About the Book

Sharon Dogar’s *Annexed* is a haunting, inspiring, and intimate portrait of a group of people whose story is known around the world because of Anne Frank’s remarkable diary. The diary was written while Anne, her family, and several others were in hiding from the Nazis during World War II. Anne’s lively, intelligent prose—at turns impish, contemptuous, and deeply insightful—has given the world a glimpse of ordinary lives unfolding in the midst of an extraordinarily brutal time. Sharon Dogar’s novel returns us to Anne’s Secret Annex, yet this time we are seeing through the eyes of another occupant, Peter Van Pels, the young man who is at first the object of Anne’s scorn but soon becomes the object of her love.

We know that after the Annex was raided in 1945, all of its occupants were sent to concentration camps—heartbreakingly, on the very last train to leave Holland for Auschwitz. We know that Anne’s father, Otto Frank, was the sole survivor. We know that Peter Van Pels died in the concentration camp Mauthausen shortly before its liberation. Dogar masterfully weaves together two narratives—one, the imagined experience of Peter, then eighteen years old, as he waits near death in the sick bay at Mauthausen, and another, a description of his unfolding experiences in the Annex with Anne and the other occupants.

Readers familiar with Anne Frank’s diary will recognize many of the events Dogar describes in Peter’s voice. Through reimagining these events and the experiences of these people, history is enriched. The voice Dogar creates for Peter is so different from ebullient, wordy Anne. He is a quiet, soft-spoken, sensitive young man, and Dogar has brought him beautifully, authentically to life. We know the story is a tragic one, because we know history’s outcome as we read. But Dogar has managed to bring hope and light into this reimagining as well, reminding us on a personal level how very much was lost during the Holocaust. Young readers will be moved, inspired, and riveted by this unusual and breathtaking novel.
1. The book begins near the end of Peter’s life, and as we read we know that he is remembering the events he describes as he is dying. How does this knowledge affect the way you read Peter’s memories of life in the Annex?

2. One of the most interesting things about the way Sharon Dogar has chosen to create the voice of Peter is that he seems like such an ordinary adolescent boy—full of passions and longings and opinions. How does knowing that Peter and Anne and the rest of the characters were real, multifaceted individuals affect your reading of the story?

3. Peter almost decides not to enter the Annex. What do you think might have happened to him had he not stepped over the threshold of that door?

4. Peter and Anne definitely don’t hit it off immediately. They are so different! They end up finding great solace in each other’s company, however. Have you ever become friends with someone very different from yourself? Someone you perhaps even disliked upon first meeting?

5. Dogar writes, “I didn’t know that to grieve, as I was grieving for my freedom, is a blessing and a privilege, as well as a sorrow” (p. 18). What do you think she means? What does Peter mean?

6. Dogar often has Peter describe dreams and memories of his girlfriend Liese (an invented character), whom he has seen taken away by the Nazis just before entering the Annex. Through these dreams and memories, we get a sense of what may be happening to others in the world outside the Annex. Why do you suppose Dogar chose to include these passages? What do they reveal about Peter?

7. Dogar writes, “Yes, I am Peter—but will somebody tell me how?” (p. 21). How does being in hiding change Peter’s sense of self? His perception of himself?

8. Early on in Peter’s life in hiding, all he wants to do is sleep. He has a hard time joining in conversations and activities. Why do you think this is so? How does this change for Peter as time goes on?

9. In spite of everything, Peter and Anne and the other occupants of the Annex find ways to enjoy themselves—Peter and Anne’s dress-up performance is one example. How do you think fun and laughter played a part in the little community of the Annex? How might this have helped people cope?

10. Peter wonders why Miep and the others risk so much to help them. What do you think?

11. When Peter is in the sick bay in Mauthausen, Dogar often repeats the word “WYSTAWACH!” (Wake up!) Why do you suppose she chose this word to repeat?

12. Peter, Anne, and Margot go on with their lessons while they are in hiding, studying French, English, and other subjects. How do you suppose this work helped them?

13. Peter and Anne take bets on whether or not the chestnut tree’s leaves will stay on until spring. Peter says they’ll blow off before February; Anne says they’ll hang on all winter. Peter hopes that Anne will be right. Why? What do you make of this passage, and how might it relate to Peter’s and Anne’s personalities and their situation?

14. Do you think that Peter and Anne would have become so close in other circumstances? Why or why not?

15. Peter says, “Our bodies will fight to the death for the life within them, whatever we like to think of ourselves” (p. 42). What do you make of this?
16. Peter says of Anne, “I think she’s like the gulls that flash silver across the sky. And I’m like the chestnut tree that takes a whole six months just to put out a single leaf” (p. 172). How do you suppose Anne is like the gulls? How is Peter like the tree?

17. It takes Peter a long time to fall in love with Anne. He realizes that he loves her after the second break-in. Why do you think this might be?

18. Peter describes staring at the stars in the middle of the night while in the concentration camp. He says, “And for a moment. Just a moment. I felt human again. And then the moment passed” (p. 235). What do you make of this? How has Peter’s humanity been stripped from him? How do the stars bring it, briefly, back?

19. Dogar often describes Peter’s dreams. He dreams vividly and painfully of what he imagines might be happening to the Jews who are not in hiding. What does Dogar accomplish by using these dream sequences? How do they add to the world the book creates?

20. As the tide begins to turn in the war, Peter is alternately filled with hope and fear. He says that hoping hurts. What does he mean?

21. Through Peter, Dogar describes the dehumanizing, senseless, shockingly cruel experience of the concentration camps. How does Peter change as he lives through this ordeal?

22. Peter says, “No feeling can last forever—how else could we endure?” (p. 297). What do you think he means?

23. In the camps, Peter, Mr. Van Pels, and Mr. Frank study what “the low numbers” do. Why do they do this? Dogar writes about bearing witness to the suffering that took place during this time period. Anne has done this with her diary, her voice in Peter’s head urges him to do so, and Dogar’s reimagining of these events does the same. Why is it so important to bear witness? To tell this story?

**Author Interview**

- Besides Anne Frank’s extraordinary diary, what other research materials or tools did you use to make *Annexed* so accurate and authentic-feeling?

- How did you use the historical information available to you as you reimagined this story from Peter’s perspective?

- How does the process of writing historical fiction differ from writing fiction set in the present time?

**Pre-reading**

*Annexed* is a reimagining of a story you may know well. Dogar writes of the importance of bearing witness, of telling these stories over and over that they might never happen again. As you read, think of the idea of bearing witness. Think about whether you can apply that idea to events in your own life, in the world today.
PROJECTS

Reading

• Have your students read Annexed alongside Anne Frank’s The Diary of a Young Girl. Have them discuss, compare, contrast, and examine the intersections of these two works. You might ask them to pay particular attention to those sections of Anne’s diary that describe her interactions with and feelings about Peter, and vice versa. You might then discuss the two accounts’ similarities and differences.

• There are many words used in Annexed that students may be unfamiliar with, as they are in other languages or are related specifically to the times and places described. As they read, have your students keep a log of words that they are learning as they go. Encourage them to first use the context to try to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words, and then to research the words’ meanings to check on their guesses. You might want to create a class word bank or word chart of some sort to display some of these new words as well.

Language Arts

Dogar has written Peter’s story almost as though he was writing in a diary too. The voice she creates for Peter’s story is very different from the voice of Anne’s diary. Peter is quiet, Anne is talkative. Peter keeps to himself, Anne is social. Discuss with your students how Dogar’s writing fits with what we know of Peter’s personality. Ask your students to either select another character from Annexed or to create a character of their own, and to write several “diary” entries in the voice of that character, taking care to make the writing match what they know (or invent) of the character’s personality. You might discuss such things as Dogar’s frequent use of very short sentences when writing in Peter’s voice, for example, and how that creates a sense of him as one who is not as verbose as chatty Anne.

Ask your students to imagine what they might do if they were cooped up in a small space for many months as Peter and Anne were. The occupants of the Annex did various things not only to keep busy but to retain a sense of self. Anne wrote. Peter drew. What would your students do? Ask them to think and write about what kind of activity they might take solace in were they in the same situation.

History

• There are myriad resources for students wanting to learn more about Anne and Peter, or about the Holocaust. Dogar includes a wonderful book list at the end of Annexed, as well as two important websites, www.annefrank.org (The Anne Frank Museum in Amsterdam) and www.yadvashem.org (Yad Vashem, an organization devoted to documentation, research, education, and commemoration of the Holocaust). Using these resources and others that your students discover, have them research a specific element of life during this time period. You might provide a list of potential topics (Jews in the Netherlands during the Holocaust, the experience of Roma people during the Holocaust, the Warsaw Uprising, etc.) or ask them to choose their own topics. Working in small groups or individually, have your students research their topics and create presentations to share with the class.

• Have your students research and read firsthand accounts of the Holocaust. The Yad Vashem website provides an extraordinary database of firsthand documentation in the form of interviews, videos, and photographs. In the spirit of sharing stories that Dogar writes about in Annexed, ask your students to choose one of these testimonials and to either write an essay describing that person’s experience or to prepare a brief presentation for the class.

About the Author

SHARON DOGAR is a children’s psychotherapist who lives in Oxford, England with her family. She discovered Anne Frank’s diary as a child and the again recently when her daughter started reading it. While writing and researching this book, she spent many hours soaking up the atmosphere of the Annex. This is her third novel for young adults.