

YEVA SKALIETSKA

You  
Don't  
Know  
What  
War Is



The Diary of a Young Girl  
from Ukraine

**Teacher's Guide**

*Guide written by Laura Reis Mayer*

Includes Discussion Questions, Classroom  
Activities, and Links to Resources



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“Everyone knows  
the word *war*.  
But very few people  
understand  
what it truly means.”

—YEVA SKALIETSKA

## Introduction

On February 24, 2022, twelve-year-old Yeva Skalietska’s world exploded—both literally and figuratively—when her hometown of Kharkiv was suddenly under attack as Russia launched its horrifying invasion of Ukraine. Over the next sixteen days, Yeva and her grandmother would travel the full expanse of Ukraine and into Hungary before settling as refugees in Ireland. Yeva’s diary captured the entire journey, detailing the destructive impact of war on both her homeland and her childhood.

In the classroom, Yeva’s diary can be used as a stand-alone text or in a set focused on world history, war, refugeeism, or memoir. Educators can assign her journal in its entirety, or ask students to read selected portions that align with course goals. Likewise, teachers can assign any combination of this guide’s activities, which are divided into three themes, or “big ideas,” and challenge students to read, write, and speak critically. In publishing her detailed and emotional journey for the world to see, Yeva’s message is clear: If you have not lived an experience such as this one, you don’t know what war is.



Yeva Skalietska




Yeva and her granny Iryna

# Preparing to Read the Text

The following activities provide equitable access for all students by building knowledge around the history and geography of Russia and Ukraine.

## Station Rotation

Introduce students to the history and politics of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict by creating a “stations” learning experience. Explain that by the end of the period, students will be able to answer the following question:

 **How have specific ideas and events led to the war in Ukraine?**

Split students into small groups at various points around the room, designated by labeled chart paper on the wall or tables. Each station represents a topic significant to *You Don't Know What War Is*. Stations are set up with an image, audio clip, video, or short text for groups to research and discuss before writing a summary on the chart paper. Groups can move from station to station, where they will examine resources and add to what has already been noted. Though not every station must be visited by each group, students will eventually return to their original station, read classmates' notes, and synthesize them into a clearly written summary statement that demonstrates the significance of this concept or event to Skalietska's text or to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Stations (with resources) might include:

- ▶ **Impact of Russian invasion on children** (website):  
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/06/1119432>
- ▶ **Disinformation and war propaganda** (podcast and article):  
<https://www.npr.org/2022/03/15/1086705796/russian-propaganda-war-in-ukraine>
- ▶ **History behind Russia's invasion** (photo story):  
<https://www.npr.org/transcripts/1084729621>
- ▶ **Global refugees** (website):  
<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/world-refugee-day.html>
- ▶ **Russian and Ukrainian geography** (maps):  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60506682>
- ▶ **NATO** (online encyclopedia entry):  
<https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/North-Atlantic-Treaty-Organization-NATO/276123>



Photograph © 2022 Anonymous



Photograph © 2022 Anonymous

Images of the horrible destruction in Yeva's apartment; the kitchen (top) and her room (bottom).



## See, Think, Wonder

Show students a current map of Russia and Ukraine, such as the military map from *The Economist*, link below. The map can be projected on a whiteboard or uploaded on individual student devices using Padlet, Pear Deck, Jamboard, or a similar interactive digital tool. Using the “See, Think, Wonder” routine, ask students to reflect on the relationship between geography and war, and post their thinking in the digital space.

### Students should ask themselves:

- What do I see? (What details stick out?)
- What do I think? (What about the image makes me think that?)
- What does this make me wonder? (What broader questions does this image raise?)

With each question, students apply a more critical lens to the map. After individual think-time, students can share with a partner, small group, or the class as a whole. Observations might include that Ukraine is directly adjacent to Russia; that both countries border on large sea ports; and that Russia is surrounding Ukraine, advancing from three sides. Briefly explain Russia’s political and economic ties to Belarus, and the 2014 annexation of Crimea. Next, show students a map of the former USSR, repeating the See, Think, Wonder routine. Students should notice that the country that was commonly called Russia used to include what is now Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and Crimea. Discuss: Why is Russia continuing to attack Ukraine? What might be Russia’s ultimate intent? For additional context, students might read portions of the *Time for Kids* article “War in Ukraine.”

#### ► Military map of Russia and Ukraine:

<https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2022/04/08/how-cartographers-track-and-map-russias-war-in-ukraine>

#### ► Map of former USSR:

<https://cdn.britannica.com/78/4878-050-C55238A0/Union-of-Soviet-Socialist-Republics.jpg>

#### ► Time for Kids article:

<https://www.timeforkids.com/g56/war-in-ukraine-2/?rl=en-880>



Photograph © 2022 Iryna Skalietska

In the basement shelter the night of February 24, playing a game with some of the other children from the neighborhood.



Photograph © 2022 Iryna Skalietska

Bombed apartment buildings photographed on Yeva’s way out of Kharkiv to Dnipro.



# Reading the Text

The following classroom activities engage students in topics and themes central to Yeva’s diary.

## Big Idea #1: War

Yeva’s narrative provides a detailed, authentic account of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Her journal immerses the reader in the realities of war and the plight faced by refugees from Ukraine and throughout the world. The following classroom activities focus on the impacts of war on people, places, and politics.




### Conversation Starters

-  What are the immediate and long-term effects of war?
-  How do we react when we witness atrocities?

## Four A’s Close Reading Protocol

Yeva’s Hungary section is introduced with a reference to an article entitled “Ukraine’s Refugee Crisis is Unprecedented. The Response Must Be, Too.” Ask students to apply the “Four A’s” protocol to a close read of this March 15, 2022 article from *The New York Times*. Remind students that a close read includes any charts, graphs, and images as well as text. While reading, students should highlight and annotate any assertions or claims the author makes, as well as any agreements and arguments students have with the text. Finally, students should note any actions they feel inspired to make after reading the article. Ask the class to share their thinking either verbally or digitally via Padlet, Pear Deck, or Jamboard. For example, students might highlight the quotation “Hosting refugees is a global public good,” and note that this is a central assertion or claim with which they would agree or argue. After reading and annotating the article, students can respond to each other’s thinking using the digital platform or in a small or large group discussion.

### Discuss with students:

-  What multiple challenges are faced by refugees from Ukraine and from all over the world?
-  What does the writer mean by the “psychic numbing” that sets in weeks after a refugee crisis begins?
-  What should our responsibility be to refugees?

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/03/15/opinion/ukraine-refugee-crisis.html>

## Impact Infographics

Yeva's diary describes immediate impacts of the Russian invasion on Ukraine's housing, food supply, and much more. Discuss with students how that impact has become global as time passes. Ask students to analyze the impact of war on people, places, and politics, and to make their learning visible by creating infographics. Students can work with partners or small groups to research and create their products. For inspiration, they can perform an online image search for examples such as the one posted below. One resource that works well for this assignment is NPR's article entitled "The Ripple Effects of Russia's War in Ukraine Are Changing the World." This May 10, 2022 article discusses the Ukrainian war's impacts on people, economics, food, energy, security, and geopolitics. Students can use Canva, Adobe Illustrator, or another digital tool to illustrate specific or multiple effects of war.

- ▶ **NPR article:** <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/10/1093066817/ukraine-war-gas-prices-refugees>
- ▶ **Example:** <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/FM1-0nIXsAoGb6g.jpg>

## Big Idea #2: Journey

Yeva's journey takes her across Ukraine, into Hungary, and finally to Ireland. Forced to leave her friends, her home, and her belongings, she leaves her childhood behind as well. The following classroom activities focus on geography, perspective, and the significance of starting over.

### Conversation Starters



What physical and emotional journeys are part of the human experience?



What is the importance of home, and what happens when one leaves it behind?

### Mapping the Text




Use interactive maps to engage students in the physical journey Yeva takes with her grandmother. As students read about each new location in Yeva's diary, challenge them to research and plot her course. Using Thinglink, Google Drawings, or another interactive imaging tool, students should import a detailed map of Ukraine such as one of those provided below. Starting with Kharkiv and stopping at each place along her journey, students should mark Yeva's route with a star or other symbol. Next, students should find images, text, and video that will deepen understanding of these places, and they should link them to the appropriate location on the map. Research can occur prior to or during reading, and maps can be completed independently or in pairs. Maps might extend into Hungary and even to Ireland. Significant locations include Dnipro, Uzhhorod, Chop, Budapest, and Dublin.

- ▶ **Maps of Ukraine and Eastern Europe:**  
<https://worldmapwithcountries.net/2018/08/24/map-of-eastern-europe/>  
<https://geology.com/world/ukraine-satellite-image.shtml>



## Connect, Extend, Challenge

The attack on Ukraine launches Yeva into an abrupt transition from childhood. Deepen students' understanding of the war as a coming-of-age journey by asking students to consider their Ukrainian counterparts. Show students the *Washington Post* video "From class to helping families flee: A teen navigates high school and war in Ukraine." While watching the video, students should take notes using the Connect, Extend, Challenge protocol. Notes can include "connections" between the video and Yeva's diary, new information and ideas that "extend" their thinking, and "challenges" or confusing areas. Students might also note connections to their own experience. After reading, students might share their notes.

### Ask:

-  What similarities are there in Yeva's and Anna's journeys from their hometowns in Ukraine?
-  How has war changed them?
-  How do both girls feel about their cities?

**Encourage students to talk about their own connections to Yeva's and Anna's journeys.**

-  What factors pull you away from home?
-  What ideas, events, or forces sometimes push adolescents into adulthood before they are ready?

Next, direct students to the *Washington Post* article that accompanies the video. Discuss the article's assertion that "the giant Russian war machine . . . has swallowed up a generation of young Ukrainians and turned them into grown-ups overnight."

### Ask students:



-  In what ways is this true?

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/03/ukraine-teen-coming-of-age-in-war>

## Big Idea #3: Story






Yeva's writing is a platform for processing fears, reflecting on hopes, and finding a voice. The following classroom activities focus on the power of story and the significance of a free press.

### Conversation Starters

-  How does telling one's story help both writer and reader?
-  What roles do journalists play during wartime?

### Quick-Writes

In the classroom, informal writing provides a way to generate and organize thinking about authors' themes, as well as a chance for students to make connections to prior knowledge, to their own experience, or to the world around them. Ask students to respond with quick writes before, during, or after reading passages of text. Prompts can come directly from the discussion questions included in this guide, or they might be more creative or personal in nature. Later, students might compose more formal essays or memoirs using the quick writes as drafts. Prompts that align to Yeva's diary and to the idea of personal storytelling include:

-  Describe a place that is significant to your childhood. Why is it so meaningful to you?
-  What three belongings would you take if you had to leave home in a hurry? Explain.
-  Discuss an event you consider a turning point in your life so far. How has it changed you?
-  What role do your friends, classmates, teammates, and other peers play in your life?
-  What is one core belief that guides your daily life?

### Socratic Seminar

In her diary, Yeva indicates there are discrepancies between what she hears as rumors, what she sees to be true, and what the rest of the world knows. For instance, she writes, "They're saying on the news that the Russians have already suffered three thousand casualties, but that Russian networks aren't mentioning that" (page 27). The news team that partners with Yeva, however, challenges the Russian propaganda effort by elevating her story for the world to see. Hold a Socratic Seminar about the significance of a free press and its connection to *You Don't Know What War Is*. Before facilitating the discussion, provide background about war propaganda. Students can listen to the NPR podcast "How to Spot Disinformation and Propaganda Coming out of the Ukraine-Russia Conflict," or they can read the article "Here's How Propaganda is Clouding Russians' Understanding of the War in Ukraine." Discuss what an ideal seminar looks and sounds like, including participation, active listening, and respect of multiple viewpoints.



During the discussion, take a facilitator’s role. Ask a low-risk opening question to encourage total class participation and to focus on a main idea in the text(s), such as “What is one example of disinformation you saw in Yeva’s diary, the podcast, or the article?” Then, move to a core question for the purpose of analyzing text details, such as: “Who benefits from the publication of Yeva’s story, and how?” End the discussion with a closing question that promotes personal connection, such as “How does the existence of a free press benefit you?” Ask students to evaluate their own and their classmates’ speaking, thinking, and listening during the seminar. Ask: How did the seminar deepen your understanding of the podcast, article, and Yeva’s story?

- ▶ **Podcast:** <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/05/1084729621/how-to-spot-disinformation-and-propaganda-coming-out-of-the-ukraine-russia-confli>
- ▶ **Article:** <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/15/1086705796/russian-propaganda-war-in-ukraine>

## Synthesizing the Text

### Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to Yeva that she has her notebook when she leaves home? What purpose(s) does her journal serve during her journey to safety? How is writing an escape?
2. The diary constantly references Yeva’s fear of the night and her need for the sun. How do color, darkness, and light serve to elevate Yeva’s feelings throughout her diary?
3. Yeva writes that her neighborhood is “practically being erased” (page 22). Discuss both literal and figurative meanings of this description. Support your thinking with text evidence.
4. How does the war affect basic human needs such as eating and sleeping? Discuss the immediate physical, emotional, and economic impacts of war on Ukraine’s citizens.
5. How does the Covid-19 pandemic further complicate the situation for Yeva and other refugees?
6. Why is Yeva so grateful to be reunited with her pink toy cat, Chupapelya? What might the stuffed animal represent to Yeva? How does it illustrate a broader theme about war?
7. Yeva’s diary entries often include news or thoughts about her friends. What is the significance of staying connected to friends and family during stressful times?
8. Why does the Channel 4 news crew wish to accompany Yeva and her grandmother on their journey? How does telling her story help both Yeva and a global audience?
9. In her diary, Yeva often follows horrific descriptions with emotional reflection. Examine the juxtaposition of fear and hope in Yeva’s writing. Use examples from the text.
10. In what ways does Yeva’s survival depend on the kindness of strangers? Trace this theme throughout Yeva’s journey.

## Text Comparison

Show the class the March 18, 2022 news video “From Ukraine to Ireland: 12-year-old refugee Yeva reaches safety after Russia’s invasion.” Explain that this is the news story the Channel 4 news team was producing during their time with Yeva. As they watch, ask students to compare what they see and hear to what they read in Yeva’s diary. After viewing, discuss: How does the video compare to Yeva’s written memoir? Are details from one version left out or expanded in the other? What from the video resonated with you? Are these the same instances that were significant in your reading? How can media add to your understanding of written text?

<https://www.channel4.com/news/from-ukraine-to-ireland-12-year-old-refugee-yeva-reaches-safety-after-russias-invasion>

## Multimedia Product

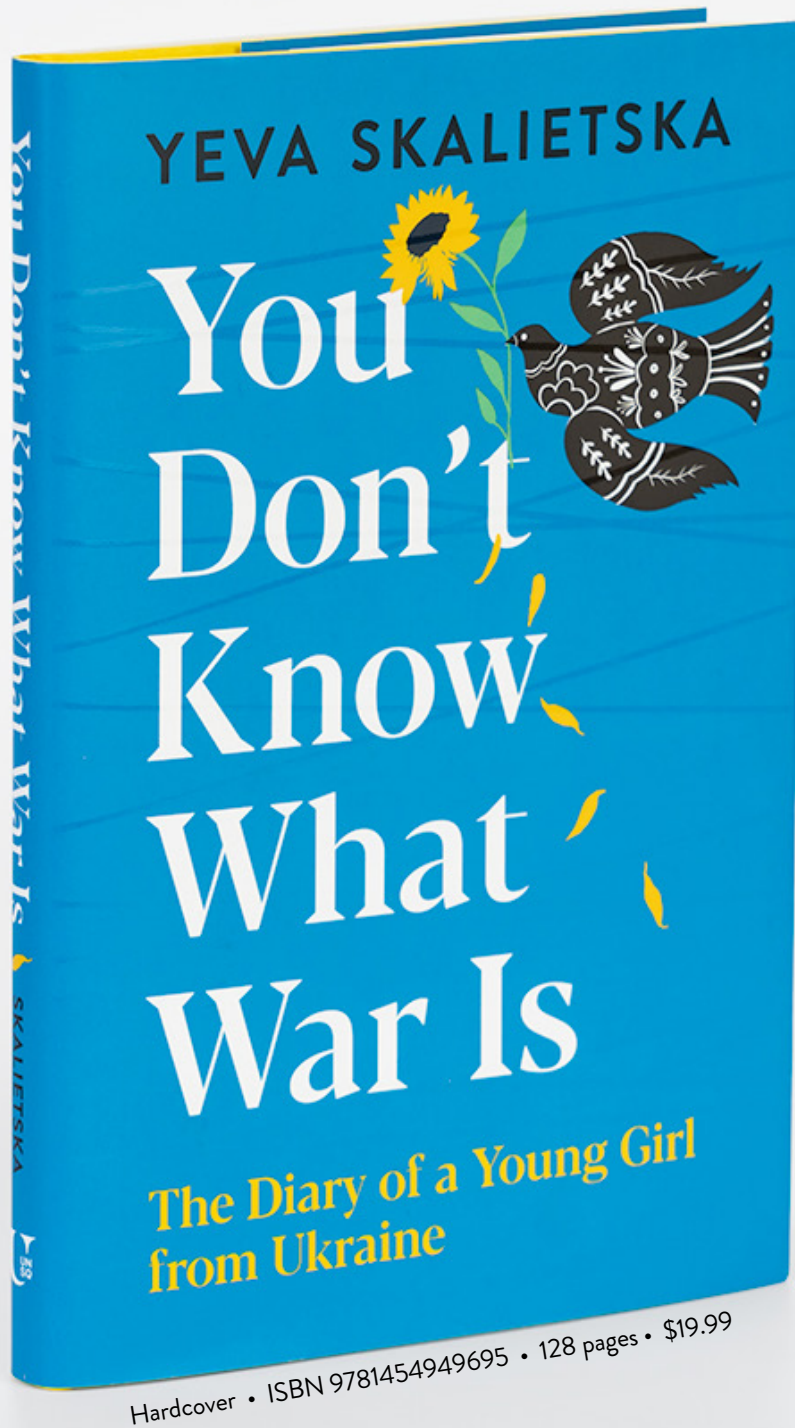
Challenge students to produce an in-depth multimedia response to one of the “conversation starters” posed throughout this guide. Then, ask students to create their own multimedia response to the question, integrating ideas from Yeva’s diary with outside research and their own thinking. For example, students might choose *What are the immediate and long-term effects of war?* Their product could be a video story that addresses an expanded view of the refugee crisis in multiple parts of the world. Or, students might choose a different question, such as, *What is the importance of home?* They could create a podcast where they interview classmates from diverse backgrounds. Responses reflect individual student choice and interests, and might include:

- ▶ A podcast using free audio recording and editing software such as Audacity  
<https://www.audacityteam.org/>
- ▶ A “TED Talk”-type video speech complete with scripted narration aided by cue cards.  
Students can use cell phones or tablets to record their talks.
- ▶ A digital story using iMovie or Windows Movie Maker.  
Digital stories combine narration and still images and are easily created on student laptops.
- ▶ An interactive web page that combines multiple digital features to tell a story.  
Students can combine text, social graphics, video, and audio using Google Sites or Adobe Spark.

## About the Author of this Teacher’s Guide

**Laura Reis Mayer** is an instructional coach and National Board Certified Teacher in Asheville, North Carolina. She has taught middle school, high school, and college English; speech; drama; and literacy. As consultant to various education organizations, she develops and facilitates professional learning on high-quality curriculums, college- and career-ready standards, and educational equity. She has written more than twenty teacher guides for various publishers.

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