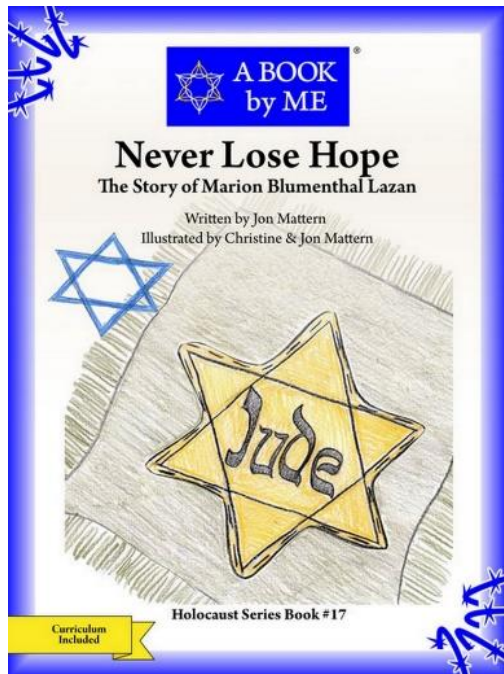


Never Lose Hope Reader's Theater

Based on the book by John & Christine Mattern

This title found in Power Girls book set at understandingworks.org



#determination

Marion Blumenthal-Lazan was a Jewish girl whose family survived a concentration camp. She played a game in camp, pretending that if she found four perfect pebbles her family would live. They did survive, but her father died later, leaving his widow to immigrate to America with their two children. Marion is a speaker on the subject of the Holocaust and is known world-wide.

Cast:

Narrator 1

Pebble 1 (smooth, texture, representing Marion's mother, Ruth)

Narrator 2

Pebble 2 (brown color, representing Marion's father, Walter)

Marion

Pebble 3 (slim shape, representing Marion's brother, Albert)

Pebble 4 (small size, representing Marion)

PROPS & COSTUMES: Keep these simple. Marion can have a ribbon in her hair to designate a young girl. Each Pebble character can be wrapped in paper that is the color and shape given in the script.



Christine Mattern, Marion Blumenthal Lazan
and author John Mattern

Scene 1

Bremen and Hanover, Germany

Narrator 1: Marion Blumenthal was born December 20, 1934, in Bremen, Germany. There, she had a loving home with her parents, Ruth and Walter, and her older brother, Albert. Her grandparents lived with them in a three-story house in the center of town. Her father was a successful businessman, operating a clothing and shoe shop below their living quarters, while her mother performed secretarial duties for the business. Like other little girls her age, Marion often played games with her friends, such as hopscotch, marbles and jump rope. They were a very close German-Jewish family.

Narrator 2: In 1938, after Marion's grandparents died, Marion's father was forced to sell his business for very little money, and the Blumenthals moved to Hanover, Germany. With Hitler in power, life for them, as for other Jews all over Germany, had become increasingly difficult. They were banned from public places such as schools, restaurants, parks and theaters, and they could no longer own property. Fears increased when synagogues were destroyed, and Jewish-owned shops and homes were ransacked.

Narrator 1: The move to Hanover was only temporary. Marion's parents, fearing that matters could grow even worse than they already were, began to make plans to leave Germany. Marion knew leaving her home would be very hard, but she was eager to go to the new country where they had planned to settle, the United States. There she knew her family would be safe.

Scene 2

Bergen-Belsen concentration camp

Narrator 2: Before the Blumenthal's had a chance to leave for America, they were sent to the Westerbork detention camp in the Netherlands. By 1940 this camp became crowded with the arrival of other refugees. Marion couldn't help but notice the barbed-wire fences that soon hemmed them in, and entire families were sometimes sent away in cattle cars. To where, she could only guess! Four years later, nine-year-old Marion's own family was sent by train to the dreaded concentration camp, Bergen-Belsen. All their plans to escape from Germany now seemed only a distant dream.

Marion: What has my family done to deserve being in this terrible place? What? Well, I must accept the fact that we are here now and make the best of it. I am lucky that I can spend time with my mother, Ruth, in this damp, overcrowded camp. My father, Walter, and my older brother, Albert, are also here. This is truly a horrible place. We often stand for hours in all kinds of weather with little or no food or clothing. As the cold winter winds seep into my body and soul, I'm not sure I can survive much longer. To keep up my spirits, I have begun to hunt for four perfect pebbles. I suppose it seems like a silly game, but my imagination is the only thing I have to play with here...and pebbles scattered throughout the grounds. I pretend that if I can find four pebbles in this dreadful place, it will mean that my family will remain whole and survive long enough to get to America. I MUST keep pretending.

Scene 3

Near Marion's Barracks at Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp

Pebble 1: Here I am, just a small part of the earth, yet I've endured so much in my ancient lifetime. I carry many memories of this land and this people. But, what surrounds me now is so unpleasant. As the thoughts of those who come near beg my attention, I am amazed how these humans endure such a vile place. Here comes little Marion. I particularly notice her because she seems to notice me.

Marion: I can't believe it! Here's a smooth pebble that reminds me of my mother, Ruth. She always tries to keep me thinking of hopeful things in order for life operate a little more smoothly for me. She even shares what little food she has with me and pulls me close at night to keep me warm. She picks lice from my hair and clothes so that I won't get typhus, like so many in this camp. Yes, I'll keep this pebble with me to remind me of my wonderful mother. **[Marion pretends to pick up a pebble]**

Pebble 2: So many feet have stepped on and over me without even noticing my beautiful brown color. Actually, there are many shades of brown in me. I like to think that these colors come from the much larger stone with which I was buried and tumbled, and finally broken off to be buried and tumbled again throughout the centuries. Though I am small now, I am a solid object in this place where so much changes every day.

Marion: Oh, there's a pebble that reminds me of my father Walter! **[Marion picks up a second pebble]** Its brown color reminds me that Papa often wore brown suits, and for sure he sold suits and shoes in his store that were that color. His father and mother, Opa and Oma, ran the shop that was below our living quarters even before Papa and Mama ran it. For over forty years, the Blumenthal's provided good and fair services in our community! Why was my father forced out of business and mistreated simply because Hitler hated Jews? Well, I'm going to keep this pebble in my pocket to remember that my dear Papa is here with me, as he has always been.

Pebble 3: How I wish I was round and smooth like other pebbles. Instead, I have a long, slim shape, not a round one, which is more common. I am ignored by everyone except a little girl, who stops to nudge me from time to time with the toe of her old, worn-out shoe. She grows thinner and thinner with each passing day. Those who look like her often disappear from this revolting place. I have no idea what happens to them. Unlike us pebbles, I don't think humans live very long, especially not here.

Marion: I've passed by this pebble so many times. I almost tripped on it once, but maybe that was because the soles of my shoes are coming off. Wait! **[Marion picks up a third pebble]** I think this pebble can stand for my brother Albert who's here in this camp with me. He's two years older than I and has grown almost as tall as my father! From the time I was a toddler, he has played tricks on me, sometimes surprising me just like this oddly-shaped pebble. But, he also helped me with my school work, and he protected me from some bullies at school when they called me a "dirty Jew." I think I'll keep this slender stone to remind me of Albert and what a good, big brother he has been. It will help me keep hoping that he survives this place.

Pebble 4: I'm so much smaller than other pebbles that I hardly think anyone even notices me. I'm often covered with dust, and no one notices that I am actually white in color. I lie here near where humans line up for something to eat. It smells terrible, so I don't think whatever they get is very nourishing. I'm glad I don't need food! Oh, my! Someone is bending down to pick me up. Maybe I am not as small and unnoticeable as I thought!

Marion: So far, I have three pebbles for each of my family members, but now I need a pebble that stands for me. **[Marion picks up a fourth pebble]** Oh, this little dusty one...wait, if I rub off the dirt it is a beautiful white color...it's just the right size for me! When I am so hungry and my only food is a thin soup of turnips, potato peelings and meat gristle, I will touch this pebble and hope that I will survive the horrors of this camp along with the rest of my family.

Narrator 1: Yes, indeed! The four pebbles that Marion found filled her spirit with hope. All four members of Marion's family DID survive. When they were liberated by the Russian Army in April, 1945, Marion weighed only 35 pounds! But, everyone's health improved when the family relocated to a farmhouse. Sadly, two months after liberation, Marion's father became ill with typhus and died.

Narrator 2: Finally, in 1948 Marion, her brother and her mother were able to do what they had always dreamed of, immigrate to America. They settled in Peoria, Illinois, and Marion started to school. Of course, she found school difficult because she had missed so much, but she ranked eighth in her class of 265 students by the time she graduated from high school. In 1953 she met and married a young man named Nathaniel Lazan and moved to New York. They now have three children, nine grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. Marion was determined to survive the war, and four pebbles helped to remind her of that hope. She says, "...by having perseverance, determination, faith, and above all hope, one can overcome almost any adversity, obstacle or difficult situation."