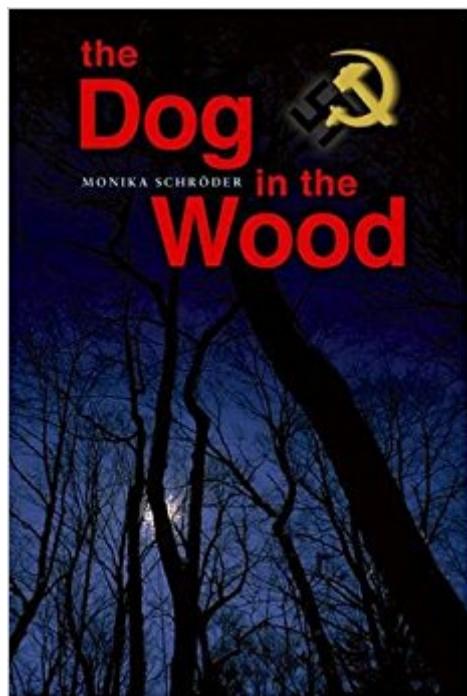


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# The Dog In The Wood



## Synopsis

When the Russians come, where do you go? Fritz loves his vegetable garden. His tomatoes are delicious, he's attentive to the asparagus, and he remembers how to keep slugs off the strawberries. But his tranquil life on the family farm is about to end; the Russians are near, Hitler has died, and known Nazi sympathizers like the Friedrich family brace for the Bolsheviks to take over their town. Local German supporters of the Bolshevik regime seize the Friedrich farm in the name of Communism, forcing Fritz's family to flee to the distant house of his grandmother, Oma Clara. Life there for Fritz is horrible, made even worse when Communists arrest his mother and Lech, the Polish farmhand who has tended the Friedrich land, for hiding weapons. Though there is no evidence to support the accusation, Gertrude and Lech are taken away, and Fritz commits to finding where they are imprisoned. Despite the boy's heroic efforts, the story ends with one of the war's ambiguities: that Lech and Gertrude may not return home. Heavy footsteps sounded on the tiles in the hallway. Then three soldiers entered the living room. They all wore torn green jackets with small red flags sewn onto their sleeves. They shouted in Russian. Fritz held Mama's hand and tried to stay as close to her as possible on the sofa. One of the soldiers broke the glass of the sideboard with the butt of his rifle, took out the bottle of brandy, drank from it, and passed it to the others. They rummaged through the china cabinet, throwing the plates on the floor. . . . Mama held his hand with a firm grip. Suddenly, one soldier pointed his rifle at them. "No!" Mama screamed. Fritz held his breath. "Stojat!" Lech stepped toward the middle of the room, holding his arms up.

&#151;FROM THE BOOK

## Book Information

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Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Military & Wars

Age Range: 10 - 14 years

Grade Level: 6 - 9

## Customer Reviews

Grade 4-6 • It is 1945; Fritz, 10, lives with his mother, sister, and father's parents in Soviet-occupied Germany. War has stolen Fritz's father from the family, while every day refugees travel the main road, heading west ahead of the Russian troops. As word arrives of Hitler's death, Fritz's Nazi-sympathizer grandparents hang themselves, and loss blankets the family again. Hope for a better future proves harder and harder to find with each upheaval. First-time novelist Schröder pulls readers through a harrowing period in the life of a young boy, engaging them in episodes taut with danger and uncertainty. This specific transition in history—•from the chaos of World War II to the oppression of Communist occupation—is not often covered in children's fiction, making this book an asset to most collections. Its pace, emotion, and eventual hope also make it a powerful, inspiring read. •Bethany Isaacson, Wheaton Regional Library, Silver Spring, MD Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"The action in this important addition to WWII literature will grab readers, and Schroder's story is an excellent, authentic portrait of children in war." --Booklist\* "While a wealth of children's books set during World War II focus on the Holocaust, Schroder brings some of Germany's other young victims to light in her exceptional debut novel. . . . Resonates with candor and eloquence. (author's note)" --Kirkus Reviews, starred review "An asset to most collections. . . . A powerful, inspiring read." --School Library Journal "[A] well-crafted debut." --Publishers Weekly

The Dog in the Wood is a middle-grade book about a ten-year-old named Fritz. He lives in eastern Germany in April 1945. His Grandpa is a Nazi sympathizer, but his mother and older sister just want to run their farm without being bothered by Nazis or Russians. As the novel begins, it is announced that Hitler is dead, and the Russian soldiers will soon be arriving and invading. The author notes that the novel is fiction, but the background for the story is based on research and eye-witness accounts. Because this is a middle-grade book, the author admits that the way the soldiers acted was toned down a bit (though there are hints at darker things occurring). She also notes,

ÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  “Although the Germans who were adults during the Third Reich can be blamed for supporting a racist, violent, insane regime that brought on a destructive war of epic proportions, children were pawn in the events. They had to learn to live on despite their loss, grief, and fear.ÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  •And this is exactly what Fritz does. He lives through the farm being taken, his home being invaded, and even his mother and hired help being arrested for false crimes. He shows bravery and conflicting emotions that would be expected of a child living through this timeÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  •when all he really wants to do is garden in peaceÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  | and be a kid! I enjoyed how the author wove in symbols and images to help show FritzÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  „cs development as the story progresses. Although the topic is grim, it was an enjoyable read in that it really helped to illustrate the difficulties of civilians trying to live during such a time. The content is slightly disturbing for young readers, but itÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  „cs also an important part of history.

A fast-pacing and well-written book about the complicated ways that adults mess up children’s lives. A Dog in the Wood sheds light on the Soviet occupation of East Germany beginning in 1945. I congratulate Monika Schroder on her moving first novel. Although I finished the book a week ago, I am still haunted by the hole in the woods and its meaning for Fritz and his family. I hope to read many more titles by this accomplished author.

This first novel by Monika Schroder (she has since written several more, including BE LIGHT LIKE A BIRD) picks a place and time in history that I don’t know much about: 1945, in a German town about to be overrun by Russians, at the end of WW2. Fritz (age 10) just wants to see his tomato plants grow. His pro-Hitler grandfather is determined to fight the Russians until the bitter end, while his mother and most neighbors are tired of the war and can see Germany’s defeat is unavoidable. When the Russians do enter the village, they bring upheaval, and Fritz and his extended family must adjust. Schroder includes one incident (well handled, but still shocking) that makes me suggest this book for readers about 12 and up. There are any number of excellent books set around the time of World War 2, but few (that I am aware of) about Germans displaced by the Russian advance. Schroder writes multifaceted and interesting characters, and places the reader in the middle of a tumultuous time. The story doesn’t tie things up neatly, but I found it an engaging read. Easy to recommend for mature 6th graders, or 7th or 8th grade fans of historical fiction. About me: I’m a middle school/high school librarian How I got this book: from the library

The Dog in the Wood is a fictional story set in Germany, just as World War II was coming to its

horrific end. It's inspired by the life of the author's father and by her 1989 visit to the village of his birth. "I interviewed several eyewitnesses of the Soviets' arrival and occupation," Schroder writes in her author's note. "Most of their stories were more gruesome than the one I tell in the book." Her book tells a depressingly sad story about nine-year-old Fritz, a boy who lives with his mother, sister and grandparents on a rural German farm. His grandfather is a staunch Nazi supporter and when he realizes the Nazis have lost the war, he and his wife commit suicide in the barn. Fritz's life is thrown into chaos when the Soviets arrive. They move into his home, steal the cows, and dispossess the family of their farm. The narrative relays the many disappointments Fritz endures as he leaves the home and garden he loves and moves in with relatives. Just when he thinks life can get no worse, the Soviets accuse his mother of breaking the law and they march her away at gunpoint. Schroder's story is written for a 10-to-14-year-old audience but it's a difficult book for a young teen to digest. There is just no light at the end of the tunnel. Poor Fritz's misery only increases as the book progresses. Although a riveting read, the book is also an upsetting one and leaves the reader hanging at the end, with no firm sense of resolution. The reader does come away enlightened about the aftermath of the war and how difficult it was for ordinary Germans, but clearly it's a good thing Schroder spared us the gruesome, real-life stories she described in her author's note. Perhaps this story is better told in non-fiction, and geared towards adult readers who are more mature when it comes to handling the subject of war and the hardships it inflicted. Lauren Kramer

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