

ABOUT

the Author

BIBI DUMON TAK is a Dutch author who has written several non-fiction titles for children, beginning with *The Cow Book* in 2001. In her books, Dumon Tak blends literary technique with fact to produce stories that are both compelling and accurate. *Soldier Bear* is her first novel based on a historical event. Bibi lives in the Netherlands.

the Illustrator

PHILIP HOPMAN was born the youngest son of a tulip farmer. But he chose a career in children's books instead of tulips, and he has illustrated more than 150 books since 1988, including *Earth to Stella* (Clarion) and *22 Orphans* (Kane/Miller). Philip also lives in the Netherlands.



PRAISE FOR

Soldier Bear

"This is smoothly translated and engagingly illustrated with sketches and helpful maps. Funny, fresh, and heartwarming, it doesn't ignore the horrors of war but concentrates on the joy of having an animal friend."

— *Kirkus Reviews*

"Hopman's expressive grease-pencil illustrations add to the story's accessibility, grounding the proceedings with charm."

— *Booklist*

SOLDIER BEAR

Written by Bibi Dumon Tak
Illustrated by Philip Hopman

Hardcover ISBN: 978-0-8028-5375-2 ❖ \$13.00

5¼" x 8½" ❖ 144 pages ❖ Ages 8–12

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If you have any suggestions for using
Soldier Bear
with young readers,
we would be happy to hear from you.

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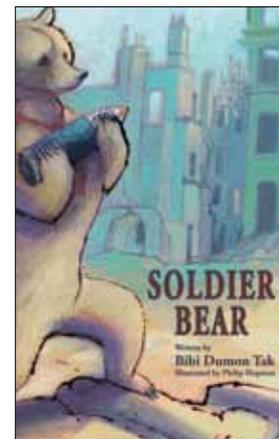
This guide was written by Ed Sullivan,
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An imprint of Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

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"Look!" Lolek cried. "That sack's m-m-moving."
Curious, Peter walked over.
"Don't" Lolek called. "It's a trap."
Peter didn't pay attention to Lolek, but went
ahead and opened the sack. They all held their breath.
Two beady eyes appeared, blinking in the blazing
sunlight. The eyes were surrounded by dull, pale brown
fur. Peter didn't look back, but picked up the dusty little
creature. It fit perfectly in his arms.

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

- ❖ Friendship
- ❖ Human-animal relationships
- ❖ Loyalty
- ❖ World War II

Eerdmans Books for Young Readers
Discussion Guide

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE READING THE BOOK

1. Based on only the title and book cover, what do you think the book is about?
2. What are some clubs, teams, organizations, or other communities you have been part of that have a mascot? What purpose do you think mascots serve? Why might they be important to a military unit?
3. Research what happened to Poland during World War II. How did the Polish army contribute to the war?



VOCABULARY

Look up the following words in the dictionary: cubicle, culprit, hygienic, immobile, nuisance, pierogi, provocation, quayside.



QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON AFTER READING THE BOOK

1. How did Polish soldiers end up in Iran?
2. What makes Peter and Stanislav want to adopt the bear as a mascot? Why do they name him Private Voytek?
3. How is Private Voytek able to win over the

sergeant and commanding officer, even though they don't want him in the unit?

4. What are some examples of the trouble that Private Voytek causes for the unit?
5. What are some things Private Voytek does that make him a valuable member of the unit?
6. How does Private Voytek get along with each of the other unit mascots?
7. Do you think animals can have personalities like people? What are some words you would use to describe Voytek's personality?
8. What bad habits does Voytek pick up from humans?
9. Why are the soldiers unable to return to Poland when the war ends?
10. What kind of reception does Private Voytek receive in Scotland? What honor is bestowed on him?
11. Private Voytek is recognized for "providing great support for the boys on the front who fought for our freedom" (page 135). In what ways did Voytek provide great support to the soldiers?
12. Before leaving Scotland for Poland, the soldiers arrange for Voytek to be placed in the Edinburgh Zoo. Do you think leaving Voytek behind was the right thing to do? How do you think the soldiers felt about having to leave him behind?

ACTIVITIES

1. Use an atlas to locate where events in the story happened. Draw or copy a map that includes all the countries where the book takes place, and then draw arrows to show where the characters traveled.
2. The author explains in the afterword that Voytek was a Syrian brown bear. Use electronic and print resources to find out more about this kind of bear: its physical characteristics, habitat, endangered species status, etc. Create a poster that shows what you have learned. Make sure to include pictures.
3. Create a logo for the unit in which Private Voytek served, incorporating the bear's image.
4. Choose a favorite chapter or scene in the story, and create a storyboard or comic that retells that part of the book. Using only drawings and minimal or no words, try to convey what happens in the story.
5. When the unit arrives in Italy, they are sent to support a battle at a place called Monte Cassino. Use print and electronic resources to find out the significance of this battle in World War II.

