

DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Tattooist of Auschwitz

by Heather Morris

BOOK GROUP

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

(Reprinted from publisher)

Heather Morris is a native of New Zealand, now resident in Australia. For several years, while working in a large public hospital in Melbourne, she studied and wrote screenplays, one of which was optioned by an Academy Award-winning screenwriter in the US. In 2003, Heather was introduced to an elderly gentleman who ‘might just have a story worth telling’. The day she met Lale Sokolov changed both their lives. Their friendship grew and Lale embarked on a journey of self-scrutiny, entrusting the innermost details of his life during the Holocaust to her. Heather originally wrote Lale’s story as a screenplay – which ranked high in international competitions – before reshaping it into her debut novel, *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*.

BOOK SUMMARY

Lale Sokolov is well-dressed, a charmer, a ladies’ man. He is also a Jew. On the first transport from Slovakia to Auschwitz in 1942, Lale immediately stands out to his fellow prisoners. In the camp, he is looked up to, looked out for, and put to work in the privileged position of *Tätowierer* – the tattooist – to mark his fellow prisoners, forever. One of them is a young woman, Gita, who steals his heart at first glance. His life given new purpose, Lale does his best through the struggle and suffering to use his position for good. This story, full of beauty and hope, is based on years of interviews author Heather Morris conducted with real-life Holocaust survivor and Auschwitz-Birkenau tattooist Ludwig (Lale) Sokolov. It is heart-wrenching, illuminating, and unforgettable.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did you feel about Lale when he was first introduced, as he arrived in Auschwitz? How did your understanding of him change throughout the novel?
2. What qualities did Lale have that influenced the way he was treated in the camp? Where did those qualities come from?
3. Survival in the camp depended on people doing deeds of questionable morality. Lale became the tattooist, but how did Gita’s choices affect her survival? What about her friend who befriended a Nazi?
4. Inmates in the concentration camp had to make life-or-death decisions every day. Why did some make the “right” decisions and survive while others did not?
5. Discuss some of the small acts of humanity carried out by individuals in *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*. How did these small acts of kindness have greater implications? Did it make you reconsider what you believe to be brave or heroic? Did this make you think differently about the impact of your own everyday actions?
6. *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* makes clear that there were also non-Jewish prisoners in the camp. How did the treatment of Jews differ from that of non-Jews? How did differences manifest themselves?

7. Had Gita and Lale met in a more conventional way, would they have developed the same kind of relationship? How did their circumstances change the course of their romance?
8. In what ways were the relationships between Gita and her friends different from the usual friendships between teenage girls? In what ways were they similar?
9. In what ways was Lale a hero? In what ways was he an ordinary man?
10. Lale faced danger even after the camp was liberated. How did his experiences immediately after liberation prepare him for the rest of his life?
11. How does *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* change your perceptions about the Holocaust in particular, and war in general? What implications does *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* this book hold for our own time?

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