

WRATH BECOMES HER

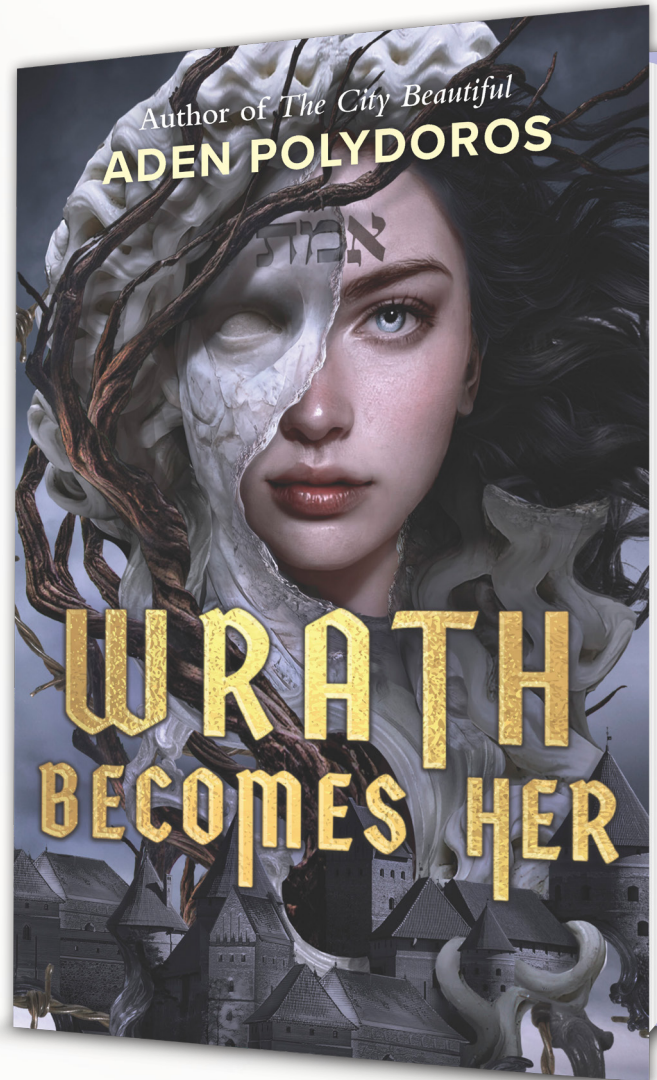
ADEN POLYDOROS

CONTENT WARNINGS

- Antisemitism
- Genocide
- On page murder and violence
- Death of a parent
- Body horror

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

- 1) Using some of the resources listed below and your own research (online or through textbooks, etc.), put together a timeline of the German occupation of Lithuania and list some of the main events that took place. Take note of the people group(s) most impacted by the occupation and structures of oppression that affected them (xenophobia, antisemitism, etc.) and keep this in mind as you read through the novel. As you read, add to your timeline and other notes based on situations the characters encounter.
- 2) Individually, or in a group, find a map of Lithuania and as you come across various names of cities and landmarks, find them on the map so you can better visualize the geography of the story. Do not be afraid to look online if you are unable to locate some of these places and landmarks.



Grades 8 and up

HC: 9781335458032

AUD: 9781488228643

EB: 9780369736628

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) What do you think the title means? As you read through the book, consider the different possible meanings, and link them to events or situations that characters encounter throughout the narrative.
- 2) Ezra says that Vera is “a desecration...but necessary” (p. 15). What does he mean by this? If she is a desecration, then why does he deem her creation to be necessary?
- 3) When Akiva says, “It used to scare me, knowing I might not survive this war.... But now, what keeps me awake at night, is asking myself ‘what if I do, what if I do, what will be left?’” (p. 79). What is it that Akiva fears if he survives the war? Why do you think he fears this more than death?
- 4) Kazlauskas, as he is being interrogated by Vera and Akiva, tries to distance himself from the violence he enacted on others by using the phrase, “We were just following orders” (p. 95). How is this phrase problematic? Why do you think this was such a common excuse used by perpetrators of war crimes throughout history?
- 5) “I had expected to feel something more once I avenged Chaya’s death, maybe relief or even joy, but what had changed?” (p. 99). What does Vera mean by this? How does this feeling impact how Vera understands the concept of vengeance and how she grapples with her purpose moving forward?
- 6) “I told him to just look how we destroy each other, and to tell me who the real monsters are” (p. 125). Consider the many ways that people and groups betray each other throughout the novel. Why do they do so in each of the situations? How do survivors process the emotions and consequences of being betrayed or even betraying others?
- 7) After being chased by two men and later killing them both, Vera thinks to herself, “So, this was the power these men had craved” (p. 151). What does she mean by this? What do you think it means that she is conflating power and violence—even death—in this statement?
- 8) While taking a moment to rest between running and fighting, Akiva, Vera, and Miriam start talking about food, and things that the flavors bring up for them (p. 172). Think about foods that have a big impact on you and that remind you of things: events, people, places, the past, etc. Why do you think the author included this seemingly small moment? What impact do you think this moment would have on the characters? How does this kind of memory impact Vera differently?
- 9) “The rules had changed day by day—first a patch with a yellow circle inscribed with the letter J, then a blue armband with a white star, before finally settling on the yellow star...” (p. 186). What is Akiva describing here to Vera? What other identities were people forced to make visible during this period, and for what purpose?
- 10) As Akiva, Gulzifa, and Vera discuss what might be part of a train shipment, Gulzifa says that the villagers might not be far enough away if the shipment is poison gas or explosives, and it all detonates. Vera reminds Akiva that the villagers are innocent, but he says, “Not all.... Not enough” (p. 224). What do you think he means by this? How do you think he is assessing innocence and why does it matter? Why does it matter to him if the majority are innocent or not?
- 11) After Rav Oren finishes repairing Vera’s wounds, Vera questions why he did so, reminding him, “You thought I was a monster.” He replies with, “Even monsters deserve to live” (p. 326). What do you think he means by this? How does this apply to Vera’s existence and her purpose?
- 12) Throughout the book, Vera questions who she is, what she is, and what it means to fulfill her purpose in life. How does her perspective change from the beginning to the end of the novel? Consider the ways that her experiences in the war and her interactions with other characters impact her way of thinking.

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EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- 1) Go back through the novel and take note of any words that you didn't know or that are from other languages which you may not understand. Consider the context of each of these words and try to discern what they mean through context. After you've done this, either by yourself or with a group, take some time to look up each of the words and see if you came up with a definition that is correct (or at least close).
- 2) Stories about monsters and mythical creatures are nothing new, and neither are stories about man-made creatures like golems, homunculi, or even androids. Make a table with three columns and as many rows as you need. In the first column, list the titles of other books you know about or have read that include man-made creatures (*Frankenstein*, for example). In the second column, note the type(s) of creatures the books focus on. And in the third column, note some of the main themes of those books and how they relate to the themes in *Wrath Becomes Her*, particularly in relation to the purpose of the golem and what it means to be human. Discuss your answers with others and note similarities and differences in your answers.
- 3) Author and philosopher Hannah Arendt, in the aftermath of World War II, wrote a book called *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, exploring what she termed the "banality of evil." Although other elements of her work have been critiqued over the years, this particular concept has been applied to many situations, especially war, where the role of ordinary citizens leads to greater evils being enacted upon innocent people. Do some further research on Arendt, the banality of evil, and how the concept applies in different ways to *Wrath Becomes Her*.

RESOURCES / LINKS / FURTHER READING

- **Lithuania (US Holocaust Memorial Museum)**
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/lithuania>
- **Vilna During the Holocaust (The Jerusalem of Lithuania)**
https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/vilna/during/german_occupation.asp
- **Aden Polydoros (Author Website)**
<https://adenpolydoros.com/about-me>
- **What Did Hannah Arendt Really Mean by the Banality of Evil? (Aeon)**
<https://aeon.co/ideas/what-did-hannah-arendt-really-mean-by-the-banality-of-evil>
- **Homunculus (Britannica)**
<https://www.britannica.com/science/homunculus-biology>

These questions were prepared by Dr. Robert Bittner, educator, consultant, and LGBTQ+ youth literature specialist.

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