# The Vanishing Sky by L. Annette Binder

## Synopsis

In 1945, as the war in Germany nears its violent end, the Huber family is not yet free of its dangers or its insidious demands. Etta, a mother from a small, rural town, has two sons serving their home country: her elder, Max, on the Eastern front, and her younger, Georg, at a school for Hitler Youth.

When Max returns from the front, Etta quickly realizes that something is not right-he is thin, almost ghostly, and behaving very strangely. Etta strives to protect him from the Nazi rule, even as her husband, Josef, becomes more nationalistic and impervious to Max's condition. Meanwhile, miles away, her younger son Georg has taken his fate into his own hands, deserting his young class of battle-bound soldiers to set off on a long and perilous journey home.

## Discussion questions

1. Books, magazines, and letters appear in various forms throughout the novel. Sometimes they are hidden away, and other times they themselves become a hiding place for something else. What role does reading and sharing stories play in the novel?
2. The Huber men are part of official, or semi-official, war efforts. What’s the difference between working as a soldier, a youth trainee, and an elderly volunteer?
3. How does Josef feel about Max’s return home, and how does Etta believe Josef feels about it? What events in Josef’s past shed light on his nationalist anger during the Second World War?
4. Eventually, Josef, Max, and Georg leave their posts. Which duties do they uphold, and which do they neglect, after their service is over?
5. With so many men gone to fight, the women who are left must often rely on each other. In which ways do women support each other? In which ways do they undercut each other?
6. How did Max treat Georg when they lived together in Heidenfeld?
7. “Of all the gifts his uncle had sent, Georg loved the coins the best” (21). What do coin tricks mean to Georg, and how do they connect to his former life in Heidenfeld? How does Georg respond when he loses his coins to the American soldier, after having protected them during his flight from the Westwall?
8. The novel is narrated in the third person, but it begins as if over Etta’s shoulder. Which other characters are part of this mode of narration (called “close” or “focalized”)? And which are described more distantly, without access to their thoughts? How do these modes of narration affect the telling of the story?
9. The Americans bring evidence of the Shoah to the captured Germans (275–76). In what ways does the novel refer to the murder of Jews, the Roma, and the disabled? How do Georg and the other boys respond when they learn of these horrors?

*Discussion questions from https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/vanishing-sky-9781635574685/*