

The Children's War by Monique Charlesworth.  
Fourth Estate 2004.

The authors of novels set during the Second World War have taken any number of approaches from the almost infinite possibilities available to them. The Children's War by Monique Charlesworth is not unique in taking a perspective that brings children to the fore, but this is one of the best novels of this genre written for adults that I have yet read.

Two families, one Aryan German, the other half-German and half-Jewish are linked together, and the story unfolds as the events of the War change for ever the lives of the two child protagonists, Ilse and Nicolai. In spite of the link between them (you'll have to read the book) they never meet, and their lives develop in different countries.

Ilse is undoubtedly the chief figure of the book, child of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother, sent away from Germany to escape persecution but ending up in France. Her heroism, nerve and honour are beautifully described and she is ably supported by a rich supporting cast of subordinate characters.

Monique Charlesworth writes with great power and effectiveness, and has created a story that absolutely cries out to be made into a feature film. The Children's War will stay in my mind for a long time.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh