

The reader



In the story *The Reader*, the main characters Hanna and Michael are faced with several moral dilemmas, which challenges them into making changes that lead simultaneously growth as well as their demise. Hanna faces the challenge of deciding if her pride is worth more than her own freedom. It is in this fear, the loss of her dignity, which ultimately shapes the character she becomes in the end. Michael, the other main character, falls deeply in love with Hanna. He is forced to make a decision on whether or not it is justified to judge someone with the intent of knowing what he believed to be best for them.

Hanna and Michael share a brief summer where they shared a physically intimate relationship. Although physically close very little detail was shared on any aspect of Hanna's former personal life. At the time that they had met, Hanna had been the dominant one, mainly on the account that there was a significant age difference, where Hanna was twice Michael's age. At the end of the summer, Hanna moved away for no apparent reason at all. Michael did not have such an easy time adapting to life without Hanna. We see this in that he often accounted for there being something missing in all his relationships he had after her.

Several years since he last saw, Michael is in his final years of law school, he is required to attend a trial in which several former SS Nazi guards are on trial for the death of a group of prisoners, Hanna had been one of those guards. The other defendants had united together to place the blame against Hanna, accusing her of writing out the report that lied about the events that took place that ultimately led to the death of the prisoners, And accusing her

of single handily preventing any of the other guards from saving any of the prisoners.

Denying all allegations at first, when asked to prove so with a writing sample Hanna quickly denies, and willingly admits to the court that she in fact wrote the report alone. When one of the surviving prisoners testimony reveals that Hanna had made some of the prisoners read to her each night, Michael is shocked coming to the conclusion that, Hanna is illiterate. This had been the secret she had been keeping for all this time, It was the reason she had gone to such extreme lengths to hide her shame, it was why she joined the SS, it was why she openly admitted to constructing the report rather than be exposed as an illiterate.

At the time he wanted to alert the judge immediately, on Hanna's inability to read. Because she couldn't be judged equally with the other defendants, this information could have been used to possibly keep her out of prison, but it would be at the cost of her dignity. Michael was now faced with the dilemma of her freedom and love for her, and by extension his willingness to protect her desires. Throughout the story the love they share for each other grows in two completely different ways as time moves on. Michael's love for Hanna moved on to becomes something more nostalgic than actual physical.

It is the thoughts and the memories that he misses the most. Never throughout her prison sentence did he contacts her with a personal visit or letter because he never knew exactly what to say. Yet he often thought about life he shared with Hanna and he would often compare current women to her standard none could meet. When he finally goes to visit her in prison,

twenty years after the trial, he is somewhat shocked that she has become an old woman. In some ways he is repulsed by what has become of the woman that he idealized. However in, the years Hanna spent in prison, her dependency on Michael grew.

He had been sending her the tapes from which she was able to learn to read and write. For the first time in her life, the one secret she had given her life away to keep, was no longer hers and it was Michael who helped her cope with it. The pressure to go against ones own morals is a driving factor to what one may be able to accomplish in the course of a lifetime. In the story Hanna struggles to hold onto the small amount of dignity that remains. We see this when she decides that going to prison is better then revealing her life long secret.

Michael faces the reality of his legal obligation and his desire to protect her from ridicule. By the end it was the decisions and actions they made early in their lives that led to the demise of one life and any future relationship ruined with another. It is shown by the actions of Hanna how much she was able to grow as an individual, by the end of the story she is finally an independent woman and her love for Michael as a person grows. Michael in a turn of events shows little effort to grow from his adolescent sense of reason, it is his refusal to leave the memories of the past, and its not Hanna as a person that he loves.