

# The book their – power of words essay sample



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A symbol is an object that represents, stands for, or suggests an idea, belief, action or material identity. Symbols take the form of words, sounds, gestures or visual images and are used to convey ideas and beliefs. In *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak he has used powerful symbolism to show how words and literature are used to symbolise destruction, and that they can be as powerful as a weapon. This is a very important and prominent idea that Zusak conveys to the readers because it is a universal occurrence, particularly during World War Two and Hitler's rise to power through his convincing use of words. Zusak has used the innocence of the protagonist, nine year old Liesel Meminger to show how she is discovering the destruction words can cause; to destroy cultures, people and whole societies.

Words can be used to symbolise destruction of a culture which is exhibited at the book burning. In *The Book Thief*, Hitler and the Nazi's goal is to eradicate Jews and if they destroy their culture they can erase Jews. For the Nazi's, all Jewish books, stories and poems represent the Jews themselves and by burning the books it symbolises the destruction of the Jewish culture. Zusak has intentionally used descriptive and forceful language, as well as short simple sentences to convey this idea to the reader, " The orange flames waved at the crowd as paper and print dissolved inside them. Burning words were torn from their sentences." Zusak has used an extended metaphor in this quote: the flames of the book burning represent Hitler and the Nazi party while the paper and print being engulfed by the flame is the the Jews and their culture

. Once the burning has ended Liesel walks past the ashes, noticing that three books have survived the burning, and she quickly sneaks one under her jacket, " When the heap was reduced near the bottom a small section of living material escaped from the ash." Zusak has used this as an example to give us hope and that there will always be someone to pick up the survivors and give them shelter. This symbolises that no matter how hard a religious, political or supremacy group try to eradicate another culture, their literature will always survive and is worth fighting for.

Secondly, Zusak uses words as a symbol for destruction of a person through Liesel's relationship with Ilsa Herman. An example of when words are used for destruction of a person is Liesel's tirade against Ilsa when she cancels the laundry service of Rosa Hubermann. Liesel is infuriated by her giving The Whistler as a ' pity gift' so she turns around to berate Ilsa, " Blood leaked from her nose and licked at her lips. Her eyes had blackened. Cuts had opened up and a series of wounds were rising to the surface of her skin. All from words. From Liesel's words." This is possibly Liesel's cruellest moment in the novel and Zusak has created imagery of Ilsa getting bloodied and battered from her verbal abuse. What Zusak is really telling us is that something as insubstantial as words can have real life effects: good or bad, depending how they are used.

Teenagers grow up today with access to more and more technology, quickly adapting to new ways of communicating and often use the internet and mobiles as the main way to reach friends. This access to technology also means that bullying can happen outside school wherever and however, using harmful words that they may not have the courage to say face to face. The <https://assignbuster.com/the-book-theif-power-of-words-essay-sample/>

real life impacts that words have, can be seen in our world today; one in five New Zealand teenagers report being cyberbullied which can have a huge impact on their life. Zusak has shown how words can be used as a symbol for destruction of a person, which is an idea that is and will be existent for all ages of people.

Lastly the use of words as a symbol for the destruction of a society is shown through Hitler's suppression of the Jewish race, which has an impact on the whole of Germany and later, the World. This can be seen when a parade of Jews is walked through Molching and eventually comes through Himmel Street. Hans walks through the parade of Jews to an elderly man on the ground and reaches out to give him a piece of bread, the German onlookers watching in awe. A soldier starts to whip Jew and the Hans, Death comments on the Jew glancing back at Hans, " If nothing else, the old man would die like a human. Or at least with the thought that he was a human. Me? I'm not so sure thats a good thing."

Zusak has used the wise narration of Death the bring awareness and raise the issue of how Hitler has destroyed a society, and teaching them to hate another race is not a natural instinct of humans. As the late Nelson Mandela said, " No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin or his background or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite." Hitler has used words to symbolise destroying a society by telling them to go against their instincts and to hate Jews, when really love comes easier to the human heart. This is the underlying message Zusak is exhibiting through his use of symbolism.

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Through the use of effective symbolism, Zusak has showed how words and literature have the potential to destroy a culture, a person and a society as an entity. Zusak shows us through the book burning that culture and literature are worth fighting for, Liesel's tirade against Ilsa symbolises that something as insubstantial as words can have real life consequences and Hans' instinctual kindness shows that humans are born to love each other.