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### **Sample MonkeyNotes**

**Note: this sample contains only excerpts and does not represent the full contents of the booknote. This will give you an idea of the format and content.**

# *The Devil's Arithmetic*

by

**Jane Yolen**

**1988**



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by Diane Clapsaddle

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## KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

### SETTING

The city of New Rochelle and an apartment in the Bronx, New York  
A Polish shtetel, the Polish town of Lublin, the village of Viosk  
An unnamed concentration camp in Poland during WWII

### LIST OF CHARACTERS

#### Major Characters

**Hannah Stern** - She is the main character of the story who experiences a trip through time from present day New York to WWII era Poland. She hates having to "remember" as expected at the Seder, but soon learns that bearing witness and remembering are two of the most important responsibilities a human being can fulfill.

**Chaya Abramowitz** - She is the young girl who Hannah becomes when she enters the past. Her heroic gesture to save Rivka sends her to the smokestack of the concentration camp.

**Gitl Abramowitz** - She is Chaya's aunt and Shmuel's sister and is a very competent, loving caregiver. She is often the one who quiets Chaya when she would open her mouth at the wrong time and she is also the one who takes her in her arms when she is in the most despair.

**Shmuel Abramowitz** - Gitl's brother and Chaya's uncle, he is planning to marry Fayge on the day that the Nazis round them up and take them off to the camps. Inside the camp, he is a leader of.....  
Additional major and minor characters are outlined in the complete study guide.

### CONFLICT

#### Protagonist

The protagonist is Hannah who Fate takes in hand to teach her a lesson about remembering what horrors came before in her heritage and about the importance of never allowing it to.....

#### Antagonists

The antagonists are the Nazis who humiliate, torture, and murder the.....

#### Climax

The climax occurs when Hannah/Chaya takes Rivka's place in the.....

#### Outcome

Chaya dies, but Hannah returns to the present with the realization that her Aunt Eva was actually Rivka and Grandpa Will was Wolfe. She had gone back in time to live their.....

### SHORT PLOT / CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

The story covers a few hours on the first night of Passover in the Stern family apartment and many days in a Polish concentration camp. Hannah, a young American Jew, just wants to forget about the past when six million Jews died in Nazi concentration camps. She enjoys Easter more than Passover. When she is asked during the Seder ceremony to open the door for the prophet Elijah, she is transported back in time to a Polish shtetl. There she becomes Chaya, a young girl whose parents have just died of a plague and she almost lost her life as well. She is living with her Aunt Gitl and Uncle Schmuel. The second day she is there, she attends Schmuel and Fayge's wedding, but it is interrupted by the Nazis who force them into boxcars and transport them to a concentration camp. The rest of the story involves Hannah / Chaya's experiences in.....

## THEMES

The theme of **family** is one of the most prevalent themes. Hannah hates her family traditions and tries to avoid the members of her extended family as much as she can. However, after she is transported through time..... Additional themes are identified and analyzed in the complete study guide.

## MOOD

At times, the mood is very normal with people living normal, seemingly content lives. Then, it switches to a mood of fear and terror as the horrors of the.....

## Jane Yolen - BIOGRAPHY

Jane Yolen was born on February 11, 1939, to Will and Isabelle Yolen. Her father was also a writer, so her talents didn't fall far from the tree. She was a part of literary pursuits throughout her education, graduating from Smith College in 1960 and earning her Masters degree in 1976 from the University of Massachusetts. She married David Stemple in 1962 and together they had two sons and a daughter. He died in 2006 of cancer. Today she continues to write and enjoy her children and grandchildren. She has written over 200 books, is the past president of the Science Fiction Writers of America, and has.....

## CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH Notes / ANALYSIS

### CHAPTER ONE

#### Summary

The story begins with Hannah, the main character, being picked up by her mother from her friend, Rosemary's, home. She has been visiting there, celebrating Easter even though she is Jewish. Her mouth is sticky with jellybeans and other Easter candy. Hannah doesn't want to go home for Passover Seder, because she says she's tired of remembering. They are going to Grandpa Will and Grandma Belle's home for the first night Seder, but Hannah doesn't want to go, because she and her brother, Aaron, will be the only children there, and she hates how the older people tell the same jokes every year in Yiddish. Her mother then begins one of her slow, reasonable lectures that were so annoying to Hannah. She tries to explain yet again how the Seder is a time for remembering, especially because her family all but two members to the Nazis. Hannah just rolls her eyes, and her stomach feels heavy like unleavened bread.

They drive from New Rochelle to the Bronx and Aaron complains the entire way. He is nervous, because he has to ask The Four Questions which he will read from the Haggadah. Hannah cuffs him to stop his whining and the promises to be right by his side if he makes a mistake to help him correct it. Then, Aaron begs Hannah to tell him a story, something she is particularly good at, especially gruesome tales. She allows Aaron to be the one to press the elevator button, because she remembers how scared she had been to ask the Questions as well.

They are met at the door by Aunt Rose, who says the usual things like how Hannah has grown. She mentions that, at age twelve, Hannah is a beautiful, young lady, but Hannah can only say that she is thirteen, even though it's only almost true. Aunt Eva is also there and she is Hannah's favorite aunt, because she prefers Hannah over Aaron. She is even named after a dear, *dead* friend of Aunt Eva. Hannah leaves the bathroom after trying to remove a lipstick stain from her forehead, absolutely dreading the rest of the evening.

#### Notes

In this first chapter, we are introduced to Hannah's dilemma: she hates the Seder service and being with the elder people of her family. She doesn't want to remember their Jewish traditions and would rather be with her Christian friend, Rosemary. We also learn that Hannah's aunts, uncles and grandparents are the last survivors of the Nazis.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Summary

When Hannah returns to the living room, Grandpa Will is sitting in front of the television where old photos of Nazi concentration camp victims roll across the screen. Grandpa is yelling at the TV, "Give them this!" and showing his left arm where he displays his strange tattoo consisting of a series of numbers and letters. Hannah can scarcely remember when Grandpa Will had not had these strange fits, yelling in both English and Yiddish and showing his arm. When Hannah been younger, she had written a string of numbers on her own arm, thinking it would please her grandfather. However, he had grabbed her arm and screamed at her in Yiddish *Malach ha-mavis*. It had taken her father and Aunt Eva a long time to clam him down. They had tried to explain to Hannah why he had behaved the way he had, but she had never quite forgiven him. Strangely, though, she had never asked what the words meant, but in her dreams, she seemed to know.

Now Hannah questions her mother as to why Grandpa continues to bring up the past. She says, "There aren't any concentration camps now. Why bring it up?" However, when she sees her mother is about to launch another lecture, she escapes into the kitchen.

During the Seder, it is Grandma Belle's place to light the candles, but Aunt Rose is given the honor as compensation for not having a home or family of her own. She could have been married three different times, but chose to live with Will and Belle and help raise their only child, Hannah's father. Her parents said she did that just because she wanted to, but Hannah's never satisfied with their answers. However, she stopped asking about it and just turned to Aunt Eva when she needed answers to everyday questions. As a child, she had thought Aunt Eva's answers were magical, but now she has become more ordinary. That is, until she lights the candles and her face takes on a kind of beauty. Hannah always found this moment in the Seder so special. She is annoyed when Aaron recites the opening prayers behind everyone else and gives him a good pinch on the arm for destroying the special moment.

### Notes

Grandpa's reaction to the pictures on the TV is a moment that has been repeated in this family many times. It foreshadows, along with the tattoo, that he was in a concentration camp and that he can never forget. This contrasts with Hannah's desire to just stop talking about it, because it's over.

In spite of her reluctance to participate in the Seder, Hannah is moved by her Aunt Eva's role in the ceremony. This is important in understanding that she is beginning to feel adolescent angst about family traditions and does have a sweet, compassionate side.....

## OVERALL ANALYSES

### CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**Hannah Stern** - Hannah is a typical twelve year old who is rebelling against what is important to her parents. However, her rebellion is also against her heritage. She is tired of being Jewish and having to remember the past. She wants Easter instead of Passover and candy instead of bitter herbs. As a result, it's as if God or Fate steps in and decides that she must be taught an important lesson about bearing witness and never forgetting the past so as it will never be able to happen again. She is transported into the past and becomes Chaya, a young Jewish girl who is forced into a Nazi concentration camp. Here Hannah learns through the.....

Additional analysis of the major characters is included in the complete study guide.

### PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The story is told first in chronological order by an omniscient narrator. This is followed by the narrator following Hannah into the past, and it is told chronologically from the year.....

## THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

The theme of **family** is the most prevalent theme. It is emphasized from the very beginning when Hannah's mother begins one of her slow deliberate lectures about attending the Passover Seder and about being with grandparents, aunts, and uncles, parents, and siblings. It is part of their way to remember the past and keep it alive by bearing witness. She wants Hannah to appreciate what her relatives endured during the Nazi regime and how they never want to see it happen to her. That's why they.....

Additional themes are identified and analyzed in the complete study guide.

## RISING ACTION

The rising action begins with Stern family traveling to the Bronx from New Rochelle to.....

## FALLING ACTION

The falling action comes after Chaya's death. Hannah is transported back to the present day where she discovers by looking at Aunt Eva's tattoo that she is.....

## POINT OF VIEW

It is written in third person point of view from the perspective of.....

## OTHER ELEMENTS

### FORESHADOWING

There are several literary devices that pop up at various times in the story. One of the most prevalent ones is **foreshadowing** which frequently presents clues of something that will happen later in the novel. Some examples of foreshadowing include:

- 1.) Hannah doesn't want to go home for Passover Seder, because she says she's tired of remembering. This foreshadows her being transported back in time.....

10 additional examples of foreshadowing are included in the complete study guide.

### IRONY

Another element that is important to note is **irony** – when something happens, or is seen, or is heard that we may know, but the characters do not, or that appears opposite of what is expected. Some examples of irony include:

- 1.) Shmuel says he wouldn't go to America for anything and that he will live and die in the shtetl like his parents before him. Ironically, he will die before a firing squad.

10 additional examples of irony are included in the complete study guide.

## QUOTATIONS – IMPORTANT QUOTES AND ANALYSIS

The following quotations are important at various points in the story, (Puffen Books, published by the Penguin Group, 1988):

1. “There aren't any concentration camps now. Why bring it up?” (pg. 10; Hannah says this when her mother defends her grandfather's behavior in response to Nazis footage on TV.)
2. Grandma Belle says they act out this part of the Seder (the hiding of the afikomen) for the children so they can have fun *and* remember their history. (pg. 17; This comment emphasizes what Hannah needs.....)

18 additional quotations are included in the complete study guide.

## SYMBOLISM / MOTIFS / IMAGERY / METAPHORS / SYMBOLS

Other elements that are present in this novel are **symbols**. Symbols are the use of some unrelated idea to represent something else. Some examples of symbols include:

- 1.) *Afikoman*, the matzoh wrapped in the blue embroidered cloth, symbolizes the knowing and not-knowing of life and the hidden order of the universe.....

13 additional examples of symbolism are included in the complete study guide.

**Metaphors** are direct comparisons made between characters and ideas. Some examples of metaphors in this novel include:

- 1.) While they are driving to the Bronx for the Seder dinner, Hannah's stomach feels like unleavened bread.

This is an appropriate metaphor given that unleavened bread is part of the Seder dinner....

16 additional examples of metaphors are included in the complete study guide.

## **IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS**

**Title:** *The Devil's Arithmetic*

**Author:** Jane Yolen

**Date Published:** 1988

**Meaning of the Title:** It refers to the the idea that for every one person who dies instead of you is one more day that you life and one less chance you will be Chosen for the gas chamber. It is an addition problem designed by evil or the devil.

**Setting:** The city of New Rochelle and an apartment in the Bronx, New York

- A Polish shtetel, the Polish town of Lublin, the village of Viosk
- An unnamed concentration camp in Poland during WWII

**Protagonist:** The protagonist is Hannah who Fate takes in hand to teach her a lesson about remembering what horrors came before in her heritage and about the importance of never allowing it to happen again. Her alter-ego is Chaya, the Polish Jewess, who heroically.....

## **STUDY QUESTIONS – MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ**

- 1.) Hannah prefers Easter over
  - a.) Christmas.
  - b.) Passover.
  - c.) Hannukkah.
- 2.) Hannah opens the door at the Seder for the entrance of
  - a.) Moses.
  - b.) David.
  - c.) Elijah.....

## **ANSWER KEY**

1.) b 2.) c 3.) b 4.) c 5.) c 6.) a 7.) c 8.) a 9.) c 10.) c 11.) a 12.) c 13.) c 14.) a 15.) c

## **ESSAY TOPICS – BOOK REPORT IDEAS**

1. What is the lesson Hannah learns from being transported in time? How do you think she will behave around her family from now on?.....

### ***END OF SAMPLE MONKEYNOTES EXCERPTS***

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