

READING GROUP GUIDE

THE INSTANT
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

WHEN TIME STOPPED

A MEMOIR OF
MY FATHER'S WAR
AND
WHAT REMAINS

ARIANA
NEUMANN



READING GROUP GUIDE FOR

WHEN TIME STOPPED

ARIANA NEUMANN

This reading group guide for *When Time Stopped* includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

“The story Neumann uncovers is worthy of fiction with hairpin plot twists, daredevil acts of love, and unexpected moments of humor in dark times. Given the slew of colorful characters and dramatic details, she could have turned her painstaking research into a historical novel. Instead she has written a superb family memoir that unfolds its poignant power on multiple levels. Yes, her account of one Jewish-Czech family’s race to outwit the Nazis makes for thrilling reading. But just as important is her lucid investigation of the nature of memory, identity, and remembrance.”

—The New York Times Book Review

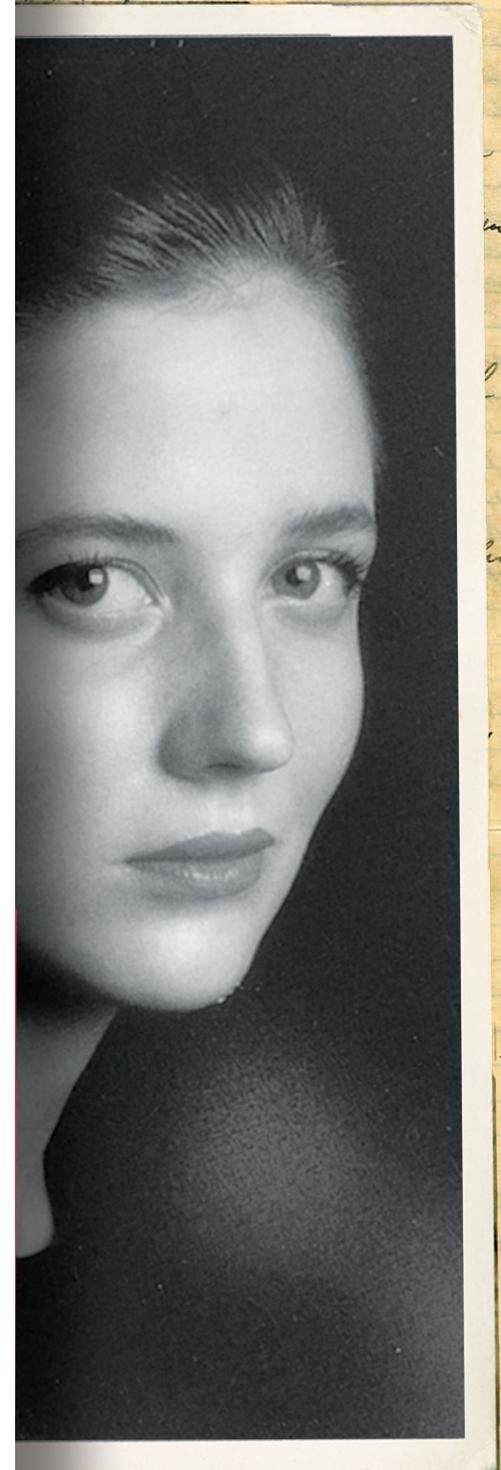
Introduction

In 1941, the first member of the Neumann family was taken by the Nazis, arrested in German-occupied Czechoslovakia for bathing in a stretch of river forbidden to Jews. He was transported to Auschwitz. Eighteen days later, his prisoner number was entered into the morgue book.

Of thirty-four Neumann family members, twenty-five were murdered by the Nazis. One of the survivors was Hans Neumann, who, to escape the German death net, traveled to Berlin and hid in plain sight under the Gestapo's eyes. What Hans experienced was so unspeakable that, when he built an industrial empire in Venezuela, he couldn't bring himself to talk about it. All his daughter Ariana knew was that something terrible had happened.

When Hans died, he left Ariana a small box filled with letters, diary entries, and other memorabilia. Ten years later, Ariana finally summoned the courage to have the letters translated, and she began reading. What she discovered launched her on a worldwide search that would deliver indelible portraits of a family loving, finding meaning, and trying to survive amid the worst that can be imagined.

When Time Stopped is an unputdownable detective story and an epic family memoir, spanning nearly ninety years and crossing oceans. Neumann brings each relative to vivid life. In uncovering her father's story after all these years, she discovers nuance and depth to her own history and liberates poignant and thought-provoking truths about the threads of humanity that connect us all.



Topics & Questions for Discussion

1.

In the prologue, Ariana introduces the mystery of her father's life with a literal question mark in place of his death date in a Holocaust memorial in a Czech synagogue. Throughout her memoir, how does Ariana seek to answer the question of who her father was and the details of his life? What answers does she uncover?

2.

Ariana describes having an idyllic childhood in Caracas as the daughter of an esteemed member of Venezuelan society. How does the Latin American setting help tell this story?

3.

On page 12, Ariana reveals that, as a child, she wanted to be a detective. In what ways does Ariana play a detective in her memoir?

4.

Ariana discovers a collection of her father's poetry from when he was a teenager, and learns he titled it "Drowned Lights." What do you think the meaning of this title is? How does it relate to his life, and perhaps more broadly, the Holocaust?

5.

On page 123, a peer tells Ariana that she must have Jewish heritage because of her last name. Ariana, jarred by the suggestion, writes: "Was my family Jewish? Was my father a Jew? Was I? What did that even mean? Is one's identity predetermined by inheritance? Or are you who you choose to be?" How do you think Ariana answers these questions throughout her memoir?

6.

Throughout her memoir, Ariana introduces the items within the small box her father left her: letters, diaries, telegrams, identification cards. How do these objects inform the memoir? How do they help Ariana understand her father's life and tell this story?

7.

Ariana notes that, despite his decades in South America, her father never adapted to the relaxed Latin American timing and instead remained relentlessly punctual. Why do you think time and timepieces were significant to him?

8.

During his time in Berlin, Ariana describes her father as “the boy from Prague [who] was defying the Nazi system by living in the middle of it” (page 237). How do you think this ability for secrecy benefited him and affected him throughout his life?

9.

Ariana later describes her father, as she knew him, “an older man living in Caracas reviving memories that were then indistinguishable from the nightmares that woke him screaming in the night” (page 240). How is this older man connected to the boy from Prague in Berlin? Over the course of his life, how do you think Hans processed his trauma from the Nazi regime?

10.

In the epilogue, Ariana reveals that her children share her father’s relationship with time and clocks, though they never met him. How do you think the question of time ripples through this story?

Enhance Your Book Club

1.

Read other accounts of the Holocaust such as Elie Wiesel’s *Night* or Anne Frank’s *The Diary of a Young Girl*.

2.

Read Viktor Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning* and compare his testimony and coping mechanisms to Hans’s.