



**Georgetown Township Public Library  
Book Discussion Guide**

*Sarah's Key*  
**Tatiana de Rosnay (2007)**

**About This Book**

Paris, July 1942: Sarah, a ten year-old girl, is brutally arrested with her family by the French police in the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup, but not before she locks her younger brother in a cupboard in the family's apartment, thinking that she will be back within a few hours.

Paris, May 2002: On Vel' d'Hiv's 60th anniversary, journalist Julia Jarmond is asked to write an article about this black day in France's past. Through her contemporary investigation, she stumbles onto a trail of long-hidden family secrets that connect her to Sarah. Julia finds herself compelled to retrace the girl's ordeal, from that terrible term in the Vel d'Hiv', to the camps, and beyond. As she probes into Sarah's past, she begins to question her own place in France, and to reevaluate her marriage and her life.

Tatiana de Rosnay offers us a brilliantly subtle, compelling portrait of France under occupation and reveals the taboos and silence that surround this painful episode.

**From:** <http://readinggroupguides.com>

**About the Author**

Tatiana de Rosnay was born in the suburbs of Paris and is of English, French and Russian descent. She is the author of nine French novels. She also writes for French *Elle*, and is a literary critic for *Psychologies* magazine. Tatiana de Rosnay is married and has two children. **Sarah's Key** is her first novel written in her mother tongue, English. She has since written **A Secret Kept**.

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## Discussion Questions

1. What did you know about France's role in World War II --- and the Vél d'Hiv round-up in particular --- before reading **Sarah's Key**? How did this book teach you about, or change your impression of, this important chapter in French history?
2. **Sarah's Key** is composed of two interweaving story lines: Sarah's, in the past, and Julia's quest in the present day. Discuss the structure and prose-style of each narrative. Did you enjoy the alternating stories and time-frames? What are the strengths or drawbacks of this format?
3. Per above: Which "voice" did you prefer: Sarah's or Julia's? Why? Is one more or less authentic than the other? If you could meet either of the two characters, which one would you choose?
4. How does the apartment on la rue de Saintonge unite the past and present action --- and all the characters --- in **Sarah's Key**? In what ways is the apartment a character all its own in?
5. What are the major themes of **Sarah's Key**?
6. de Rosnay's novel is built around several "key" secrets which Julia will unearth. Discuss the element of mystery in these pages. What types of narrative devices did the author use to keep the reader guessing?
7. Were you surprised by what you learned about Sarah's history? Take a moment to discuss your individual expectations in reading **Sarah's Key**. You may wish to ask the group for a show of hands. Who was satisfied by the end of the book? Who still wants to know --- or read --- more?
8. How do you imagine what happens after the end of the novel? What do you think Julia's life will be like now that she knows the truth about Sarah? What truths do you think she'll learn about her self?
9. Among modern Jews, there is a familiar mantra about the Holocaust; they are taught, from a very young age, that they must "remember and never forget" (as the inscription on the Rafle du Vél d'Hiv) Discuss the events of **Sarah's Key** in this context. Who are the characters doing the remembering? Who are the ones who choose to forget?
10. What does it take for a novelist to bring a "real" historical event to life? To what extent do you think de Rosnay took artistic liberties with this work?
11. Why do modern readers enjoy novels about the past? How and when can a powerful piece of fiction be a history lesson in itself ?
12. We are taught, as young readers, that every story has a "moral". Is there a moral to **Sarah's Key**? What can we learn about our world --- and our selves --- from Sarah's story?

**From:** <http://readinggroupguides.com>

**Resources for additional information about book discussion choices and authors:**

**Books & Authors** (Access through links to MeL Databases on Library's webpage.)  
<http://bna.galegroup.com/bna/>

**LitLovers.com**  
[www.litlovers.com](http://www.litlovers.com)

**Overbooked.com**  
<http://www.overbooked.com>

**Penguin.com (USA)**  
<http://www.us.penguinroup.com/static/pages/bookclubs/index.html>

**Reading Group Center**  
<http://reading-group-center.knopfdoubleday.com>

**Reading Group Guides**  
<http://www.readinggroupguides.com>

**Suggested print resources:**

*The Book Club Companion: A Comprehensive Guide to the Reading Group Experience*  
Diana Loevy  
**374.22 Loevy 2006**

*The Book Group Book: A Thoughtful Guide to Forming and Enjoying a Stimulating Book Discussion Group*  
Ellen Slezak (editor)  
**374.22 Book 2000**

*Good Books Lately: The One-Stop Resource for Book Groups and Other Greedy Readers*  
Ellen Moore and Kira Stevens  
**374.22 Moore 2004**

*Read It and Eat: A Month-by-Month Guide to Scintillating Book Club Selections and Mouthwatering Menus*  
Sarah Gardner  
**028.9 Gardner 2005**

*The Reading Group Handbook: Everything You Need to Know, From Choosing Members to Leading Discussions*  
Rachel W. Jacobsohn  
**374.22 Jacobsohn 1994**

*What Do I Read Next?* (Multi-volume set, annual editions)  
Gale Research Inc.  
**R 016.813 What**