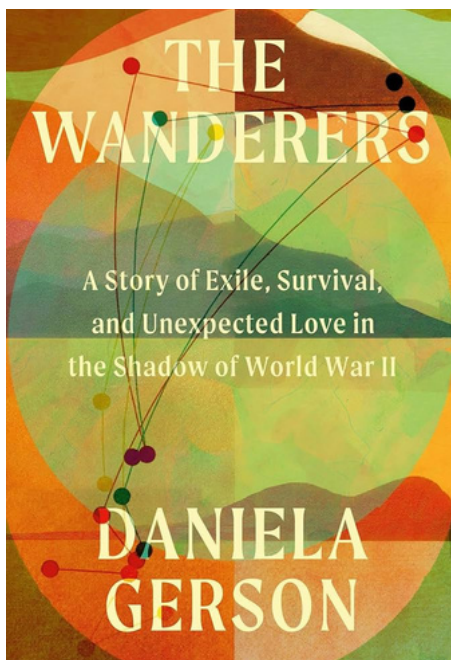


# THE WANDERERS

BY DANIELA GERSON

## *Reading and Discussion Guide*



### INTRODUCTION

*The Wanderers* by Daniela Gerson is a poignant narrative history and genealogical detective story that uncovers the overlooked experiences of Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust by fleeing into the Soviet Union. The book follows the parallel odysseys of the grandparents of Gerson and her wife, Talia Inlender, as they embark on a 5,000-mile journey through Ukrainian territories, Soviet Gulags, and Central Asia. Through contemporary reporting and historical research, Gerson explores the universal struggles of refugees forced to make impossible decisions, ultimately revealing how these legacies of exile and survival continue to resonate across generations and borders today. The questions below are organized around the book's major themes and are designed to open conversation, not close it.

### USING THIS GUIDE

#### AS A GROUP

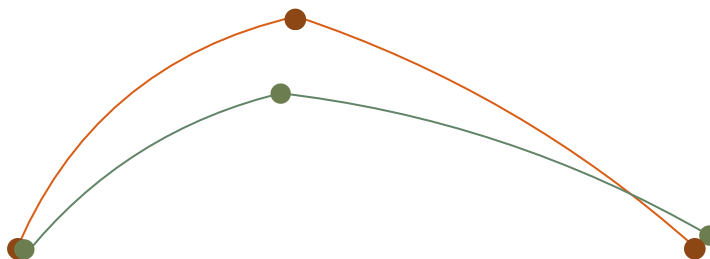
- Use the questions to guide your book club discussion.
- Divide your class into small groups and assign each one a theme to discuss, then have everyone report back.

#### ON YOUR OWN

- Use the questions as journal prompts to help you reflect on the book.

### A NOTE ON THE CONVERSATION

*The Wanderers* rewards slow reading and personal reflection. These questions are a beginning, not a syllabus. The best discussions will follow the energy, questions, and curiosity of the room.



# THE WANDERERS

BY DANIELA GERSON

## *Reading and Discussion Guide*

### MEMORY, COMMEMORATION, AND THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

1. According to Daniela, “commemorating Zamość was an inherited duty.” So much so that her family spent decades discussing and documenting their Holocaust stories. In contrast, Talia’s family often let their family stories linger in the silence of the past. What do you think drives those different choices? Is there a duty to commemorate? If yes, who does commemoration serve and who does it not serve?

2. [When it comes to the events of the Holocaust] *“we may learn the context, find all the records accessible, and we still will not know what made a person decide to go or stay [in their home]. You have to deploy your imagination, she seemed to say, to put yourself in their shoes, to comprehend what drives those very small, seemingly random choices with generation- defining consequences.”* (79)

Throughout the book, Daniela and Talia have to reconstruct their families’ pasts through archives, photographs, and conflicting second-hand accounts. What does the book suggest about the difference between remembering and imagining, and whether that distinction matters? How do we sort through conflicting accounts to arrive at something truthful? What responsibility do we have to accuracy when no one is left to correct us?

### THE ETHICS OF SURVIVAL

3. The book argues that “victimhood does not imply innocence.” What did you make of the moments when survivors made ethically complicated choices, (e.g. post-war Jewish refugees driving Germans out of their homes in order to access shelter, falsifying documents, leaving family members behind)? How do you hold space for survivors who made choices you might not have made? Where do empathy and moral accountability meet?

# THE WANDERERS

BY DANIELA GERSON

## *Reading and Discussion Guide*

### **HISTORY AND THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE**

4. The book surfaces a largely forgotten chapter in Jewish history: the migration of many Eastern European Jews to Siberia and Central Asia that, paradoxically, saved hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives. How did reading this change your understanding of survival and of who gets remembered?

5. Upon reaching Zamość, Gerson is surprised to learn that local Holocaust education is focused far more on the displacement, and killing of non-Jewish Polish citizens, who were targeted following the expulsion of the Jews from the region. As she writes, “The horrors Nazis and their henchmen inflicted on Zamość Poles were all new to me, a disorienting revelation of the brutal suffering of a people I had known as perpetrators of ethnic violence.” How does this realization resonate with you? How is your understanding of this complex history shaped by where you were raised?

6. The word “wanderers” comes from the Yiddish term the refugees used for themselves. As Gerson writes, “They were not moving fast; they were not fleeing. Rather...they were stuck wandering for years in the deserts, metaphoric and real...” How does that image of wandering reframe what we usually think of as the refugee experience?

### **LEGACY, FATE, AND CONTEMPORARY RESONANCES**

7. Daniela opens the book with an explanation of the word b’skert, Yiddish for “meant to be,” usually reserved for a soulmate. How does that idea resonate through not just her relationship with Talia, but the whole arc of their families’ survival and connection? How do you make sense of the notion of b’skert within the broader context of trauma surrounding the Holocaust?

## LEGACY, FATE, AND CONTEMPORARY RESONANCES

8. In Zamość, Daniela and Talia visit the city's old synagogue and encounter a group of young queer Poles who have made it their gathering place. In this unexpected moment, a space of Jewish memory becomes a living home for a new queer community. How did that scene land for you? What other stories of contemporary Europe surprised you in *The Wanderers*?

9. The book closes on a scene with Daniela and Talia watching their children sleep, both grateful for the life they've built and aware of how fragile that good fortune is. What do you carry away from this book about what we owe the generations that came before us and the ones that come after?

## FURTHER READING

***Survival on the Margins: Polish Jewish Refugees in the Wartime Soviet Union***

Eliyana R. Adler

***Into the East: How My Father and a Quarter Million Polish Jews Survived the Holocaust***

***Tehran Children: a Holocaust Refugee Odyssey***

Mikhal Dekel

***Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors***

Helen Epstein

***Lucky Jews: Poland's Jewish Figurines***

Erica Lehrer

***The Lucky Ones***

Ruth Franklin

# THE WANDERERS

BY DANIELA GERSON

*Reading and Discussion Guide*

## FURTHER READING

***After They Closed the Gates: Jewish Illegal Immigration to the United States, 1921-1965***

Libby Garland

***The Last Million: Europe's Displaced Persons from World War to Cold War***

David Nasaw

***The Adventures of One Yitzchok***

Yitzchok Perlov

***Caviar and Ashes***

Marci Shore

## ABOUT THE CREATORS OF THIS GUIDE

The logo for Reboot, featuring the word "REBOOT" in a bold, orange, sans-serif font. The letter "O" is stylized with a horizontal line through its center.

Reboot is an arts and culture non-profit that reimagines and reinforces Jewish thought and traditions, offering an inviting mix of discovery, experience and reflection. Through Reboot Studios, our media investment and development arm, we fund and produce projects in television, film, theater, podcasts, music, publishing and beyond. We also provide a variety of educational experiences and resources connected to the arts.

[www.rebooting.com](http://www.rebooting.com)