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# Anya's War



## Synopsis

Anya Rosen and her family have left their home in Odessa for Shanghai, believing that China will be a safe haven from Hitler's forces. At first, Anya's life in the Jewish Quarter of Shanghai is privileged and relatively carefree: she has crushes on boys, fights with her mother, and longs to defy expectations just like her hero, Amelia Earhart. Then Anya finds a baby—a newborn abandoned on the street. Amelia Earhart goes missing. And it becomes dangerously clear that no place is safe—not for Jewish families like the Rosens, not for Shanghai's poor, not for adventurous women pilots. Based on a true story, *Anya's War* by Andrea Alban is a rich, transcendent novel about a little-known time in Holocaust history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In 1937, Anya Rosen, 14, and her extended Jewish family have fled their comfortable home in Odessa, Ukraine, where they were threatened by Stalin's secret police. Now settled in Shanghai, they join other refugees, including those from Hitler-controlled Germany. In this first novel, based on the author's family experience, the dramatic cultural and historical details are sometimes more compelling than the plot, in which Anya makes friends and then rescues an abandoned newborn Chinese girl in a culture where girls are worthless. Most moving are the scenes with the full cast of family characters, who are irritating, irritable, funny, surprising, mean, and prejudiced. Alban also explores the complexities of Anya's Jewish community. Anya resents the Orthodox constraints against women: why can't she go to synagogue like her brother? The Ashkenazi Jews do not like the Sephardic refugees, and both speak disparagingly of

local coolies, though for Anya, the family's Chinese servant becomes a mentor. An important addition to literature about WWII refugees. Grades 7-12. --Hazel Rochman --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“Based on the author’s life, it is a book with history, drama, and good writing.”  
Association of Jewish Libraries Reviews “The characters, and most notably Anya, are well crafted and believable.”  
BCCB “A delightfully textured glimpse at a little-remembered period of Jewish history.”  
Kirkus Reviews “An important addition to the literature about WWII refugees.”  
Booklist

I read this book a while back and read it in 2 days. Very well written and engaging. I loved the depth to the characters the author was able to coax to the surface in a relatively short and quick read. I just loved the family and quickly turned each page to find out what happened next. Would love to read other stories about this family and some of the supporting characters. Highly recommend for young adult reading. Could actually be a great choice for junior high-school curriculum.

Great!

A very simplistic story, maybe it was for the teenage population. So many errors in the life of the Chinese. Couldn't believe it. Gave it to my library and suggested she put it in the teenage section. Really a disappointment!!!!!!!!!!

Anya is a young Jewish girl living in China with her family after they left their home in Odessa to escape Hitler. One day, while going on an errand, she finds an abandoned baby girl near her house. She tries to chase after a woman she suspects is the mother, but loses her. So she feels she has no other choice but to bring the baby home. I had thought the story was going to be about this baby girl she finds, but soon after she brings the baby home, it becomes about boys. One boy who she knew in school, and another she meets that night through her father's acquaintance. I then thought it would've been about this boy and the baby, but then there's another turn of events; a bombing. This bombing was the most exciting part of the story. I wish the aftermath of this had lasted longer, though. Before I knew it, the story was ending. So, to me, this story felt like jumping from one thing to another rather quickly with fast resolutions. I did enjoy learning about what it was like in China

during this time, as well as the customs of both the Chinese and the Jews. This is a good story for young kids to read and to learn about this period. And it will be an easy read for them. There's just some terms in different languages, and probably some of the Jewish customs for Sabbath, that they may not understand. What is really interesting is that it's based on a true story from the author's family. That makes this story pretty interesting. \*I won a copy of this book from the author.

*Anya's War* is a first person account of a 14 year old Jewish girl's adventures and misadventures in acclimating to her new life in Shanghai in 1937. Her upper class Jewish family has fled there from Odessa, Russia, where Jews are being persecuted under Communism. Anya Rosen (her father has just shortened the family name from Rosengarten) narrates the events around her 14th birthday when, riding her new bicycle home with her purchases from the kosher butcher, she hears a mewling sound that turns out to be a crying baby. She finds and rescues the Chinese infant girl she hears crying in the bushes. The baby has been abandoned because she is a girl and unwanted by a society that values males over females. (This event is based on the factual account of the author Andrea Alban's grandfather, who lived in Shanghai at that time and brought home such an abandoned infant girl.) We learn much about Chinese culture in this book, and much about Jewish culture and family life. The Rosens; Anya, Georgi (her younger brother) Mama, Papa, Babushka and Dedushka celebrate Shabbat faithfully in elegant Odessa style. Anya expresses a very personal and emotional experience of Shabbat: Anya lit hers last, one candle for shamor, observance, and one for zachor, remembrance. It was time for her second neshamah to enter her body. Her skin tingled with the feeling of the additional soul slipping in. This extra soul might distract her from her worries about the Japanese and Chinese fighting for control of Shanghai. Anya worries about the big things: war, infanticide, injustice to females in China, a bombing that injures her brother and Amelia Earhart, whose plane is lost. She also worries about personal things: a boy she likes, her looks, her relationship with her mother, father, brother, Babushka and Dedushka. She has a close and trusting relationship with Li Mei, the family's 17 year old Chinese cook. Anya writes in a *Book of Moons* (diary) and opens her personal and political world to young readers. Though fictionalized, this account of a little known period of Jewish, Russian and Chinese history fills in a blank that most don't know. Boys and the male viewpoint are well represented in this book, so it is not a book for girls only. Ages 10 and up. Naomi Morse

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