

Under the Rubble

By Elisa Boxer | Illustrated by Oksana Drachkovska

READING GUIDE

About the Book

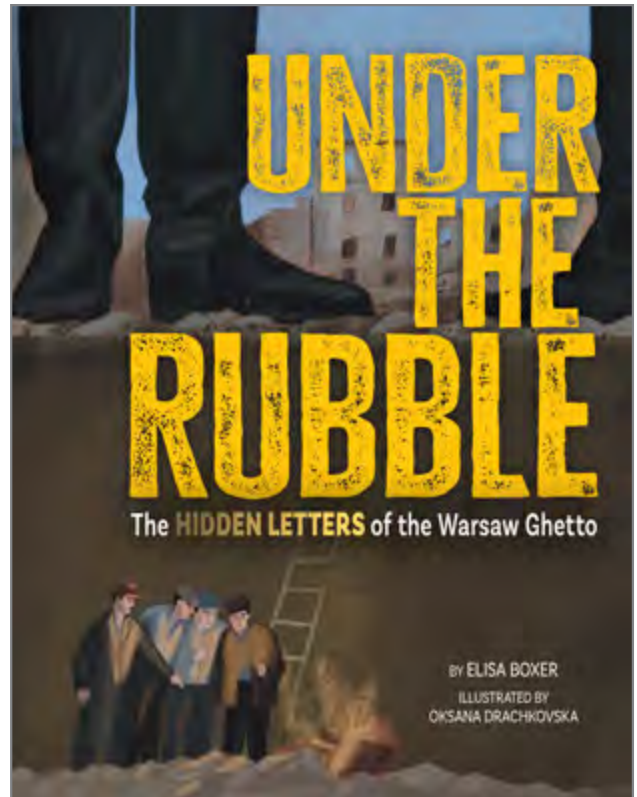
On September 1, 1939 Germany invaded Poland setting off WWII. The following year Nazis forced nearly 450,000 Polish Jews into a crowded ghetto in the capital city of Warsaw. By the end of the war, most of those imprisoned had been killed, either in concentration camps or on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. But miraculously, their stories survived. HOW? That's a story in itself . . .

When the Jewish prisoners of Warsaw Ghetto realize that Nazi atrocities might go unanswered, they courageously risk their lives and resist with just pen and paper as their weapons. In an act of defiance, they write and bury deep underground a complete record of what they endured. After the war, Hersh Wasser, the only survivor who knows where the records are buried, leads the effort to recover them.

This true story of the Oneg Shabbat Archive was the subject of an award-winning adult book and documentary film. The book includes notes from those who were part of the effort to recover the canisters. Extensive backmatter includes a historical note, glossary, and a list of resources for further learning.

Elisa Boxer is an Emmy-winning journalist and Sydney Taylor Honor author. Elisa is the author of numerous children's books, including *One Turtle's Last Straw* (which won the 2024 Maine Chickadee Award) and *Hidden Hope: How a Toy and a Hero Saved Lives During the Holocaust*, which won the Sydney Taylor Silver Medal, the Maine Literary Award for Best Children's Book, and was a Booklist Editor's Choice pick for 2024. Elisa lives in Scarborough, Maine.

Oksana Drachkovska graduated from the National Academy of Arts in Lviv, Ukraine, majoring in fine arts, she decided to focus on illustration. In 2020, the book she illustrated, *A Bunny Who Didn't Jump and His Brave Mother*, won Lviv Book Forum's award as the best book for children aged 6 to 8. In 2021 and 2022, she was shortlisted for Bologna Book Fair's International Award for Illustration. An illustrator originally from Lviv, Oksana is currently living in Barcelona, Spain.



Key Themes:

Antisemitism, Bravery, Resistance against discrimination, Telling and preserving the truth

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Ages 6–8 years

Use these questions to preface and conclude a reading of this book with children. Encourage them to share their observations as you read the book together, and take time to linger on pages or spreads that generate more discussion.

Before Reading

- Look carefully at the cover and the title of the book. Make a prediction: what do you think this book is about?
- Why do you think anyone would want to hide letters?

During Reading

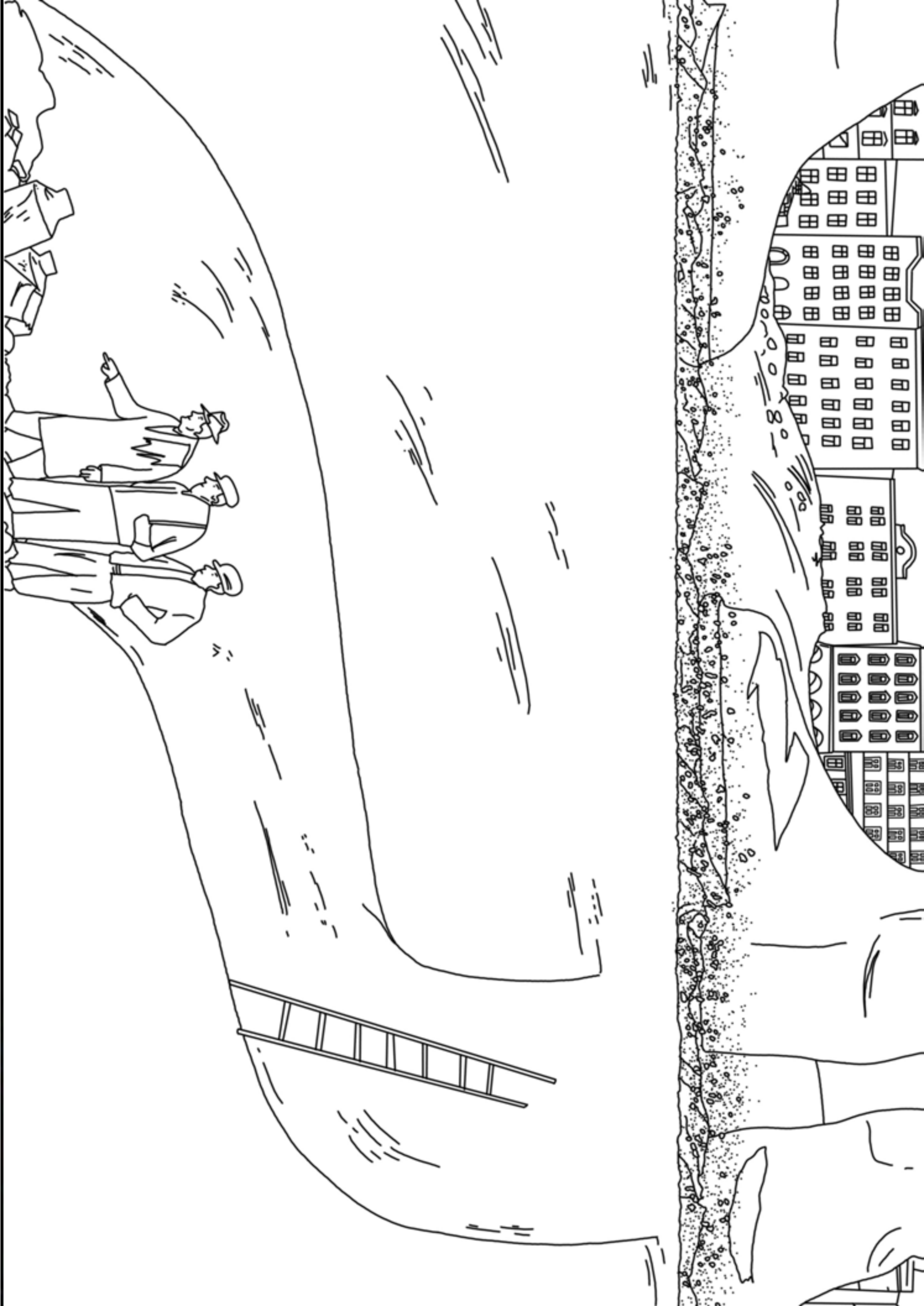
- How do you think the secret letters of children, parents, rabbis, and doctors might have been different from each other? What might be similar about them?

After Reading

- At the start of the book, Hersh Wasser calls the collection of hidden letters “a treasure.” Why do you think he considers it to be a treasure?
- Why was it so important for the people in the ghetto to “give the words a chance to survive?”
- Which illustration was most powerful for you? Why?

Optional: Extension Activity

Emanuel Ringelblum formed the secret Oneg Shabbat group to gather testimonies to preserve the history of the Warsaw Ghetto. He did not survive the war. Write a letter to Mr. Ringelblum telling him what happened to the Oneg Shabbat archive and what you learned from it nearly 100 years later.





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Character Cut Outs

