



## Don't You Know There's a War On?

By Avi

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World War II is on everyone's mind and in every headline, and Howie Crispers has a hunch that his school principal is a spy. With a little snooping around, Howie finds out something even more alarming. Principal Lomister may not be a spy, but he is plotting to get rid of Howie's favorite teacher. Howie's dad is fighting Nazis overseas, and his mom is working hard to support the war effort, so Miss Gossim is the only person Howie can depend on. With the help of his friends, and a plan worthy of radio show superhero Captain Midnight, Howie intends to save Miss Gossim!

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## **Don't You Know There's a War On? By Avi Bibliography**

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Sixteen-year-old Howie Crispers narrates Avi's (*The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*) poignant, funny coming-of-age tale set in Brooklyn during WWII. For the facts, readers can consult Stephen E. Ambrose's excellent volume (reviewed below), but for a flavor of everyday life on the homefront, they will appreciate Howie's recollections of his experiences as a fifth grader during one pivotal week in March 1943. The hero juggles everything from failing math grades and air raid blackouts to a crush on his teacher and worries about his merchant marine father, criss-crossing the North Atlantic. Howie also suspects his principal of being a Nazi spy, and follows him into a brownstone one morning where he overhears plans to fire his beloved teacher, Miss Rolanda Gossim (he thinks of her at night when fear overtakes him: "She was my emergency brake, my life raft, my parachute, my own private rescue squad"). How he "saves" Miss Gossim makes for a smashing story enlivened by the added emotional texture of a boy dealing with wartime realities (particularly the death of his "bestest" friend Denny's father) and romance (Miss Gossim is actually married to a missing airman and pregnant). Howie's voice, firmly rooted in Brooklyn ("You'd feel worse than a Giants fan in Ebbets Field," he says of disappointing Miss Gossim), takes on the inflections and slang of the era. The novel ends on an upbeat note, with 16-year-old Howie celebrating the end of the war and still carrying a torch for Miss Gossim. Ages 8-12.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 4-6-Howard Bellington Crispers looks back from his 16-year-old perspective to 1943 when he grappled with issues of friendship, fear, love, and loss. At age 11, Howie and his friend Denny share a crush on their teacher and they suspect their principal is a Nazi spy. However, in a sleuthing expedition, Howie learns that the principal's real perfidy hits closer to home-he is urging the firing of Miss Gossim. Howie visits his teacher and she tells him the reason for her pending dismissal-she is secretly married to an army pilot and is pregnant. Taking up her cause and disregarding his promise to keep her secret, Howie circulates a petition to stop the firing, embarrassing the young woman but securing her a reprieve until the end of the school year. Avi packs the story with authentic details of World War II in Brooklyn, NY, augmented by newspaper headlines. He peppers it with funny scenes, lots of slang dialogue between the boys, and a keen sensitivity to the adolescent psyche. Layered into the plot is the drama of the boys' absent fathers. Howie's returns but Denny's is killed, and the bittersweet ending reflects the protagonist's regret over losing Denny's friendship when his own family moves to Long Island. Though lacking in originality, this quick-moving, easily read story will be enjoyed by many readers. A more serious, complex, and in-depth treatment of a similar theme can be found in Janet Taylor Lisle's beautifully wrought *The Art of Keeping Cool* (Atheneum, 2000).

*Marie Orlando, Suffolk Cooperative Library System, Bellport, NY*

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 4-7. The war at home is both setting and story in this affectionate comedy told in the immediate voice of Howie Crispers, who looks back a few years to 1943 when he was 11 and living in Brooklyn, New York. Howie has a crush on his wonderful teacher, Miss Gossim, and he's horrified to discover, while spying on the hateful school principal, that Miss Gossim is to be fired. Howie and his best friend have always imagined that the principal was a Nazi spy, but they don't know why Miss Gossim has to go. The spying and the

secrets add to the fun, but this is mostly a story about the daily life of kids on the home front. Every chapter begins with a page of dramatic newspaper headlines about the war, which provide context for Howie's worries about his dad fighting in Europe; Howie knows families who have lost loved ones. The times described are hard, but Avi keeps the storytelling light, with fast dialogue and lots of lively detail about a time when grown-ups went away and "it was kids who had the job of trying to keep things normal. Know what I'm saying?" Like Avi's *Who Was That Masked Man, Anyway?* (1992), this is not so much about war as about ordinary life. *Hazel Rochman*

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## **Users Review**

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#### **Darrell Fowler:**

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