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# The Reader By Bernhard Schlink: Critical Response

Title of the text for analysis: The Reader by Bernhard Schlink, 1995.

Part to which the task refers: Part 3 – Literature: texts and contexts.

My critical response will:

- Explore the importance of context in The Reader. Explain why different audiences might interpret The Reader differently.
- Comment on the position of German people born shortly after World War II (Nachgeborenen). Explain their relevance both in The Reader and now.
- Explore how the relevancy of Schlink's characters would be different today.
- Conclude by stating that Schlink's intention of showcasing the weight that Nachgeborenen carry due to the actions, or inaction, of their ancestors is still relevant today, though that the setting of The Reader would not be seen as relevant to all audiences.

## Critical Response

Even after World War II had finished, it still had lasting effects on the German youth. They were taken aback by what the previous generation had allowed. They felt like their parents turned a blind eye to the atrocities that happened in Germany during the war. Through The Reader, Bernhard Schlink, born in 1944, shows the weight that he and other Nachgeborenen carried through the character of Michael Berg. The Reader displays the difficulties that Nachgeborenen face when confronted by the remnants of Germany's actions, or lack thereof during World War II. This essay will explore how the characters, plot, and setting of Schlink's The Reader would differ or remain the same if it were written today.

Understanding the context of The Reader heavily affects the way you perceive The Reader, and thus affects its relevance. This also means that different audiences will perceive The Reader differently. The Reader's story starts in 1958, World War II had ended and children, like Michael Berg, that were born during the war the war had grown up. These children, Nachgeborenen, often had a hard time coming to terms with what had happened during World War II. They could not comprehend how their parents allowed the Holocaust to take place. An example of this feeling can be seen when Michael Berg finds out that Hanna, who he had become emotionally attached to before, worked as an SS guard; he starts feeling guilty for having loved somebody that was a part of what he despises. If the reader is knowledgeable about how the Nachgeborenen felt The Reader will highlight just how difficult it actually was for them to comprehend what had happened during World War II. However, if the reader is not knowledgeable of Nachgeborenen, The Reader might not seem as relevant; it will seem like the story is solely about an affair that had a lasting impact on somebody's life, which is less relevant than a story about the lasting effects that wars have on people, even after that war has finished. This shows that for The Reader to be relevant, it is necessary for the reader to know

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about the context.