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Overview



World War II provides one of the most important lessons in all of history. Not only did this war involve all parts of the globe, it also taught us a great deal about prejudice and persecution. We learned that barbarism is not limited to uncivilized society, but that it can subtly creep into even the most genteel society and seem justified.

History books have plenty to say about World War II, but as far as literature is concerned, the storytellers have been fairly silent. *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* was the first and is probably the best-known piece of literature that has come out of this era. Perhaps it's because the people who were involved in World War II are getting older and the memories will soon be extinct that the survivors are finally telling their stories. The Holocaust literature genre has grown in the past 15 to 20 years to include stories from all over the world. They are remarkable stories of ordinary people who experienced the anguish firsthand, articulately expressing how they survived both physically and emotionally. It's important that people of all future generations learn from what happened to help ensure that nothing like it happens ever again.

There is enough Holocaust literature written and published today to provide stories that will appeal to every student in the classroom. This multibook unit offers choices that will appeal to each student, and then enables the class to bring all the different stories together so that the students can achieve a broader, more accurate, picture of World War II and its effects on our world.

The books included in this unit tell those stories. One story is told from the perspective of a Jewish prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. Another is about a Hungarian teenager trying to survive the bombing of her city. There's also a German child forced to join the Hitler youth in order to survive the Nazi regime. One historical

account tells of a young American girl who must move to an internment camp located in California because of her family's Japanese ancestry. Yet another story tells of a 15-year-old American boy who chooses to join the military illegally, thinking he can help to kill Hitler. These stories paint a global picture of the war, affording a personal and human view of World War II that history books alone cannot provide.

The main component we looked for in making our selections was human interest. From these books, students are able to see how young people their own age found the courage to survive the horrors that took place during a tumultuous era.

One of the objectives of this unit is to help students relate to the subject matter on a personal level. What does this whole experience mean to today's students and to future students? And what is there about the writers' experiences that the students have encountered before in some way? There are writing assignments for each story that encourage students to look inside themselves and clarify their own ideas and feelings about the war and about being a teenager.

Writing is very important in this unit on an individual level, but we have found that group work helps to give the students a broader understanding of the literature. The content of some of these books is mature, and the group discussions allow the students to work together to make sense of the books.

The reason we have not included *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* in this particular unit is because in our school district *Anne Frank* is a required part of our eighth-grade English curriculum. We want *all* students to read about her. Because some students are already World War II experts and because other students have no idea that such horrible events ever took place, we feel that *Anne Frank* makes a good starting point for

preparing all of the students for the Holocaust stories to come.

Because this Holocaust literature unit will take four weeks to complete, you probably won't want to go into too much depth studying about Anne Frank. Interesting excerpts ought to be enough, although you could give extra credit to students who want to read the entire work. The students may also enjoy reading the screenplay, which takes four or five days. Or you could show the movie, which takes four days. The teacher must take care in choosing the approach of the overall unit, so that students do not become "Holocausted" out by the end. It's easy to overdo this unit because the subject matter is so interesting and so abundant.

We like to schedule this unit for the end of the school year so that it will coincide with our school's social studies unit on World War II. This way, the students can get the historical background from their social studies class to enrich their understanding of the stories in this unit. Conversely, the literature provides the stories of real people that the history books cannot.

This unit could tie in easily with other school subjects, too. Art, music, and science teachers could participate in some way. Maybe even math.

Structure

Each classroom consists of five or six groups of five students, with each group reading a different piece of Holocaust literature. The days in class are divided between reading, group discussions, and a variety of writing assignments.

At the end of the unit, each group will present its book to the class, so that everyone in the class will benefit from all the books.

Here are the books included in this unit:

I Am Fifteen—And I Don't Want to Die! by Christine Arnothy. Scholastic, Inc., 1956. ISBN 0-590-44630-4.

The Cage, by Ruth Minsky Sender. Bantam Books, 1986. ISBN 0-533-27003-6.

Night, by Elie Wiesel. Bantam Books, 1960. ISBN 0-553-27253-5.

The Hiding Place, by Corrie ten Boom. Bantam Books, 1971. ISBN 0-553-25669-6.

The Last Mission, by Harry Mazer. Laurel-Leaf Books, 1979. ISBN 0-440-94797-9.

Mischling, Second Degree, by Ilse Koehn. Puffin Books, 1990. ISBN 0-14-034290-7.

The Upstairs Room, by Johanna Reiss. Harper-Trophy, 1990. ISBN 0-06-440370-X.

In the Mouth of the Wolf, by Rose Zar. Jewish Publication Society, 1983. ISBN 0-8276-0382-7.

Farewell to Manzanar, by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James Houston. Bantam Books, 1973. ISBN 0-553-27258-6.

Kindertransport, by Olga Levy Drucker. Henry Holt and Company, 1992. ISBN 0-8050-1711-9.

Touch Wood, by Renée Roth-Hano. Puffin Books, 1989. ISBN 0-14-034085-8.

Maus I and *Maus II*, by Art Spiegelman. Pantheon Books, 1973–1991. *Maus I* ISBN 0-394-74723-2. *Maus II* ISBN 0-679-72977-1.

To help you decide which of these 12 stories to use, we include a description of each one at the beginning of each individual unit. You can analyze what kinds of students you have and then determine which books would most appeal to them.

How to Use This Unit

How to Begin

Begin by looking over the descriptions of the books to see which ones you would like to use in your class. Choose stories that you feel your students would be most interested in reading. Some of the books may appeal more to boys than to girls or vice versa, but most of the stories will appeal to either gender.

Because the students will be sharing what they learn with the rest of the class at the end of the unit, it's desirable to have the class read a variety of stories: maybe a couple of stories from a Jewish perspective, one from a German, one American, and one Polish, for example. The students should ultimately come away from this experience with an understanding of how people of varied races and creeds were affected by World War II.

Purchasing a book for every student is not necessary. All of the reading can be done in class, which means that if you have several English or reading classes, you can use the same 30 books for all of them. You will need to purchase six copies of each title you choose.

After you have chosen the books you would like to use in this unit, give the students the choice of which books they would like to read. We like to have a "book talk" day. We give a brief summary of each story and pass the books around for the students to look at.

Sometimes students think this unit will be easier if they choose a short book with large print. Explain to the students that all of the lessons are exactly the same length, so the shorter books will have more assignments to go along with them, and the units for the longer books will have more reading and fewer assignments.

At the end of the "book talk" period, we have students write down their top two or three

choices, and then we match the students up with the books.

Choosing Groups

In grouping the students, take into consideration what the students want to read, and then decide which students will work well together. The groups should be heterogeneous. Include a couple of top students, a couple of average students, and a lower-end student in each group. Sometimes friends work well together, and sometimes they don't. Sometimes students who don't know each other work well together. Finding out who can't work together might be a good idea as well. We occasionally have a group that simply isn't working out, and in that case, we just plan on working with that group more closely than others. Most groups, however, need little or no guidance from the teacher.

Because of the heterogeneous groups, it really doesn't matter what book each group reads. All of the books will be a little difficult for the low readers, and that's why it's a good idea to have students read the books aloud. Reading aloud also keeps the group at the same place so discussions will be easier.

How to Manage the Papers

The easiest and most effective way of passing out papers, we have found, is to give each student at the very beginning a packet of every reproducible page she or he needs to understand and complete this unit. This way, students can see the day-to-day schedule, as well as the assignments to come. They can even read the guidelines for the

class presentation, which is included in the Appendix. There should be no surprises. The exception would be the Answer Sheets that are included in the Appendix. These should not be distributed until after each assignment is completed.

Students should turn in assignments as soon as they complete them. There are two different ways to manage the completed assignments. You can give each group a folder to keep completed assignments in, and then at the end of each day or week, collect the folders and grade them. The advantage of this method is that all the assignments for each group are together—they're not mixed in with other groups. Or you can simply have all students in a class put their assignments in a single basket. The advantage of this method is that the teacher doesn't have to collect folders, and all the papers for a single class are together.

The sooner papers are returned to the students, and the sooner students begin to understand how everything will be graded, the more seriously they will take each assignment. Included in each student's packet should be a grade sheet for the book that he or she is reading. As the students finish the assignments and turn them in, they should check them off on the grade sheet where it says "Student ✓." After the assignments are returned, the students can enter the number of points they received for the assignments and how many points they were worth, if that information isn't already on the grade sheet. It might also be a good idea to have a grading scale on the grade sheet, too, so students can estimate how many points they'll need to get a certain grade.

Time Management

Probably the biggest worry for both the teachers and the students is trying to keep up with this unit's day-to-day schedule. Please regard this schedule as simply a guideline. Since most students read at different levels, you will find that not all group members will complete the daily assignments at the same time. Students typically fix this problem themselves by reading aloud, taking assignments home, or by checking books out. One advantage of using heterogeneous groups is that

the books can be read aloud, eliminating the problem of varying reading levels.

If the teacher finds that most of the groups in a class are behind, a "catch-up" day can be incorporated. Our guidelines for what should be accomplished during a day are designed to keep the students moving—they have lots to do every day. If you find that your students are falling behind in the day structure, let them know that the activities of a certain day should follow the activities of the day before. There's a progression.

If a student is absent, the group can brief that student on what they read when he or she was absent. They can also help that student with the assignment that may have been due. This is another advantage of having groups. If a student is absent for an extended time, send a book home, and he or she can work on it alone. The student will already have the assignments and know exactly what to do. You will just need to let the student know how far to go.

Grading

First of all, you will need to decide how many points you want this entire Holocaust unit to be worth. If you look at the grade sheets, you will notice that the Points Possible column has been left blank for the teacher's discretion. Figure out how many points you want each assignment to be worth. For the books that have more assignments, a certain assignment might be worth less than a similar assignment for another book that has fewer assignments. Also keep in mind the difficulty of an assignment when assigning points. A long and involved assignment should be worth more than a "fill-in-the-blanks" one.

The fastest and easiest way to grade all the papers that come in is to give them a +, a ✓, or a -. If an assignment is worth 10 points, then make a + worth 10 points, a ✓ worth 7 or 8 points, and a - worth 5 or 6 points. The teacher may also keep a grade sheet for each student in a notebook. Then, as assignments are turned in, the teacher can fill in the points. At the end of the unit, the teacher can give a copy of the grade sheet to each student, and the student can compare it with his or her own record.

For group discussions, we evaluate the record of what was discussed, and all group members will receive the same grade from the paper that the Secretary turned in. Most assignments, however, are graded individually. Please emphasize that all the students in a group will *not* receive the same grade for the unit. It is possible for one group member to get an A, and another group member to fail.

Each student will also receive a grade for group participation. Throughout the course of the unit, the teacher should be observing group members to see how they are participating. Most groups will let the teacher know which students are not pulling their weight. At the completion of the unit, the students will complete a group evaluation form. This should be completed in an organized, efficient manner to take up the least amount of time. Each group member will receive a sheet of paper with five spaces. They need to put each of their group members' names in the spaces provided, including their own, in the same order. They will give a score to each person, and all the teacher has to do is put the papers together, staple, and then cut them apart. Then you should have all the evaluations of a single student stapled together.

Essays

For writing assignments, we have included a reproducible essay form in the Appendix. At first, it might seem to be a waste of paper to provide a form for student writing. But we have found that the students take the essays more seriously when they see the form—it seems to trigger a sense of formality for the assignment. Before we started using an official essay form, we found that students sometimes didn't take the essay assignment seriously, and they might write only a paragraph (if that!). To make this form even more effective, we have already given students essay-writing experience throughout the year on similar forms. When our students see the essay form,

they know that the essay will need to be several paragraphs long, cohesive, well-organized, in pen, spelled right, and probably a final draft.

Group Presentations

At the end of the reading, the students will be preparing a group presentation. This is actually the most important and fun part of the unit. Let your students know from the beginning that they will be doing a presentation to the class, because this knowledge makes the students more serious about their reading and their studying. The guidelines for the class presentation are given at the end of each unit, and they're all the same.

In the Appendix you will find a form for evaluating group presentations. Have each group turn in a paper that explains what each member has done for preparing and presenting the story to the class. The presentation grade should be an individual grade based on individual effort rather than a group grade.

If a student is absent on the day of the presentation, the group can present on another day, or the absent person might give a presentation to the teacher at an appointed time.

Quizzes

Following their presentation, each group needs to give the rest of the class a five-point quiz. You can decide what form the quiz should take, or you can let the students decide how they'll set up their quiz. The group is then responsible for grading the quizzes and getting them back to the other students. We have included a quiz-taking form in the Appendix to help you keep track of all the quiz grades.

Use your own discretion in handling the situation when students are absent for a quiz. Most teachers already have an absence policy in place.