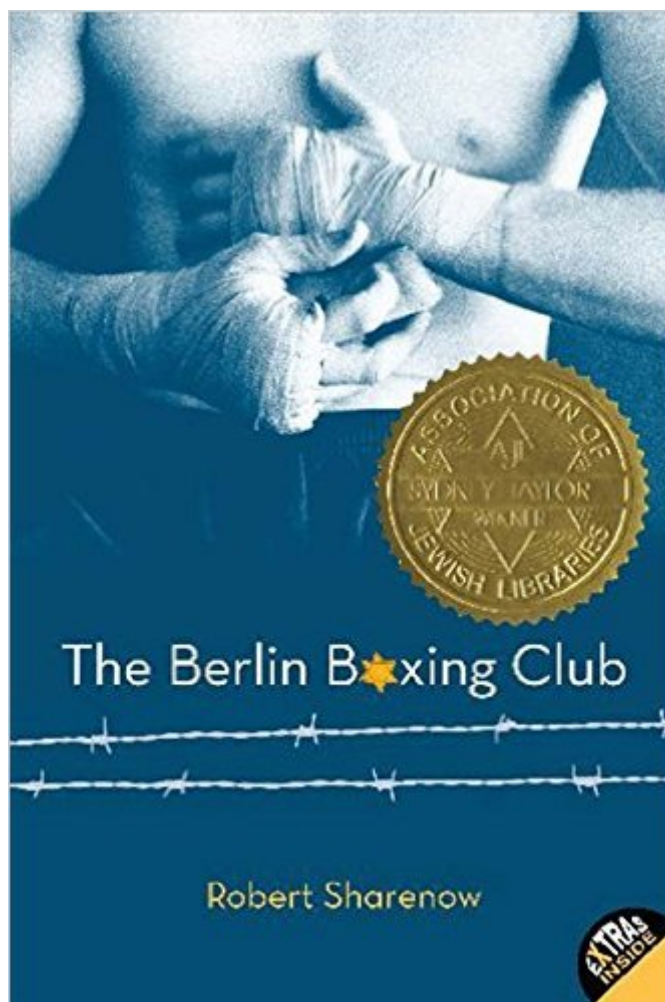


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# The Berlin Boxing Club



## Synopsis

Sydney Taylor Award-winning novel *Berlin Boxing Club* is loosely inspired by the true story of boxer Max Schmeling's experiences following Kristallnacht. Karl Stern has never thought of himself as a Jew. But the bullies at his school in Nazi-era Berlin, don't care that Karl has never been in a synagogue or that his family doesn't practice religion. Demoralized by attacks on a heritage he doesn't accept as his own, Karl longs to prove his worth. So when Max Schmeling, champion boxer and German national hero, makes a deal with Karl's father to give Karl boxing lessons, A skilled cartoonist, Karl has never had an interest in boxing, but now it seems like the perfect chance to reinvent himself. But when Nazi violence against Jews escalates, Karl must take on a new role: protector of his family. And as Max's fame forces him to associate with Hitler and other Nazi elites, Karl begins to wonder where his hero's sympathies truly lie. Can Karl balance his dream of boxing greatness with his obligation to keep his family out of harm's way? Includes an author's note and sources page detailing the factual inspirations behind the novel. Supports the Common Core State Standards.

## Book Information

Paperback: 432 pages

Publisher: HarperTeen; Reprint edition (October 23, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 006157970X

ISBN-13: 978-0061579707

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 1 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.9 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (85 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #88,201 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #30 in [Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > Holocaust](#) #101 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Sports](#) #309 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Friendship](#)

## Customer Reviews

I could not put this book down. What I most liked about the book was that although it detailed the anti-Semitism in pre-World War II Germany, there were glimpses of what life was like before the Nazis starting gaining power, so the reader could understand why people could not believe what was happening, or that it would pass. This key component helps establish this huge sense of loss and incredulousness on the part of the Jews in Germany. While the ending left a lot up in the air

(whether Karl's parents survived), a happy ending would have been too contrived, and a sad ending would not have been a satisfying conclusion to a great story. While not as literary as "The Book Thief," it has some of the same elements that made that book so wonderful: a great main character - Karl Stern ended up being a hero; well developed secondary characters like his family, the men at the boxing club, his girlfriend, "The Countess," and, of course, Max Schmeling; interesting intertwined stories that included the ban on "degenerate" art, the world of boxing, and Karl's interest in comics books; and a sense of history. I just read "In the Garden of the Beasts" about the US Ambassador to Germany in the early 1930s, and I would recommend reading that in conjunction with "The Berlin Boxing Club" to get two different angles on what was going on in Germany.

I received this book through the Vine Program and my initial reaction upon looking at the cover was disappointment seeing it was a teen novel. Well, there is truth in old sayings, "Never judge a book by its cover." The book follows the path of a young teenager through the power grabbing years of the Nazi's. The protagonist does not relate to his heritage and does his best to "blend in" by hiding in plain sight, however when he is exposed to be of Jewish heritage he is forced to learn to fight back against overwhelming odds by making an unlikely alliance with a world class boxer. The descriptions are brutal and the writing reminds me of another excellent book that my son read for 9th grade called "The Book Thief" and my guess is that many of the readers of that book will be reading this one and they and you won't be disappointed. An excellent read for any age.

Great historical fiction novel starring Karl, a Jewish 14 year old, who can pass for Gentile and has been raised in an agnostic home. He lives with his parents and younger sister in Berlin at start of Hitler's power. Karl is bullied by the Wolf Pack, who humiliate him because of his heritage, and eventually taken under the wing of boxing great Max Shmeling, who gives Karl a training routine and teaches him to box. The story looks at a brutal time in history, with an eye toward mid-teen readers, as Karl struggles with resentment of his family's reduced circumstances, teenage lust for a neighbor, tempered by a mature work ethic and a good heart. The story, while somber, is not without points of humor, and the chapters are punctuated by occasional drawings when Karl's artistic side comes out. Fans of Sharenow's book MY MOTHER THE CHEERLEADER (also excellent) will see parallels in the writing style, as Sharenow takes a hard look at an ugly time. About me: I'm a middle school/high school librarian How I got this book: purchased it for the library

The Berlin Boxing Club is not only a stunningly well written book, it is also a brutal and engaging

story that will leave readers in stunned silence while they fervently search for the next page that will never come. The Berlin Boxing Club looks into the world of Jewish Germans during World War II, but instead of focusing on the world of religious Jews, The Berlin Boxing Club instead focuses on Jews who are instead Jews by heritage but not by religious affiliation. The story focuses on a number of important elements; from their family's persecution, to a coming of age story revolving around the world of boxing, to understanding who someone is, not based on what they look like but instead based on the courage of their actions and the strength in their convictions. Of course besides having a captivating and moving story, The Berlin Boxing Club also contains fantastic characters and action. All the characters, from The Countess, to Karl, to Max, are robust, realistic, and well written. Of course besides the good, Berlin Boxing Club, also demonstrates how the German people were swept up into the thick of it all. It does not paint them all as monsters, instead it paints some as hideous creatures who enjoy the suffering of others, some who choose to take advantage of those who are downtrodden, and most of all it shows the majority of people too scared to defy these groups, and so because of their own fears give in to the cruelty and discrimination that goes on. All in all The Berlin Boxing Club is a fantastic book. It is gripping, realistic, full of both action and emotions, and is truly a superb story. This book should be read in classrooms along with other holocaust books such as the Diary of Anne Frank. And will find an audience among boys, girls, and adults; as the characters and story are developed enough to capture anyone who is willing to listen to its tale.

Although Karl Stern never really considered himself a Jew..(He never even went to a synagogue)the bullies at his school set out to terrorize him and Karl sets out to prove himself worthy. Robert Sharenow is a terrific writer. I was drawn right into the story from the start causing me--like Karl to have mixed emotions as the plot thickens. It asks but does not really answer many questions and I found myself thinking a lot about the book when I was away from it and always eager to get back to it. When I finished, I went back and read the ending again and wished I could talk to the author. This is a REALLY good book and I hope it finds its place...

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