

Teacher Timesavers

ISBN: 1-897157-74-6
Ref: 413

Grades 6 - 9

The **HOLOCAUST**

Using Biographies and Novels

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Introduction

The Holocaust is written for Grades 6 to 9. Teaching a topic such as this can be very difficult, but using novels and biographies provides background knowledge and an introduction for discussion. It is by discussing what happened and why it happened we can make our students aware of these events and hope that they will determine that such a thing can never happen again.

The unit consists of activities for historical novels, autobiographies and biographies. These vary in content and due to the subject matter descriptions are very graphic.

There are comprehension activities for each book, a section called *Thinking About What You Have Read*, and a list of activities ranging from mapping skills to creative writing. The unit also contains a selection of activity cards that can be used with any novel or biography.

Also included is a comprehensive list of novels, suggestions for teaching the unit, tracking sheets, a rubric for evaluation with an evaluation sheet, and answer keys to the comprehension activities.

Suggestions for Using the Unit

The unit should be introduced by discussing genocide: what it means and other instances of large numbers of people being killed because of racial or religious differences. This is often called “ethnic cleansing” in today’s world.

The books chosen for detailed study vary in difficulty and are a mixture of biography and historical fiction. The content is, of necessity, very graphic and choosing the books to be assigned must take into consideration the maturity of the students.

The work for the books consists of comprehension questions requiring answers in complete sentences. A section called *Thinking About What You Have Read* asks for the students’ thoughts and opinions, so answers for this will vary. It is stressed that the students must justify their opinions and ideas. Some books also have a section containing True or False Questions. Additional activities ranging from locating and labeling places on a map to creative writing are also included.

The set of twenty-eight activity cards, which can be used with any book, should be photocopied, (it is helpful to make more than one set), mounted on card and laminated if possible.

An excerpt from *Whispers From the Ghettos* by Kathy Kacer and Sharon E. McKay could be read to the whole class as an introduction. This is a collection of recollections of life in the ghettos by young people who survived the Holocaust.

Depending on the books available to you, these can be assigned or students given a free choice. You might wish to assign the books according to the reading and maturity level of the students. Students could be put into groups and the books assigned accordingly.

Students with reading difficulties may find easier to work with a partner or a peer tutor.

Students should keep their work in a folder or binder, and it is important that the tracking sheets be kept up to date. This will enable to the teacher to see how much work is being accomplished.

For research purposes the student should be encouraged to use a wide variety of resources: reference books, encyclopedia and the Internet. It is a good idea to point out, once again, that when using reference material it is important to put things into their own words.

Allow time for discussion. Students reading the same book can discuss their thoughts and feeling as a group, and time can also be spent in whole class discussion.

Resources

Note: Some of these books may be out of print, but may still be available through the public library in your area. I encouraged my students to use the public library as a resource. Most libraries will welcome visits from schools and this can be used as an opportunity to obtain library cards.

This list is a selection of the many books available on this subject

Non-Fiction

Biographies

Anne Frank and the Children of the Holocaust - Lee, Carol Ann
After the Holocaust - Howard Greenfield
The Star Houses - Stuart Ross
Hiding Edith - Kathy Kacer
Hidden Child - Isaac Millman
I Will Plant You A Lilac Tree - Laura Hillman
Whispers From the Ghettos - Kathy Kacer & Sharon E. McKay
Hiding to Survive - Maxine B. Rosenberg
Luba: The Angel of Bergen-Belsen - Michelle Roehm McCann
The Lost Childhood: A World War II Memoir - Yehuda Nir
Rescued Images: Memories of Childhood in Hiding - Ruth Jacobsen

Historical Fiction

Once - Morris Gleitsman
Then - Morris Gleitsman

ANSWER KEY

Understanding the Novel

1.
 1. Bruno said he would miss his home and his friends.
 2. Father has been given a new job in Out With (Auschwitz) by the Fury (Fuhrer.)
2.
 1. The new house was smaller, isolated, didn't feel like home and there was no one to play with.
 2. Maria is the family's maid who came with them to the new house.
3.
 1. Gretel's friends teased him because he was small for his age.
4.
 1. Beyond the garden they saw rows of huts, enclosed by a high fence that was topped with barbed wire. There was no grass or trees, and hundreds of men and boys wearing striped pajamas and caps were inside the fence.
 2. Gretel said they must be in the countryside and these were the people who raised food for the people in the cities. Bruno disagreed because he could not see any animals, and there would be animals in the countryside.
5.
 1. *Answers may vary.*
Father has rules that must be obeyed without question. He always feels that he knows best. All the soldiers obey him. Everyone, including Bruno, seems to be somewhat afraid of him.
 2. He thinks Father must have done something bad and he has been sent to Out With (Auschwitz) as a punishment for this.
6.
 1. Father had taken her in and given her a job, a home and food when she needed it. He paid for her mother's hospital care and funeral. Maria's mother had been Grandmother's dresser when she was an actress.
 2. Bruno treats Maria as a friend and talks to her politely. Gretel says she is just the maid and orders her around.
7. *(Answers may vary.)*
 1.
 - there is an atmosphere around the Lieutenant that makes Bruno feel cold and uncomfortable.
 - he walks around the house as if he owns it.
 - he called Bruno "little man."
 - Bruno feels ashamed of the way the lieutenant speaks to Pavel.
 2. Pavel is the man who peels the vegetables and waits at table. He is Jewish and was a doctor before being sent to the camp. When Bruno falls from the tire swing, Pavel dresses the cut.
 3. Bruno feels she would be taking credit for something she had not done.
8.
 1. Grandmother had been an actress before her marriage. She wrote little plays that the children performed. She made costumes for them, and Bruno liked dressing up and becoming another character.
 2. Grandfather was proud of his son's promotion and told him he was a patriot. Grandmother was ashamed and wondered where she had gone wrong. She left the house in anger and Bruno rarely saw her after that.

What World Is Left by Monique Polak

Thinking About What You Have Read

1. When Hitler came to power in Germany, many Jews fled to other countries believing they would be safe.
However, when the Nazis invaded these countries they found themselves to be in danger again.
Which countries were invaded by the Nazis?
Which countries would have been safe for the fleeing Jews?
2. Hannelore's mother appears to think it unfair that the Van Raalte family should be given better living quarters.
Is she justified in thinking this?
Her daughter says that everyone in Theresienstadt has to work for the Nazis so Mr Van Raalte isn't doing anything wrong?
What do you think?
How might you feel if you were Hannelore's mother?
3. Mr. Van Raalte says he will do anything to ensure his family's survival and that is why he paints signs and murals for the Nazis.
In your opinion is he right?
Do you think he would do anything, or are there some things he would not do?
Where do you think he would draw the line concerning what he would do?
4. What do you think would be the hardest thing about being imprisoned in a place like Theresienstadt?
Life was very hard, but what made it bearable for Anneke's family?
5. What is your opinion of the actions of the Danish Red Cross?
Do you think they were fooled by the Embellishment of Theresienstadt?
Why or why not?
6. The poem that Anneke and her father recited said,

“Think what world is left you, and how lovely is that part.”

What does it mean?

C. Activities

1. Make a list of the places mentioned in the book.
Use an atlas to locate these places, then mark and label them on a map of Europe.
Some place names have been changed and you may need to research these on the internet to find them.
2. What is a family tree?
Jack said his family had eighty members, most of whom perished in the war.
He did not show us these members on a family tree, but we know it would have been extensive.
Create your family tree.
Begin with your grandfather and grandmother and continue it to you and any siblings you may have.
It will be even more interesting if you can begin with your great grandparents.
3. Jack mentions lice several times.
What are lice?
Research this topic and write a paragraph giving information about them.
4. Starvation was a major problem for the prisoners, and they spent a great deal of time searching for food.
At one point Jack tells us about his fantasy meal.
What would you have for your fantasy meal?
5. Jack mentions that several camps had outbreaks of typhus.
This disease killed many prisoners.
Use the resources available to you to research this disease.
What causes it? What are its symptoms?
Can it be cured?
Present your findings in the form of an entry in an encyclopedia.