



THE CROSSING (Flukten Over Grensen)

Norway 2020 / 85 min.

Adventure movie

Recommended from age 12

Director: Johanne Helgeland

Main Cast: Anna Sofie Skarholt (Gerda)
Bo Lindquist-Ellingsen (Otto)
Samson Steine (Daniel)
Bianca Ghilardi-Hellsten (Sarah)
Henrik Siger Woldene (Per)
Luke Niete (Herman)
Julius Robin Weigel (Hans)
Kari Simonsen (Wilhelmine)

THE CROSSING tells the story of the adventurous 10-year-old Gerda and her brother Otto whose parents are in the Norwegian resistance movement during the Second World War. One day, just before Christmas in 1942, Gerda and Otto's parents are arrested, leaving the siblings on their own. Following the arrest, they discover two Jewish children, Sarah and Daniel, hidden in a secret cupboard in their basement at home. It is now up to Gerda and Otto to finish what their parents started: To help Sarah and Daniel flee from the Nazis across the border to neutral Sweden and reunite them with their parents. THE CROSSING is a film about the confidence, uncompromising loyalty and great courage you can find in even the youngest children.

Main topics:

Escape and refuge, helping each other, resistance in WWII, National Socialism, missing parents, siblings, what is the “right” thing to do? finding trust, forgiveness, apologizing.

Trigger: war, escape, fleeing, parents arrested, children left behind, dogs

Protagonists in THE CROSSING:**Siblings 01:**

Sarah and Daniel are two Jewish kids who are forced to escape from the Nazis without their parents. Their father is waiting for them in Sweden. They had planned the escape for quite some time, so Daniel knows he has to get in contact with the Norwegian resistance, which is a very dangerous endeavour. Daniel is older than Sarah and realizes that he is responsible for his sister. He trusts his intuition, acts quickly and thinks critically. He is reluctant to trust others. Sarah is the youngest of the group that is formed later. She is confident, makes friends easily and has trust in other kids. She also has faith in their strength as a group. She takes a liking to Gerda and her way of celebrating Christmas. She always inspires hope in others, even in seemingly hopeless situations.

Siblings 02:

Gerda and Otto are two kids who are going to find out that their parents and their aunt secretly work for the Norwegian resistance against the Nazis and regularly help people to escape to Sweden. Gerda is very determined, friendly and brave. She likes to tell stories and is very fond of The Three Musketeers and their motto „All for one and one for all”, which she strongly believes in as well.

The movie opens with Gerda’s voice as an old woman, telling the story in her way.

Otto initially seems receptive to the Nazis due to his best friend’s father’s attempts to get him to join the Hitler Youth. At first, he only offers his help in executing the escape because Gerda urges him to and he does not want her to flee all by herself. He decides to come along to protect his sister. After thinking about it for a long time, he realizes that helping Daniel and Sarah would be the right thing to do. In doing so he becomes the main strategist and protector of the group. Skilled in handling compasses and maps, he guides the group towards the green border.

The two pairs of siblings are mirror images of one another, considering their ages, birth order and role allocation (the responsible and severe older brother, the friendly, brave, happy-go-lucky little sister). Also in technical terms of directing and portrayal of the characters, there are several moments where the siblings mirror each other (e.g. on the train).

Gerda: “We are just kids; we are not to blame. We only have each other.”

Possible questions:

How would you describe Sarah, Daniel, Gerda and Otto?

Are there differences between the siblings? What do they have in common?

Gerda attributes character traits of the Musketeers to the four children. What are they and what do they stand for?

Secondary characters:

Cousin (Pier), aunt and parents of Gerda and Otto. All of them are involved in the Norwegian resistance against the Nazis.

People that the kids encounter on their escape, who cannot be easily categorized into “good” and “evil”, such as the policeman, the train conductor, the old woman, the young frontier guard.

The kids have very different experiences in the beginning of their escape. Daniel and Sarah are very much aware that their well-being and their freedom are at stake. Otto too knows that he finds himself in a crucial and perilous situation. Gerda is living her motto “All for one, and one for all” without compromise but maybe does not recognize the significance of her decisions. In her perception, there is a tug of war between playfulness and seriousness. The further along they go in their journey, the closer their experiences align themselves as they live through them together.

On their journey, they encounter all kinds of strangers who either support them in their escape or seek to hinder and betray them.

Possible questions:

What kinds of people do Daniel, Sarah, Gerda and Otto encounter on their escape?

How do they know who to trust?

Answers/Examples:

The **policeman** who, as their parents are arrested, whispers to them: If the children can't be found, the parents can go home.

The stern **train conductor** who understands without words that Daniel and Sarah are fleeing, lets them ride for free and makes sure they get off the train undetected by the Nazis.

The old, overly friendly **neighbour lady** who invites the kids into her home, fixes them a meal and keeps them occupied until the police, who she has notified, arrives at the house. She might look like a lovely old grandmother but has a picture of Hitler hanging in her bedroom.

The **young soldier** who finds the kids in the woods and makes a false report to his captain, thus helping them to flee. Maybe he thinks it is the right thing to do, or maybe Gerda reminds him of his little sister.

Otto's inner conflict:

Otto, who at first is undecided between being for or against Hitler and who even has attended a Nazi meeting one time, takes over the role of the aide and protector of Sarah and Daniel through Gerda, since he does not want to let her leave all by herself, and because he is convinced that it is the right thing to do. While preparing the car for the escape and hiding the kids under sacks of potatoes, he asks his cousin: "Why do you take all this risk for them? They are not like us." His cousin answers: "We are human beings and they are human beings. Helping each other is what humans do."

It takes another direct confrontation with Daniel in the old lady's home at the border, who invites them in for dinner and betrays them over to the police (Otto finds the picture of Hitler in the lady's bedroom, but keeps it to himself)—but then he becomes the guide and protector of the group and through his valiant efforts, detaches the frontier guards and makes sure the kids can make it over the border. From all the children he is the one who undergoes the biggest transformation.

Possible questions:

Why does Otto struggle to see what is "right" and what is "wrong"?

Why is Otto reluctant to offer his help initially?

Why is it so clear to Gerda what has to be done?

What makes a person change her/his opinion and stand up for other people?

Hide and seek as a game for kids and survival strategy

The motive of "hiding" comes up time and again in THE CROSSING. Right when Daniel and Sarah are introduced, they have to hide from the Nazis. Gerda makes her first appearance hiding under a table, reenacting a scene from *The Three Musketeers*. Otto keeps to himself that he has attended a Hitler Youth meeting. Gerda's and Otto's parents hide the fact that they work for the resistance and they also hide Daniel and Sarah in the basement of their family home. As the story progresses, it gets more and more difficult as well as dangerous for the children to find hiding places...on the open road right in front of the Nazis who are busy arresting a family, under sacks of potatoes in the car during the inspection by the border police, in the empty woodshed surrounded by the wintery forest, in a cave while the border police is trying to track them down.

Possible questions:

In the movie, child's play later on turns into what?

What scenes during which the kids have to hide can you think of?

What other things have to be hidden or concealed in the movie? And why?

Instructions from the parents:

For Daniel and Sarah:

When Daniel and Sarah come back and find the apartment empty, Daniel finds his father's nice shoes purposefully placed. They are the secret signal for starting the escape. The father was forced to hastily flee to Sweden, the children were supposed to get to Gerda and Otto's parents who are in the Norwegian resistance and already worked out a plan on how to enable Daniel and Sarah to join their father in Sweden.

For Gerda and Otto:

As he is arrested, Gerda's dad says to his daughter: "The Christmas presents are in the basement, take them and go to your aunt!" Then he asks Otto to take good care of Gerda. When Gerda finds Sarah and David, she understands her father's instructions to take them to her aunt, and immediately gets to work in helping them escape to Sweden.

Possible questions:

What instructions did the kids get from their parents?



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Background on the Theme of Escape in THE CROSSING:

The producer Cornelia Boysen had already rejected the script once before, because she did not want to make another film about war—but she was approached a second time with a revised edition of the script by director Johanne Helgeland. It was 2015 then and the refugee crisis, caused by the conflicts in Syria, was at its climax. Hence, due to the arrival of the hundreds of thousands of refugees in Europe, the theme of escaping and flight was very prevalent in the media and in society. Because of that, Cornelia Boysen decided to make the movie after all, showing young audiences in particular that the issues of escape and flight are persisting worldwide phenomena. Especially in times of war there were, and are, people who are forced to leave their homes, among them many children who are in need of help.

Background on Documentary vs Fiction in THE CROSSING:

The movie is based on a book by Maja Lunde and, by way of a fictional story, takes up on true events and things that happened in a similar way. This is made clear by the seamless transition from documentary material (black and white) to the actual movie in the beginning, as well as by the given clues and snippets of information about people that had actually crossed the Norwegian- Swedish border, at the end of the film. Example: The protagonists Sarah and Daniel appear for the first time during black and white passages that closely resemble a documentary. After this, the film takes colour and the fictional story begins.

Possible questions:

How does the movie begin? What do you notice, what do you see?

When does the movie transition from documentary material from the archive to the actual film? What do you notice at the end of the film?

What does "based on real events" mean?

Possible question about camera work/perspectives:

What camera settings/angles did you notice in particular? How does the camera evoke different emotions?

Examples:

- *Increase in tension at the border control by the constricted view (of the camera and of Sarah and Daniel)? Also dramatic music.*
- *Long angle camera view when entering the Johnson's house (thereby falling into the old lady's trap).*
- *Bird's eye view during the scene in the woods where the Nazis search for the children with dogs. The soldiers are shown small, from above, except for the young soldiers who helps them out.*



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The Cloak:

At first an apron, it later on becomes a cloak. It serves as a symbol for the wish to possess supernatural powers. Gerda wants to be brave, like Portos the brave Musketeer, and the cloak gives her courage. She takes off the cloak only in the shed once she realizes the severity of the situation (disillusion, look behind the curtains) as she runs out of food to share...Sarah encourages her to put it back on and to tell a story about the Three Musketeers. The transformation of the apron into a cloak can also be interpreted as an emancipatory step to break out of role stereotypes.

Wanting to dress up as a superhero is often an expression of the desire to be able to do more than is typically possible at a given age.

Questions about equipment and colours:

What did you notice about the colours in the film? (there is a lot of blue)

What clothes are very important for the story and what do you think they stand for?

- Shoes of Daniel and Sarah's father
- Gerda's cloak

Locations: hiding places, means of transportation (train, car, go by foot), villages, later mostly in the woods, bright, rough, cold, wintery nature

Time: 1942, National Socialism, Norway/Sweden

Beginning/end: Gerda's off-camera voice tells the story as an old lady, reunion of the group at the end of the film.

Interview with Johanne Helgeland: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8iDHbg_cEI