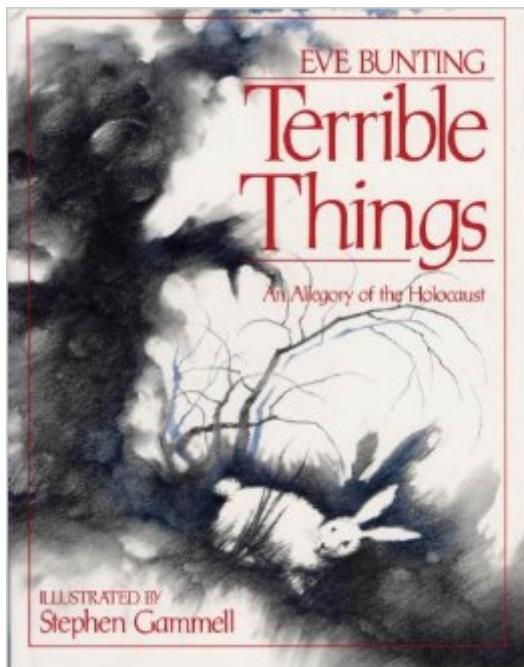


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# Terrible Things: An Allegory Of The Holocaust (Edward E. Elson Classic)



## **Synopsis**

This unique introduction to the Holocaust encourages young children to stand up for what they think is right, without waiting for others to join them. Ages 6 and up

## **Book Information**

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Age Range: 6 - 9 years

Grade Level: 1 - 4

## **Customer Reviews**

I was curious to see how Eve Bunting would turn the Holocaust into an allegory appropriate for young children, but as soon as I started reading "Terrible Things" the inspiration for her story became clear. The Terrible Things first come to the forest for every creature with feathers on its back. The frogs, squirrels, and other animals quickly declare that they do not have feathers, that the forest is better without the birds, and that they are all glad that it was not them that the Terrible Things wanted. Clearly Eve Bunting takes her text from the famous statement attributed to Martin Niemoeller. If I remember correctly Niemoeller was a pastor. He told about how in Germany the Nazis first came for the Communists, but since he was not a Communist he did not speak up. Then they came for the Jews, but again he did not speak up because he was not a Jew. The same rationale explained his silence when they came for the trade unionists and Catholics. "Then they came for me," Niemoeller said, "and by that time no one was left to speak up." Niemoeller's words might be the most famous declaration about the Holocaust and its appropriateness for being the basis of an allegory for young children should be self-evident. Bunting is not talking as much about

the mass exterminations by the Nazis as she is about the culpability of the ordinary citizens who looked the other way when terrible things happened in Germany. The rhetorical question Bunting asks is "If everybody had stood together at the first sign of evil would this have happened?" If young children do not know the answer to that question before they read "Terrible Things," they certainly will afterwards. Before she tells the story, which is illustrated by Stephen Gammell with pencil drawings, Bunting provides the moral for her tale. Acknowledging that standing up for what you know is right is not always easy, especially when you are facing someone bigger and stronger than you are, Bunting admits to her readers that it is easier to look the other way, "But if you do, terrible things can happen." The strength of "Terrible Things" is that Bunting makes the lesson Niemoeller shared about the Holocaust easily recognizable and understandable to young children.

The Holocaust is an event so vast in the scope of its horror that it can be hard for anyone, let alone a child, to understand how it happened. Eve Bunting's The Terrible Things uses an allegory of forest animals to help children (and, frankly, adults) grasp how it is that ordinary people like themselves and people they know could have allowed the Holocaust to happen. While it does not deal directly with the Holocaust itself, The Terrible Things does deal with the fear and shifting of responsibility that allowed it and similar events to happen. In the book "The Terrible Things" (which are never pictured concretely in illustrations) come for one after another group of forest animals while those not included in the roundup do nothing, until - of course - there are none left. This book is clear and understandable but not frightening or disturbing. Indeed, it is a picture book much like any other children's picture book. Hence, I wouldn't worry about introducing it to elementary age students. In fact, this book would probably be my top choice for an initial introduction to the Holocaust. This book also carries a poignant message about integrity and responsibility to persons of any age. Eve Bunting artfully captures the essence of what John Donne meant in writing "no man is an island." She also helps us to comprehend what is most incomprehensible: one of the reasons decent people allowed the evil of the Holocaust to go on.

Truth is sometimes a difficult pill to swallow. This book about forest creatures who are taken away, one species at a time, by the "Terrible Things," teaches a valuable lesson. The white rabbits think it is better not to say anything, so long as it is not their species that is being taken. Ultimately, the white rabbits are also taken. The little white rabbit who has questioned the circumstances of the other forest animals being taken, comes to the realization that he should have done something earlier. But sadly, he realizes at the end of the story that he waited too long and now it is too late to

do anything about it. This book has some valuable messages, but it would definitely not be considered light reading. In the right setting, when a parent, or teacher, is prepared to discuss the topic at great length, this book can go a long way in preparing young minds to make decisions on their own and to question when things don't seem right. It can also be a valuable tool in helping children understand how the atrocities of the holocaust came to be. ~DeeDee Fox, author and illustrator, *The Ruby Red Slippers*

Terrible Things by Eve Bunting is one of the best children's books I've read which addressed the Holocaust during WWII. A wonderful allegory using animals to explain to children the effect of terrible things like a Holocaust which happen to innocent people. Systematically different groups of animals are terrorized and removed from a clearing area in a forest. But the ones who are left say the ones who were removed were annoying. Then later they begin to say and think they are better than the rest till they are also removed. There is a wonderful poem written by Pastor Neirmueller about the Holocaust which ends, "When they came for me, there was nobody left to speak up for me." This reminded me so much of the book Terrible Things and I highly recommend this as a teaching tool for children when discussing the various Holocausts which have occurred all over the world.

I used this for a graduate class in teaching. Many school districts require teaching on the Holocaust in early grades. I would use this for K-3rd grade, but skip reading the introductory page. Then there is no mention at all of the Holocaust by name, for such a young audience, but it very expertly introduces themes of discrimination and selfishness and is a great conversation starter. I would use this book with 4th-12th grade students in study of the Holocaust or when the themes of selfishness, prejudice, etc. are appropriate.

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