

Worksheet – Sophie Scholl

Comprehension Questions

Reading

(This reading is adapted from Rachael Roberts, ELT Resourceful.)

Growing up in Nazi Germany, Sophie Scholl had automatically become a member of the girls' branch of Hitler Youth, the League of German Girls. She joined at the age of twelve and she was soon promoted to Squad Leader. However, as discrimination against the Jews grew, Sophie began to question what she was being told. When two of her Jewish friends were barred from joining the League, Sophie protested. As she grew older she grew more and more suspicious of the Nazi Party and what they were telling young people.

Her father was a secret anti-Nazi and he encouraged Sophie and her brother to question everything, once saying that all he wanted was for them to walk straight and free through life, even when it was hard. Eventually he was arrested after a co-worker overheard him criticising Hitler.

As Sophie became more fully aware of the terrible acts being committed by the Nazis, she had to weigh up her sense of self-preservation with her determination to do the right thing. In June 1942 Sophie had been sitting in a lecture theatre at the University of Munich when a slip of paper on the floor caught her eye. The paper suggested that one day all Germans would be ashamed of what the Nazi government was doing to the Jews of Europe. Sophie knew enough to realise that this message referred to the mass deportation of Jews and other prisoners to concentration camps, and she had also heard the rumours of Jewish people being killed there. But even being in possession of such a message was illegal and could put her in danger. It was her duty to report it.

Unsure what to do, she went in search of her older brother, Hans, who was also a student at the university. Hans was not in his room, so while she waited for him to return, she leafed through a book on Hans's desk, by the poet Schiller. She turned a page and saw that Hans had underlined a quote with the exact words she had read on the slip of paper. When he returned, she confronted him and he admitted to having joined an underground resistance group, The White Rose. The siblings discussed how every person should follow their conscience, even under a dictatorship. Eventually Sophie decided to join the group as well.

The White Rose was well-organised. They bought stamps and paper from different post offices to avoid being caught and they produced five more pamphlets, helping to open

people's eyes to the lies being spread by the Nazi propaganda machine. They wrote graffiti on walls around Munich, saying things like 'Down with Hitler' and 'Freedom'. They set up connections to other resistance groups, and their flyers were distributed in far-away towns and cities.

Hearing from the battlefield that the German Army was struggling against the Soviets made the White Rose braver. They believed that the Nazis were disintegrating and that the war would soon be over. Overconfident, Hans and Sophie brought suitcases full of copies of the sixth pamphlet to the university and distributed them everywhere. Sophie went to a balcony which overlooked a huge courtyard and let the pamphlets flutter down just as the students were leaving class. A janitor spotted what Hans and Sophie were doing and reported them. They were arrested and tried four days later.

The siblings were not allowed to defend themselves in court, but Sophie spoke out nonetheless, saying, "Somebody, after all, had to make a start. What we wrote and said is also believed by many others. They just don't dare express themselves as we did." After the half-day trial, Sophie, Hans and another member of their resistance group, Christoph Probst, were executed. Sophie's last words were, 'How can we expect righteousness to prevail when there is hardly anyone willing to give himself up individually to a righteous cause? Such a fine, sunny day, and I have to go, but what does my death matter, if through us, thousands of people are awakened and stirred to action?'

Today hundreds of German schools are named after Sophie Scholl, recognising the extraordinary bravery she and her fellow resistance members showed in the face of great danger. Their actions are a perfect example of what is often called moral courage- the ability to take the right action even when one has doubts or fears about the consequences.

Questions

1. Why did Sophie stop believing in the Hitler Youth?
2. What important lesson did Sophie learn from her father?
3. The text says Sophie "had to weigh up her sense of self-preservation with her determination to do the right thing". What does this mean?
4. What did Sophie discover about her brother, Hans?
5. What was the White Rose trying to do by publishing pamphlets?
6. What other actions did the White Rose take, in addition to publishing pamphlets?
7. How were Sophie and Hans discovered?
8. What happened to Sophie and Hans Scholl?
9. Did Sophie regret her actions? Give evidence from the text.
10. What is moral courage? How did Sophie Scholl show moral courage?