

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When *The Color of Courage* opens, the author Julian Kulski is a ten-year-old Boy Scout, living at home with his parents. How does his initial attitude toward the war change as the war progresses? At what point does he begin to take on adult responsibilities?
2. What part does being a Boy Scout play in Kulski's wartime experiences?
3. What motivates Kulski's actions throughout the war—patriotism, self-defense, personal honor, national pride, tradition, something else? How do you think you would react under a similar wartime situation?
4. Throughout the Occupation, the Germans use both propaganda and physical power to control and manipulate the people of Warsaw and thwart resistance efforts. What are the various specific ways in which these two basic techniques were applied?
5. Hitler makes a speech in Berlin on October 6, 1939. Kulski's father repeats the last words: "Destiny will decide who is right." Did it? Who was ultimately "right"?

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6. Why is it important to Kulski's mother that their first wartime Christmas Eve be traditional, in spite of everything? Do you agree with her, or instead with Julian's initial reaction that this is "rather silly"?
7. How does his mother's life change as a result of the war?
8. Eleven-year-old Kulski's first act of sabotage is tearing down five or six wooden signboards. Why is this act important? What risks did Kulski take in doing this?
9. On November 22, 1939, Kulski says: "It has begun to dawn on me that the Germans are not going to treat all Poles alike." What is he referring to? What impact does this have on Kulski?
10. Time and time again, Kulski is amazed that "the Germans could really believe their own propaganda." Do you think they did? How is this evidenced?
11. What is the German attitude toward Jews? How does this differ from Kulski's?
12. What do you find most striking about Kulski's observations concerning the Germans' creation of the Warsaw Ghetto, and what he calls its "Red Wall"? What interactions with the Ghetto does Kulski subsequently have?
13. Why is it so important to Julian's father that the city's monuments be saved, or if they cannot be saved, that casts of them be made?

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14. Why is Warsaw “greatly moved” by a large poster that appears on April 23, 1943?
15. When Kulski is being released from Pawiak Prison, he rides in a prison van with three pretty girls, heads erect, whose quiet dignity catches his attention. How are the women able to be so dignified in the face of what awaits them?
16. What roles do women play during the Occupation, in the Home Army, and during the Warsaw Uprising? Were you surprised to learn of the extent of their activities?
17. In the “tram,” Kulski sees a man and woman who’d been badly tortured by the Gestapo. He wonders if he could be as brave as these people “who, for their country or their faith, were suffering torture and death so bravely.” Would you consider such people heroic? There are many types of heroism. What examples do you see in the book?
18. Was it worth the risk when Kulski forces the church organist to play the forbidden Polish patriotic hymn on May 3, 1944? Why or why not?
19. Kulski’s father, who is Deputy Mayor of Warsaw when the war begins, becomes mayor for the duration of the war after Mayor Stefan Starzyński is arrested by the Gestapo on October 27, 1939. Does Kulski’s father want this position? Why doesn’t he resign? What challenges, responsibilities and stress does his father face during his wartime tenure?
20. How does Kulski’s relationship with his father evolve over time?

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21. Soviet planes air-drop supplies to the Uprising soldiers, but without parachutes so that most are smashed and thus useless. Why does Kulski write, “[T]he remainder is sufficient to keep us alive and fighting. That is good enough for Soviet purposes and for Soviet propaganda.”?
22. At one point during the Warsaw Uprising, fifteen-year-old Kulski says, “The field of death made the deepest impression on me.” What incident prompted that comment? What other incidents during his wartime experience seemed to make a particularly strong impression on Kulski? How did these experiences affect Kulski? What incidents made a particularly strong impression on you?
23. Does the Warsaw Uprising make sense? Should it have occurred? Why or why not?
24. What role does this diary ultimately play for Kulski?
25. In his opening epigraph, Kulski asks “What is the color of courage?” In concluding, he says: “After all, what does a man have in the end, except his honor...and the courage to live by it?” Do you agree or disagree? Why? If you disagree, what would your conclusion be?
26. Has this book changed your perception of Poland in World War II? If so, in what ways?

