



# READING GROUP GUIDE

**Adolfo Kaminsky, A Forger's Life**  
By Sarah Kaminsky  
Translated by Mike Mitchell

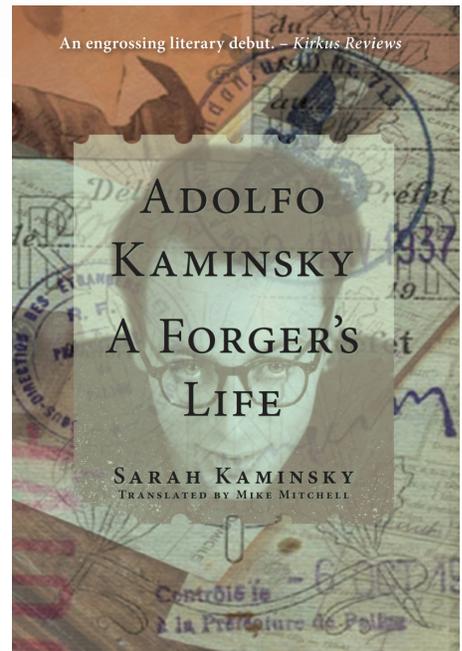
## Introduction

Best-selling author Sarah Kaminsky takes readers through her father Adolfo Kaminsky's perilous and clandestine career as a forger for the French Resistance, the Algerian Independence Movement, and numerous other humanitarian causes of the twentieth century.

Recruited as a young Jewish teenager for his knowledge of dyes, Kaminsky became the primary forger for the French Resistance during the Nazi occupation of Paris. After the war, while working as a professional photographer, Kaminsky spent the next twenty-five years secretly producing thousands of counterfeit documents for immigrants, exiles, underground political operatives, and pacifists across the globe.

Kaminsky kept his past cloaked in secrecy well into his eighties, until his daughter convinced him to share the details of the life-threatening work he did on behalf of people fighting for justice and peace throughout the world.

*Adolfo Kaminsky, A Forger's Life* includes black and white artistic images by Adolfo Kaminsky from recent exhibitions taken during the 1940s and 1950s in Paris.



***Adolfo Kaminsky, A Forger's Life* is worthy of the best spy novels and tells the story of Sarah Kaminsky's father, the genius-forger who committed his know-how and convictions to serve the French Resistance during World War II, saving thousands of Jewish families, and many others over the course of 30 years for various causes around the world.**

—TED.com

Watch the author's TED talk here: [https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah\\_kaminsky?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_kaminsky?language=en)



## REVIEWS

### Reader's Choice Award Elle Magazine, France

An engrossing literary debut. [...] Writing in Adolfo's voice gives this suspenseful narrative candor and immediacy.

– Kirkus Reviews

A thrilling, novelesque account of how a young man became a sought-after subversive force. [...] A triumphant wartime biography, full of heroism and near-alchemistic craftiness.

– Foreword Reviews

In the shadows, Kaminsky lived the brightest hours of the Resistance.

– Le Monde

Sarah Kaminsky has done a masterful job. A suspenseful, captivating, and thrilling account of an exceptionally brave and daring man.... So absorbing that I read it in one sitting.

– Don Messerschmidt, Portland Book Review

If made into a film, the life of Adolfo Kaminsky would have all the ingredients of suspense thriller, war movie, historical tragedy, intimate drama and scenes of terror.

– O Globo

A humanist forger, a utopian outlaw, the Robin Hood of false papers, preparing passports and identity cards for the world's oppressed.

– The Jerusalem Post

**Subject of The New York Times video "The Forger," winner of a World Press Photo Award for long-form documentary.**



## READING GROUP QUESTIONS

1. In a sense, Adolfo Kaminsky sacrificed a large part of his own freedom to help others secure theirs. How did this sacrifice pay off in the long run?
2. What do you think of Adolfo's decision to continue doing such dangerous work after he had a family? How did he try and balance his duties as a father with his commitment to human rights?
3. If you had a unique talent that could save the lives of thousands of people but that puts your own life at risk, do you think you could do it? Why or why not? Discuss examples of people who put their lives on the line in the course of their chosen professions and how that sense of duty compares to Adolfo's.
4. Most of the work Adolfo did as a forger was illegal, but was done in order to save lives. What do you think this suggests about the nature of morality and laws?
5. Some of the reasons Adolfo kept working as a forger were because of his own suffering, the suffering he witnessed, and the many lives he could not save. What are your thoughts on this Jewish idea of having a "duty to remember"? What responsibilities do we, as members of various societies, religions, cultures, etc., have to the generations that came before us?
6. Many stories in the book concern children. How do the effects of war and danger specifically on children motivate the writing of this book, and how do they thread together Adolfo's life story itself?
7. Where are the gaps in the story of Adolfo's life? What does his daughter Sarah decide to leave unwritten or unspoken, and why? How do these gaps, or "lacunae," provide other kinds of evidence or information? What clues do they leave the reader of another story, behind the one told?
8. What traces or influence of Adolfo's work as a forger and what he witnessed do you see in his photographic work as an artist? What are some of the traits of an artist he showed during his career as a forger?
9. Throughout his life, Adolfo lived in many places, using different names. How do you think this affects a person's sense of self? How does it affect a person's sense of home? One's allegiances and values?



10. What were some factors that caused Adolfo to move to Algeria? Where did his sympathies and allegiances lie, and what experiences led him to make those decisions?
11. Before you had read the book, what did you picture the life of a forger to be like? How were those expectations met or how did they end up being different when you learned about the reality of such a life?
12. Were there any parts in the book that led you to reflect on current events? Which and how?
13. What new elements of the periods of history discussed in the book did you learn about from Sarah and Adolfo's telling of them, or from the translator's notes?
14. Why did Adolfo and his wife Leïla move the family from Algeria to France? What difficulties were there for the family when they decided to stay in Paris? How does that situation reflect on immigration of families across borders today?
15. Oppressive governments and regimes exist today just as they did when Adolfo began his work as a forger. Why do you think the world continues to struggle with violence and discrimination? Who can make a difference, both locally and globally, to make a better world?
16. In interviews Adolfo has given since the publication of the book, Adolfo insists that he is "not a hero but a zero." Does Adolfo qualify as a hero? Why or why not, in your opinion? What does it mean that Adolfo considers himself a zero? Who do you think his heroes might be?



**Sarah Kaminsky** was born in 1979 in Sidi M'hamed, Algeria. She is a French actor, screenwriter and author. She was 3 years old when she immigrated to France with her father Adolfo, of Russian Jewish origins and carrying an Argentinean passport, and her mother Leïla, a Tuareg Algerian (Berber). Her first book is the biography of her father, Adolfo Kaminsky, published by Éditions Calmann-Lévy in 2009. It has sold over 12,000 copies in France and has since been translated into Italian, Hebrew, German, Spanish, Turkish, and Arabic. She lives in Paris.



Adolfo and Sarah, 2009.

**Adolfo Kaminsky** was born in 1925 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He made his living as a photographer in various fields: postcards, advertising photos, and reportage. He took numerous photographs of works of art for exhibition catalogues and posters, and he was the regular photographer for the painters who were the precursors of kinetic art such as Antonio Asis, Jesús Soto, Carmelo Ardenquin, and Yacov Agam. As a specialist for giant-format photography he produced photos for the film sets of Alexandre Trauner, the famous French set designer for Marcel Carné, René Clair and others. He also took thousands of artistic photographs through his life, but has only recently started exhibiting them. He lives in Paris.



Translator **Mike Mitchell** has won several awards for his English translations of books from French and German. He was born in Rochdale, England in 1941 and has been active as a translator for over thirty years. He is the recipient of the Schlegel-Tieck Prize for translations of German works published in Britain, has won the British Comparative Literature Association translation competition three times, and has been shortlisted for many awards including the French-American Translation Prize, the Weidenfeld prize, the Aristeion prize, the Kurt Wolff prize, and the Crime Writers' Association Gold Dagger. In 2012 the Austrian Ministry of Education, Art and Culture awarded him a lifetime achievement award as a translator of literary works. He lives in Scotland.



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DoppelHouse Press is based in Los Angeles, a home to many exiles and immigrants from all over the world, which makes us further able to reflect on global conditions, cultures, politics, and crises that disperse creative people to new homelands, where they often flourish, transform local vernaculars, and influence future generations.

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