

PROMISES TO KEEP

Student Workbook & Teacher Guide

By Patricia Stiehr

About the Novel

Promises to Keep is a historical novel in verse based on the true story of Holocaust survivor Ilse Katz Altman. The novel invites students to explore courage, friendship, faith, sacrifice, and hope while learning about one of history's darkest periods.

About the Historical Background

The Holocaust was the systematic persecution and murder of six million Jewish people by Nazi Germany and its collaborators. This workbook encourages thoughtful, respectful discussion while helping students understand how ordinary choices can have extraordinary consequences.

Meet the Real Survivor: Ilse Katz Altman

Although Hannah is a fictional character, her journey is inspired by the life of Holocaust survivor Ilse Katz Altman. Students are encouraged to compare the historical events in the novel with real history.

Historical Timeline (1933–1945)

- Hitler becomes Chancellor (1933)
- Nuremberg Laws (1935)
- Kristallnacht (1938)
- World War II begins (1939)
- Liberation of concentration camps (1945)

Character Relationship Guide

- Hannah – courageous young Jewish girl
- Frederick – childhood friend whose loyalties are tested
- Hannah's Father – protective and devoted
- Herr Knodt – teacher who brings Nazi ideology into the classroom

Historical Vocabulary Preview

Antisemitism • Aryan • Gestapo • Hitler Youth • Kristallnacht • Propaganda • Refugee • Synagogue • Swastika • Star of David

Literary Devices Reference

Watch for simile, metaphor, symbolism, imagery, personification, repetition, alliteration, hyperbole, and parallel structure as you read.

PROMISES TO KEEP

Student Workbook & Teacher Guide

Author: Patricia Stiehr

Grades 5–8

Letter to Teachers

Dear Teacher,

Thank you for using Promises to Keep in your classroom. My hope is that students will grow in historical understanding, empathy, courage, and compassion as they walk alongside Hannah's journey.

Welcome to the companion workbook for Promises to Keep. Use this workbook to deepen understanding through discussion, writing, vocabulary, historical connections, and reflection.

How to Use This Workbook

Complete each section after reading the assigned pages.

Learning Objectives

- Build historical understanding
- Analyze literary elements
- Strengthen critical thinking
- Develop empathy and effective written communication

Hannah's Journey Map

Follow Hannah's growth through seven stages: Innocence Lost, Choosing Right Over Easy, Faith and Commitment, Courage Under Pressure, Hope Despite Hardship, Endurance and Faith, and Hope Triumphs.

Promises to Keep

Complete Publisher-Quality Teacher & Student Workbook

Author: Patricia Stiehr

Grades 5–8 • Florida BEST Aligned

About the Author

Patricia Stiehr is the author of *Promises to Keep*, a middle-grade historical novel in verse inspired by the experiences of Holocaust survivor Ilse Katz Altman. I've been a student and teacher of the Holocaust for over 30 years. During my career as an educator, I was awarded the Rockwood School District Middle School Teacher of the Year and was National Board Certified.

I wrote *Promises to Keep* to educate young people about this horrendous part of history because history can repeat itself—same evil, different time, different place—and must never be forgotten. My mission is to encourage young people to respect all human beings including themselves. Violence is never an answer to solving differences, and it begins with educating our youth to make right choices when dealing with any conflict.

I now live in Saint Augustine, Florida, with my husband Jack. We love the beach and boating. We have five awesome grandsons—three live here and two live in St. Louis, Missouri.

My goal is to get *Promises to Keep* into every middle school in the country and to speak a word of hope and encouragement to them all.

Section 1: Hannah's World and Classroom Changes

Book Pages: 1–30

Student Worksheet

Comprehension Questions

1. Who is Hannah, and what do we learn about her life at the beginning of the story?
2. What changes when the new teacher arrives?
3. What objects in the classroom signal a major shift?
4. How do students react to the new teacher?
5. How does Hannah feel during these changes?
6. What clues suggest danger may be coming?

Discussion Questions

- What would you do in Hannah's situation?
- How do courage and moral choices shape the story?
- What lessons can readers learn?

Vocabulary

Authority, Loyalty, Propaganda, Intimidation, Restriction

Historical Connection

Schools in Nazi Germany were increasingly used to spread Nazi beliefs and isolate Jewish students.

Writing Prompt

Write a journal entry from Hannah after her first day with the new teacher.

Teacher Guide & Answer Key

Sample Answer Guidance

Student responses will vary. Look for textual evidence, understanding of character growth, and thoughtful analysis.

Teaching Focus

Loss of Freedom, Courage, Moral Choice

Discussion Guidance

Encourage respectful discussion and ask students to support ideas with evidence from the text.

Extension Activities

- Character analysis chart
- Historical research project
- Reflective journal writing
- Small-group discussion or debate

Florida BEST Standards

ELA.5.R.1.1 • ELA.6.R.1.3 • ELA.7.R.2.2 • ELA.8.C.1.3

Section 2: Frederick, Rising Danger, and the Attack

Book Pages: 31–58

Student Worksheet

Comprehension Questions

1. Who is Frederick, and what role does he play in Hannah's life?
2. How has Frederick changed since becoming involved with the Hitler Youth?
3. What clues suggest danger is increasing in Hannah's community?
4. Describe the attack. Why is this event important?
5. How does Hannah react emotionally to the attack?
6. What does Hannah learn about Frederick?

Discussion Questions

- What would you do in Hannah's situation?
- How do courage and moral choices shape the story?
- What lessons can readers learn?

Vocabulary

Conflict, Betrayal, Courage, Fear, Loyalty

Historical Connection

The Hitler Youth influenced many young people and often divided friendships and families.

Writing Prompt

Write a diary entry describing the attack from Hannah's perspective.

Teacher Guide & Answer Key

Sample Answer Guidance

Student responses will vary. Look for textual evidence, understanding of character growth, and thoughtful analysis.

Teaching Focus

Friendship, Courage, Betrayal

Discussion Guidance

Encourage respectful discussion and ask students to support ideas with evidence from the text.

Extension Activities

- Character analysis chart
- Historical research project
- Reflective journal writing
- Small-group discussion or debate

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Section 3: Family Conflict and the Promise

Book Pages: 59–85

Student Worksheet

Comprehension Questions

1. Why does Hannah's father want to remain in Germany?
2. What dangers are becoming more apparent?
3. How does Hannah respond to her father's decision?
4. What internal conflict is Hannah experiencing?
5. What does the promise begin to mean to Hannah?
6. What are the risks of staying and leaving?

Discussion Questions

- What would you do in Hannah's situation?
- How do courage and moral choices shape the story?
- What lessons can readers learn?

Vocabulary

Responsibility, Sacrifice, Courage, Uncertainty, Conflict

Historical Connection

Many Jewish families faced painful decisions about whether to leave Germany.

Writing Prompt

Write a letter from Hannah to her father explaining her feelings.

Teacher Guide & Answer Key

Sample Answer Guidance

Student responses will vary. Look for textual evidence, understanding of character growth, and thoughtful analysis.

Teaching Focus

Family, Courage, Freedom

Discussion Guidance

Encourage respectful discussion and ask students to support ideas with evidence from the text.

Extension Activities

- Character analysis chart
- Historical research project
- Reflective journal writing
- Small-group discussion or debate

Florida BEST Standards

ELA.5.R.1.1 • ELA.6.R.1.3 • ELA.7.R.2.2 • ELA.8.C.1.3

Section 4: Decision and Turning Point

Book Pages: 86–110

Student Worksheet

Comprehension Questions

1. What important decision is Hannah beginning to make?
2. What dangers are becoming more immediate?
3. How does Hannah demonstrate courage?
4. What fears continue to affect her choices?
5. How is Hannah's promise influencing her actions?
6. Why is this section considered a turning point?

Discussion Questions

- What would you do in Hannah's situation?
- How do courage and moral choices shape the story?
- What lessons can readers learn?

Vocabulary

Determination, Risk, Resolve, Consequence, Bravery

Historical Connection

As conditions worsened, many families had to make difficult choices quickly.

Writing Prompt

Write a journal entry explaining Hannah's decision.

Teacher Guide & Answer Key

Sample Answer Guidance

Student responses will vary. Look for textual evidence, understanding of character growth, and thoughtful analysis.

Teaching Focus

Courage, Decision-Making, Hope

Discussion Guidance

Encourage respectful discussion and ask students to support ideas with evidence from the text.

Extension Activities

- Character analysis chart
- Historical research project
- Reflective journal writing
- Small-group discussion or debate

Florida BEST Standards

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Section 5: Escape and Consequences

Book Pages: 111–119

Student Worksheet

Comprehension Questions

1. What promise does Hannah make to Frederick?
2. What opportunity arises for Hannah?
3. Why was it difficult for Hannah to leave her father?
4. What dangers does Hannah face?
5. How does this moment connect back to her promise?
6. What consequences begin to appear?

Discussion Questions

- What would you do in Hannah's situation?
- How do courage and moral choices shape the story?
- What lessons can readers learn?

Vocabulary

Escape, Consequence, Sacrifice, Survival, Separation

Historical Connection

Escape often meant leaving family, possessions, and familiar surroundings behind.

Writing Prompt

What does freedom cost—and is it worth it? Explain.

Teacher Guide & Answer Key

Sample Answer Guidance

Student responses will vary. Look for textual evidence, understanding of character growth, and thoughtful analysis.

Teaching Focus

Freedom, Sacrifice, Consequences

Discussion Guidance

Encourage respectful discussion and ask students to support ideas with evidence from the text.

Extension Activities

- Character analysis chart
- Historical research project
- Reflective journal writing
- Small-group discussion or debate

Florida BEST Standards

ELA.5.R.1.1 • ELA.6.R.1.3 • ELA.7.R.2.2 • ELA.8.C.1.3

Section 6: Reflection, Loss, and Resilience

Book Pages: 120–130

Student Worksheet

Comprehension Questions

1. What has changed for Hannah after these events?
2. How does the young woman Hannah finds in the bombed-out synagogue affect her?
3. How does Hannah get out of Germany?
4. After Hannah misses her ship, why does she feel she has broken her promise?
5. Has Hannah given up hope to get to America? Why or why not?
6. Why is it ironic that Hannah boards a Japanese freighter to get to America?

Discussion Questions

- What would you do in Hannah's situation?
- How do courage and moral choices shape the story?
- What lessons can readers learn?

Vocabulary

Reflection, Loss, Resilience, Memory, Hope, Futile, Ironic

Historical Connection

Many survivors experienced grief, separation, and uncertainty even after escaping danger.

Writing Prompt

How can someone hold onto hope during difficult times?

Teacher Guide & Answer Key

Sample Answer Guidance

Student responses will vary. Look for textual evidence, understanding of character growth, and thoughtful analysis.

Teaching Focus

Resilience, Identity, Hope

Discussion Guidance

Encourage respectful discussion and ask students to support ideas with evidence from the text.

Extension Activities

- Character analysis chart
- Historical research project
- Reflective journal writing
- Small-group discussion or debate

Florida BEST Standards

ELA.5.R.1.1 • ELA.6.R.1.3 • ELA.7.R.2.2 • ELA.8.C.1.3

Section 7: Legacy, Hope, and Resolution

Book Pages: 131–152

Student Worksheet

Comprehension Questions

1. Why is Hannah nearly repatriated back to Germany at the end of the story?
2. What has Hannah lost and gained?
3. How does Hannah find her brother?
4. Why does Hannah pledge to tell her story to everyone she meets?
5. How has Hannah changed since the beginning of the story?
6. What message does the story leave with the reader?

Discussion Questions

- What would you do in Hannah's situation?
- How do courage and moral choices shape the story?
- What lessons can readers learn?

Vocabulary

Legacy, Strength, Hope, Identity, Freedom, Repatriated

Historical Connection

Holocaust survivors often shared their stories to educate future generations.

Writing Prompt

What is the most important lesson Hannah's story teaches?

Teacher Guide & Answer Key

Sample Answer Guidance

Student responses will vary. Look for textual evidence, understanding of character growth, and thoughtful analysis.

Teaching Focus

Legacy, Memory, Hope

Discussion Guidance

Encourage respectful discussion and ask students to support ideas with evidence from the text.

Extension Activities

- Character analysis chart
- Historical research project
- Reflective journal writing
- Small-group discussion or debate

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