traditional social studies units. I definitely recommend this for students of middle school age or older.

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### **Bekah says**

I am so pleased that I stumbled upon this while scanning the library shelves, but surprised that I had never heard of it before.

Told in first-person, with lots of illustrations that are both simplistic but powerful, *The War Within These Walls* tells the story of Misha, a young Jewish man in 1939 Warsaw. From his fictional lens, we learn about the Nazi invasion of Poland, the creation of the Jewish Ghetto in Warsaw, onward through the uprising of 1943.

It was a very short read, but powerful, bringing up a lot of emotions and questions. I would definitely recommend it to anyone, but especially to middle & high school teachers, to include in their WW2 curriculum.

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### **Barbara says**

*The War Within These Walls* is a story based on real facts with fictional characters and relates the details of the invasion of Warsaw by the Germans on September 1939. The author did a succinct but powerful job depicting the feeling of the characters, making the readers feel the injustice and agony the Jewish went through. The author did a great job by choosing carefully in every page the perfect words to describe the actions, the anguish, the sorrow and harassment that the Jewish population lived at that time.

It is a story that retells many of the fact of the persecution of the Jewish people but also combines the excitement of the brave Jews that tried to fight back and defend their honor.

The book is an easy read with scenes that make you gasp and show your feelings aloud! I was not a big fan of the pictures, however, they definitively capture the mood and the essence of the story.

I recommend the book for either reluctant reader since the story is short and easy one.

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### **Tarissa says**

A hard-hitting look at one family's survival in the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw, Poland. In fact, it's told from first-person perspective, so it's exactly like seeing it through young Misha's eyes.

Yes, there's some gruesome/graphic scenes. Yes, there's pain and hurting on these people's faces. Yes, you're going to see and feel the pain for yourself.

The Nazis have taken over Warsaw, but the ghetto is uprising. The Jews in the area are being persecuted (the book fills the reader in on what the Jewish people could and could not do). As Misha in the story says, ***"I***

*had never felt so Jewish before."* Because it never really mattered before the Nazis arrived. But the ghetto will not be downtrodden forever...

It's a fairly short read. I finished it in just a couple of sittings. But there's a big story behind these words and between these pages.

I'd recommend it for anyone 10 and up, but with a warning on some gruesome or violent content.

*Thanks to NetGalley for a free copy of this book; I was not required to post a positive review.*

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### **Stephanie says**

The War Within These Walls is a historical fiction graphic novel about the uprising in the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw in 1943. The book is told in first person through the eyes of Misha, a fictional character based on the Jewish people who fought against the Nazis during World War 2. Misha's account begins in 1939 at the formation of the Warsaw ghetto through 1943 when the Jewish resistance forces fought back. Misha details the horrors the people in the ghetto faced during this time. The reader sees how life in the ghetto left Misha feeling defeated and how he had lost hope before meeting Mordechai Anielwicz who encouraged him to join resistance. "We were not fighting to win. We were fighting for an honorable death."

The War Within These Walls was a 2014 Batchelder Honor Book, a 2014 Sydney Taylor Honor book (teens category), and the 2014 winner of the National Jewish Book Award (Children's and Young Adult Literature). The book was published in 2011 in Dutch by Belgian author Aline Sax and later translated to English by Laura Watkinson in 2013. The author writes with short, simple sentences that give the book an almost poetic feel. The simple, yet complex text is complemented with the illustrator, Caryl Strzelecki, use of black and white drawings which reflect the mood and tone of the story. The illustrations aid in the understanding of the events as well as reflect the feelings of the characters in the story.

The graphic and violent content of the book would be most appropriate for older readers. The book narrates only what is happening in the Warsaw ghetto with an assumption that the reader is already familiar with important concepts in World War 2 and the Holocaust. This book would be best for high school readers to read after they have some background knowledge on these topics

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### **Sarah Hysong says**

While I like the concept of the book, the "poetic style"-- i.e. 169 pages of simple sentences-- made it a very annoying read.

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