



## The Secret Seder

*By Doreen Rappaport*



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Jacques and his parents are hiding in Nazi-occupied France during World War II, pretending to be Catholics. On the first night of Passover, Jacques and his father elude Nazi soldiers to gather with other Jews and celebrate the Seder in secret. For this book, Doreen Rappaport researched the lives of resistance fighters and Jews in hiding: brave men and women who managed to survive one of the darkest times in history with their faith intact. Emily Arnold McCully's intense and respectful paintings illuminate the perils of a turbulent time and the triumphs of a resilient people.

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## The Secret Seder By Doreen Rappaport Bibliography

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### Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 2-6 - Amid the plethora of Holocaust children's literature emerges yet another picture book that uses the themes of exodus and freedom associated with Passover to contrast the reality of Nazi-occupied Europe. The narrator is a French boy whose family lives openly as Catholics, but secretly observes their Jewish faith. Despite the fear that their true identity will be discovered, he and his father attend an all-male Seder held in an abandoned shack in a nearby forest. They arrive with a roasted egg for the meager Seder plate, which lacks many of the traditional ingredients. One man says, "We have no bitter herbs to dip in salted water," while another replies, "We do not need bitter herbs....Our lives are bitter enough." The highlight of the evening is when the boy recites the four traditional questions, which he had secretly practiced with his mother. The men provide secondary answers to the customary ones: "I think tonight is different because tonight all over Europe, Jews are being murdered." Their sadness, fear, and misery are underscored by the idea that tonight they are free in their hearts and by their hope for a brighter future. Watercolors depicting gloomy, foreboding images of the village, forest, and shack counter the child's memories of happier meals at his grandmother's home. Rappaport interweaves themes and descriptive text to create a meaningful story in a distinctive setting. An excellent discussion starter. - *Rita Soltan, Oakland University, Rochester, MI*  
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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 2-4. Rappaport draws on Holocaust history to imagine a small French boy, Jacques, living in an occupied village, who, with his father, evades soldiers to attend a secret seder. Like David Adler's Holocaust books for young children, this one doesn't sensationalize the brutality, but sadness and terror are all around--as is the courage of those who resist. McCully's watercolors, dark with shadow and bright with candlelight, are never sentimental. Much of the book is about the ages-old celebration, the meaning of the holiday to the men gathered together that day ("tonight is different because tonight all over Europe, Jews are being murdered"), and the symbols on the seder plate. Some of the men at the seder table are sobbing; some can barely speak; but even in the darkness and sorrow, Jacques finds community and strength in the history of his people. An author's note and bibliographies of books on the Holocaust and Passover are appended. Share this after a seder to open up discussion. *Hazel Rochman*  
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About the Author

Doreen Rappaport has written several award-winning books for children, including *The School Is Not White!*, illustrated by Curtis James; *Martin's Big Words*, a Caldecott Honor Book, a Coretta Scott King Honor for Illustration, and a Jane Addams Children's Book Award winner; *Freedom River*, an ALA Notable Book and winner of a Coretta Scott King Honor for Illustration; and *John's Secret Dreams: The Life of John Lennon*, all illustrated by Bryan Collier. Rappaport lives and writes in upstate New York.

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**Belia Gillespie:**

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