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THE LIBRARIAN OF AUSCHWITZ by Antonio Iturbe Discussion Questions

1. Discuss chapter one and why the author chose to open the book with these scenes. What does the chapter convey about Auschwitz, Block 31, Fredy Hirsch, Dita's personality, and Dita's past? How do the different scenes in this chapter foreshadow important themes and later developments in the book?
2. "You have to have a childhood to be a child!" Dita thinks at one point. (p. 41) What was Dita's life like before the Nazis? What aspects of a typical childhood did she and other Jewish children lose due to the war and the concentration camps? Why was it so important to Fredy "to convey a certain sense of normalcy" to the children of Block 31? (p. 112)"
3. Analyze the power of books in Dita's life before the war and in the concentration camps. Discuss specific books as well as the role of books for her in general. What were the "living books" in the camp, and how did they affect her and others in Block 31?"
4. Describe Fredy Hirsch—who, like Dita, was a real person—and why he is so important to the people around him, including Dita. What is his past? What is the secret that Dita learns about him? How does she react at first to the secret and why does she change her viewpoint? Talk about his death and why the way he dies matters so much to Dita"
5. "Brave people are the ones who can overcome their own fear," Fredy tells Dita. (p. 25) He also tells her that the strongest athlete isn't the fastest one but rather "the one who gets up again every time he falls." (p. 46) Talk about his words and about the courage shown in the story by Dita, Fredy, and others."
6. Describe Professor Morgenstern and his strange actions. What does Dita think of him when she first knows him? What causes her opinion to change, and what is her new opinion? What character in one of the library books does he resemble, and how? Talk about their final encounter and what it means to Dita."
7. Describe some of the people who are important to Dita besides Fredy and the professor. How did they help her survive physically and emotionally? Give specific examples. How did her relationship with each of them change over the course of the story?"
8. Why did the Nazis in charge of Auschwitz want the family camp to exist, and why did they end it? Why did they let Fredy create a special place for the children in Block 31? What



usually happened to children at Auschwitz? Describe Block 31, including its official activities and its secret ones"

9. Who is Dr. Mengele? What do the prisoners think about him? What does he do in his lab? Why does Dita think he's watching her? How is he used in the novel to symbolize the Nazi regime? Discuss what could cause someone to be so evil and how conditions could exist that encourage such evil."