

TEACHER'S GUIDE

**THE
GIRL
IS
MURDER**

KATHRYN
MILLER
HAINES



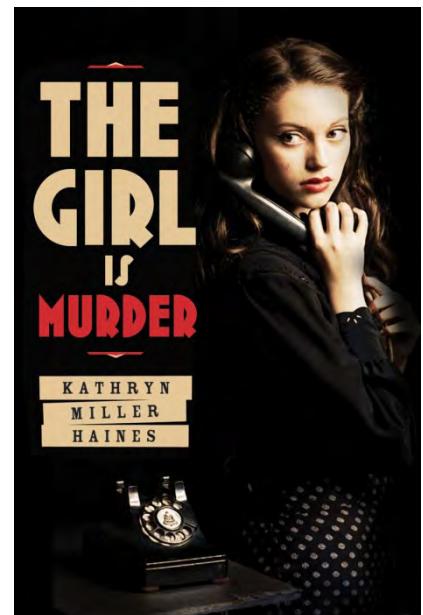
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ABOUT the book



Iris Anderson is only 15, but she's quickly mastering the art of deception.

It's the Fall of 1942 and Iris's world is rapidly changing. Her mother is dead and her Pop is back from Pearl Harbor with a missing leg, limiting his ability to do the physically grueling part of his detective work. Plus, the loss of her mother means that the Iris has to give up her tony private school and move to the Lower East Side, where being a teen is a very different experience. Iris is dying to help her father, especially when she discovers that one of Pop's cases involves a boy at her school. But when Pop adamantly refuses her help, Iris quickly realizes that it's much easier to lie than to ask permission. Suddenly, this once obedient private-school girl is sneaking out of the house, double-crossing her friends, and dancing at the Savoy till the early morning hours. There's certainly never a dull moment in the private eye business.



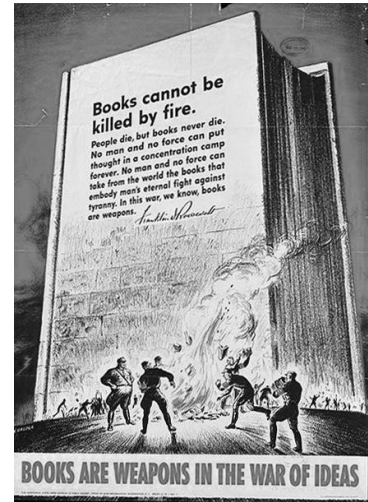
PRE-READING activities

Discuss what a mystery is and what its traditional components are (problem, solution, suspects, witnesses, clues, red herrings). How does a mystery differ from a traditional novel? What is the difference between a mystery and a thriller or suspense novel?

Have students research the history of the mystery novel. Who is considered the father of the form? What other mysteries have they encountered in the classroom?

Because mysteries are very plot dependent stories, writers often need to know the solution before they write the story. Have students attempt to write their own mystery story starting backwards, at the solution, and then providing the rest of the story that leads to that conclusion.

What is historical fiction? What is the different between something that is historically accurate and something that is based in nostalgia? What factors does the time period of a story affect? How do you do research for historically set story? Have students research several elements of a specific time period as though they were going to write a story set in that period.



VOCABULARY/ use of language

The title of *The Girl is Murder* refers to a comment Suze makes about Iris. Murder, she explains, means that something is marvelous. How else might the title be interpreted?

What is slang? What are some modern slang words? What are occasions when you use slang? (instant messaging/online etc). Are there slang terms Iris uses that are still in use today? If so, how has their meaning changed?

Have students write down the slang Iris and her friends use and attempt to define each term. Have them create a glossary of twenty slang terms they currently use in their own speech.



THEMATIC connections

Questions for Group Discussion

Friendship

One of Iris's big struggles over the course of the book is that she no longer feels connected to her private school friends and yet has no new friends to replace them. Why does Iris stop seeing her private school friends? Prior to the solution of the mystery, do you think she would have resumed her relationship with Grace? How does Iris's friendship with Suze differ from her friendship with Pearl? How do her friendships at P.S. 110 differ from those she had at Chapin?



Self-identity

Much is made in the book of Iris's changing sense of social position courtesy of the family's move to the Lower East Side. What events precipitated this move? In what ways does Iris define herself in terms of money and possessions? Are there instances when she judges others based on what they have or don't have? How does Iris's sense of self change over the course of the novel? In what ways is Iris like kids today? In what ways does she differ?

Family

Iris and Pop are no longer speaking to members of their family when the story opens. How do they form a new family on the Lower East Side? In what ways did the war change the traditional family unit (mothers going to work, Father's overseas for extended periods of time, advent of daycare, etc.)?

Religion

What role does religion play in the Anderson's lives? What was like to be a Jew in the U.S. before World War II? During the war? What knowledge would Iris have in the fall of 1942 of what was occurring to Jews in Europe? Did knowledge about the Holocaust change the way Jews were treated in the U.S.? Why or why not? Why do you think Pop really decided to change the family's name?

Activity: Have students find primary source evidence of anti-Jewish sentiment in the 1940s (political cartoons, newspaper articles, films).



Ethnicity

What would it have been like to be a German in the in the U.S. during World War II? Why did Germans immigrate to the United States in the 19th and 20th Centuries? What other groups do you see being discriminated against in the novel? What groups today face similar discrimination? Why?

What places, other than the Savoy, do you think you would've seen blacks & whites together during the 1940s without restriction? Do you think what occurred in New York would've been occurring throughout the country?



Lying

Iris spends a great deal of the novel lying to her father and to new friends. What are her reasons for doing so? When do you agree with her decisions to lie? When do you disagree? Do you think she's a reliable narrator?

Is lying ever justified?

War & Mortality

The decision to start the U.S. draft is in the background of the story. How does the war change for young people once their peers are the ones being drafted? What might have Tom's outcome been if he had decided not to enlist and had been drafted instead?

Unraveling the Mystery

What clues does the writer provide to help direct the reader toward what really happened to Tom? What is your first hint that there's more to the culprit than meets the eye? Are there moments when you feel like you know more than Iris does? When and why?



CURRICULUM connections

Language Arts

What are the red herrings in the story? What are the clues? Who are the suspects and what evidence is there of their guilt or innocence?

How would the story change if it were set in the present day? What conventions have we come to expect from present day mysteries?

How would the story change if it were in third person? Why do you think the author chose to write it in first person?

What is propaganda? What evidence of war propaganda does Iris see around her? Are there versions of war propaganda that you encounter today? How has propaganda changed with technology?

Suggested Activities:

Visit the Northwestern University war poster archive online (<http://digital.library.northwestern.edu/wwii-posters/>) and analyze the different posters the government released during World War II. What key themes are replicated in the posters regardless of their subject matter? Have students create a modern piece of propaganda using similar techniques.

Letter writing plays an important role in *The Girl is Murder*. Have students write a letter Grace may have written to Tom after he's left to enlist, or a letter Tom might have written to Grace.

Social Studies

What is going on in the war when the story opens? What changes have taken place on the U.S. home front? What is rationing? What role does rationing play during wartime? What items were rationed during World War II and why?

What was the draft and when was it instituted? When did it end?

What roles did women play in the war? For those who couldn't serve, what did they do on the homefront to contribute to the effort?

Suggested activities:

Have students interview a female friend or family member who recalls the war about their experiences on the U.S. homefront. Use http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/WWII_Women/ as a model.



Music

Research the background of the songs Iris hears when she goes to the Savoy. How popular were these tunes? What was their history (who wrote them, when, and why?)

Suggested Activity:

Have students create a playlist of historic songs that Iris would've listened to in 1942 had she owned an ipod. Conversely, have them create a playlist of contemporary songs that reflect Iris's emotions, or have them compare a song Iris would've listened to in 1942 to a similar song from today.

Art

Both Iris and Gloria have scrapbooks they've created of Deanna Durbin. What other kinds of popular culture does Iris like?

Suggested Activity:

Create a collage of the things Iris would've enjoyed during the 1940s (magazines, movie stars, movies, songs, fashion, etc.), both items that are mentioned in the book, and other things that you discover were popular with girls her age during this time period.

Compare *The Girl is Murder* with:

The Diary of Anne Frank: how might Iris have responded to this book if she had access to it? How would it have changed her own perception of her struggles?

What I Saw and How I Lied: both books hinge on a lie told to family members. How justified is each narrator in deciding to tell their lie?

Websites:

What did you do in the war, Grandma?

http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/WWII_Women/

Northwestern University Poster Collection

<http://digital.library.northwestern.edu/wwii-posters/>



ABOUT the author

Kathryn Miller Haines is an actor, mystery writer, and award-winning playwright. Kathryn's love of the 1940s comes from her mother, who raised her on films from that era, and from her father who loves to read about the history of the war. She lives in Western Pennsylvania with her husband, son, and their two dogs.

Visit her online at www.kathrynmillerhaines.com

Also by Kathryn Miller Haines

The Girl is Trouble (Roaring Brook Press, 2012)

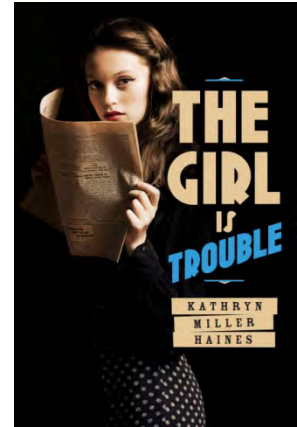
Mysteries for adults:

The War Against Miss Winter (HarperCollins, 2007)

The Winter of Her Discontent (HarperCollins, 2008)

Winter in June (HarperCollins, 2009)

When Winter Returns (HarperCollins, 2010)



Praise for the book

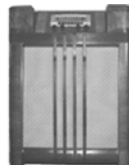
★ "...the compelling characters, superb setting, and myriad twists and turns will keep readers intrigued till the very end." —**SLJ, Starred Review**

"Haines writes gracefully, immersing readers in Iris's perceptive thoughts, suffering, and transformation. Nuanced relationships and a social climate shadowed by ethnic tension and war result in a compelling reflection on a complex era." —**Publisher's Weekly**

"Take a powder, Nancy Drew. 1940s girl sleuth Iris Anderson is on the case. A stylish, slang-filled teen noir that is as entertaining as it is absorbing." —**Kirkus**

★ "What makes this such a standout is the cast. Sounding like they're right out of the 1940s (well, a 1940's movie, anyway), the characters, young and old, pop off the pages. Iris, intriguing and infuriating, captures the tension inherent in the teenage years, no matter what the decade. This joint is jumping." —**Booklist, Starred Review**

"Iris' story has considerable crossover appeal, enticing both mystery lovers and historical fiction fans, with a cunningly devised plot and a cast of period-specific characters..." —**BCCB**



A CONVERSATION WITH Kathryn Miller Haines

This is your first mystery for young adults, after penning several of popular mysteries for adults in your Rosie Winter series. What made you decide to write for this new audience?

I love reading YA books and, as when I first tried my hand at mysteries, I wanted to see if I could write one for myself. I also felt like there was a whole world of World War II that hadn't been explored very much – what was the war like from the perspective of teenagers? In fact there's a great non-fiction book called *Teenage* that talks about adolescence through history that really got me buzzing about what life was like then.

What were some of the mysteries you enjoyed reading when you were young?

I absolutely loved Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys. Truth told, though, I didn't read a lot of mysteries as a young 'un. I was a big Judy Blume fan (particularly *Blubber*, a book that has stayed with me all these years). *Bridge to Terabithia* will still make me cry. And I never met a Lois Duncan book I didn't tear through (though I guess those kind of are mysteries/thrillers).

What kind of research did you do to create an authentic early 1940s-New York City setting? Was there any difference in your research process for a young reader's title compared to your work for adult titles?

I read a lot of great non-fiction books about the war, went through contemporary to the war issues of newspapers, magazines, comic books; listened to music and radio shows; looked at fashion; watched movies – pretty much surrounded myself with the kind of pop culture that I would've probably been into had I lived during that time.

With the adult mysteries, I think readers are looking for the nitty gritty details about the period whereas I don't think YA readers have the patience for a four page info dump on the history of air conditioning. It was freeing in some ways because I didn't have to be as specific and heavy handed with creating my world. I felt like I could create a flavor of the period without having to drown each scene in period detail. It became a lot more about experiencing the world through the character for me.

One thing that was really important to me was to find the balance between creating a character that would resonate with people today and not make her too contemporary that should would feel out of time. I'm fascinated by the notion of "the good old days" which I think is a fallacy – everyone thinks that the time that came before when we're currently living is better than now. When I write historical stories, I always want to make it clear that the past wasn't this great romantic epoch that was light years better than life now. I also, though, want to draw parallels between life then and life now; teenagers then and teenagers now. I was fascinated to read in the 1940s papers these screeds over how awful "kids today" are, or how miserable the state of education has become, utilizing the same language and same examples that we see in the news in 2011. Here we were desecrating these kids as worthless, violent, and virtually illiterate, and yet seventy years later we call that generation the "greatest generation"!