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TEACHING THE UNSPEAKABLE: CREATING A CURRICULUM
BASED ON HOLOCAUST LITERATURE USING YOUNG ADULT TEXTS
AND MEETING COMMON CORE STANDARDS

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The Holocaust is an atrocity that remains a vital area of study regardless of how many decades pass. It presents educators with opportunities to discuss not only the historical facts of the event but also the numerous reasons it is considered a watershed event of the twentieth century. Holocaust education also has the potential to support students' moral development and to help instill in them a sense of global awareness. Although educators may view the Holocaust as a daunting topic to teach, literary works serve as an effective approach to historical education. When educators incorporate literature into the study of the Holocaust, the brutalities endured by victims are personalized, helping to turn facts and statistics into the experiences of real people. Biographical novels, such as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, are the most common Holocaust literature taught in schools, but educators should not overlook young adult literature. Authors of young adult literature present stories that relay historical information while encouraging students' engagement throughout an academic unit. These literary texts also promote before-, during-, and after-reading activities that increase students' historical knowledge and reading comprehension and improve students' quality of writing while meeting various Common Core State Standards, which are becoming more prevalent in schools across the United States.

TEACHING THE UNSPEAKABLE:
CREATING A CURRICULUM BASED ON HOLOCAUST LITERATURE USING
YOUNG ADULT TEXTS AND MEETING COMMON CORE STANDARDS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
Chapter	
1. Teaching About the Holocaust	
1.1. A Brief History of Holocaust Awareness.....	1
1.2. Rationales for Teaching the Holocaust.....	5
1.3. The Role of Literature in Holocaust Education.....	9
1.4. Guidelines for Choosing Holocaust Literature.....	11
2. Using Young Adult Literature in the Classroom	
2.1. A Brief History of Young Adult Literature.....	14
2.2. Defining Traits of Young Adult Literature.....	17
2.3. Benefits of Using Young Adult Literature in the Classroom.....	20
3. Reconciling Holocaust Literature and Young Adult Literature Guidelines.....	23
4. Lesson Ideas and Considerations	
4.1. Developing Objectives.....	46
4.2. Before-Reading Activities.....	49
4.3. During-Reading Activities.....	52
4.4. After-Reading Activities.....	55

Chapter One: Teaching About the Holocaust

A Brief History of Holocaust Awareness

Attempting fully to understand the Holocaust and all it represents is a struggle; in fact, according to John K. Roth, “[I]t is a good question . . . whether anyone can *understand* the Holocaust . . . when we think about all that understanding entails” (Totten and Feinberg xi). The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website includes a condensed definition of the massive tragedy of the Holocaust that serves as an attempt to increase understanding:

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims—six million were murdered; Gypsies, the handicapped and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of wars and political dissidents, also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny. (“Mission Statement”)

While this definition is the core of the Holocaust, it fails to provide a complete understanding of all the Holocaust entails. Beginning to understand the immense ramifications of the Nazi regime’s beliefs requires accessing and studying historical information. Raising awareness of the Holocaust is one way to increase people’s access to and knowledge of historical information and documents.

For decades after the end of the Second World War, many people in the United States avoided discussing the atrocities that occurred during the Holocaust. People, especially educators, eventually acknowledged the importance of remembering the Holocaust and

strove to educate others. What began as individual endeavors led by ambitious teachers in school districts, eventually grew into national, and even international, organizations that strive to increase Holocaust awareness. One such organization is FHAO, Facing History and Ourselves, which is one of the earliest Holocaust programs. Two junior high school teachers from Brookline, Massachusetts began FHAO in 1976, aiming to “assist teachers to teach the universal themes of the history of the Holocaust through ‘a rigorous examination of its particularities’” (“About Us”; Totten, *Teaching Holocaust Literature* 94). Now with more than 29,000 specially trained educators, FHAO is an international organization with locations in China, Northern Ireland, Israel, South Africa, Rwanda, London, and various cities from the east coast to the west coast in the United States (“About Us”). Through a series of workshops, seminars, and online resources, FHAO reaches more than two million students annually, teaching them “civic responsibility, tolerance and social action” (“About Us”). Since the creation of this organization, various commissions, councils, and programs have been created across the country in an attempt to increase Holocaust awareness.

The initiation of individual Holocaust awareness organizations served as a small victory for society, yet more still needed to be accomplished. A few years after the creation of FHAO, Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel chaired the President’s Commission on the Holocaust, which was established on November 1, 1978, by President Jimmy Carter (“History”). Through the vision and years of hard work of Wiesel and other contributors, the Holocaust Memorial Museum finally opened on April 26, 1993. The Holocaust Memorial Museum opened with bold intentions and continues to uphold its mission “to advance and disseminate knowledge about this unprecedented tragedy; to preserve the memory of those who suffered; and to encourage visitors to reflect upon the moral and spiritual questions

raised by the events of the Holocaust as well as their own responsibilities as citizens of a democracy” (“History”). The museum itself, as well as the website, provides opportunities for people, especially students, to discover the events of the Holocaust and for educators to find suggestions on how to teach about the Holocaust in a way that increases the understanding of youth.

As Holocaust awareness organizations and the Holocaust Memorial Museum gained more credibility and recognition, people in the United States began to realize the importance of continually raising Holocaust awareness through the implementation of Holocaust education in public schools. Because the federal government is not responsible for creating education policy, it is up to the fifty individual states to take the initiative and mandate a Holocaust education policy. Former Florida Governor Lawton Chiles initiated a brief trend of mandating Holocaust education in 1994 when he signed the Holocaust Education Bill, making Florida the first state to require teaching about the Holocaust in public schools. The words that Chiles spoke before signing the document ignited a national recognition of the importance of Holocaust education:

The souls of those who perished in the Holocaust still cry out for justice, not through retribution, but through education and enlightenment—the truest enemies of tyranny and brutality. . . . Sadly, many students in our schools have demonstrated an alarming and dangerous lack of knowledge about the millions of Jews and others who were slaughtered during the Nazi’s reign. That must change—because the price of ignorance is simply too high. The bill I sign . . . acknowledges that the path to true enlightenment must include

the darkened hallways of places like Auschwitz and Dachau. It is not an easy lesson—but one that must be learned anew. (qtd. Greenbaum xviii-xix)

Following the State of Florida’s initiative, four other states created a legislative mandate requiring the teaching of the Holocaust in their public schools: California, Illinois, New York, and New Jersey (“Country Report” 1). Ten other states highly recommend and encourage Holocaust education, but they do not require it: Washington, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, South Carolina, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Ohio, Indiana, and Georgia (“Country Report” 2). A total of twenty-four states wrote state-specific standards that at least mention the Holocaust, which means that youth in twenty-six states quite possibly learn nothing about the Holocaust throughout their public school career. Even more students in even more states receive only a brief overview of the Holocaust, touching only on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s definition that was mentioned earlier.

While many educators and members of state boards of education acknowledge the importance of informing youth about the Holocaust, too many people refuse to accept Holocaust education because they cannot see its purpose in public school systems. Because of this, it is vital that supporters of Holocaust education make it well-known why students need to be taught about the Holocaust. To spread their message in a powerful and clear manner, these supporters rely on carefully chosen rationales, which are made available to the public on credible websites, such as *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* and *The Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education*.

Rationales for Teaching about the Holocaust

Donald Schwartz, a professor at California State University, said, “[T]here is a human tendency to recall the past selectively and to erase painful memories. Nations, too, seek to dismiss or distort inglorious historical episodes” (96). Schwartz’s words state the truth. If people choose to forget the atrocities of the Holocaust, these people are also choosing to forget a vital event in the history of the twentieth century.

The broadest rationalization that many educators use to support the teaching of the Holocaust is that it is viewed as a watershed event of the twentieth century. The atrocity affected many nations and continued to affect the world during its aftermath. Political leaders, professionals in various fields of study, religious leaders, and individual citizens struggled to confront the events that occurred. Nations worked both together and separately, confronting important issues, such as protecting refugees, enforcing international tribunals, establishing a Jewish homeland, and enforcing “informed consent” in medical experimentation (“A Changed World”). Many of these issues still affect our lives and our world today. Because it “fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilization” (“Why Teach,” *Task Force*), opportunities arise to discuss politics, diversity, international affairs, technological advances, morals, and other various topics related to both the Holocaust and current society. Creating opportunities to communicate critically with students on these topics helps them develop into informed and rational citizens. This is important to the future success of our country because, as Schwartz said, “The universal implications of the Holocaust are firmly grounded in a world where dictatorship, terrorism, and nuclear technology make future Holocausts a distinct possibility” (100). Unfortunately, they are not just a future concern.

Few people argue with the fact that the Holocaust was an act of genocide. In fact, it is one of the most well-known examples of genocide, but genocidal acts occur on an almost daily basis. After the Holocaust, the United Nations held the Genocide Convention, which declared genocide “a crime under international law” and “condemn[ed] genocide, whether committed in time of peace or time of war” (“Convention” par. 1). In general, society convinced itself that genocidal acts were not a future concern, but the atrocities of Indonesia, East Timor, Bangladesh, Burundi, Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur, and many other countries all prove otherwise (Totten, “A Note” 177). Around the world people are suffering, enduring torment that no one should have to endure. Educators raise global awareness by teaching youth about the Holocaust. While there is truth in the statement that “when six million people are killed, and we forget about it, then we’ve lost the meaning of life” (Schwartz 99), the same can be said for not even realizing when thousands more are dying. By studying the Holocaust, educators create opportunities to connect historical events with similar events occurring in the world today.

According to The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website, the instigations of all genocidal acts are the same: “prejudice, racism, and stereotyping” (“Why Teach,” *United States*). Once it is determined that specific groups of people do not fit into “regime ideologies and structures,” standard codes of interaction break down (Weitz 142-43). As these judgmental ideals escalate, extreme societal crisis occurs, resulting in genocidal acts (Weitz 143). The ramifications of stereotyping, prejudice, and racism escalated severely during the Holocaust, but youth also experience the effects of these human biases in their everyday lives. Sometimes the results are extreme, such as with the shootings at Columbine; other times students may only feel the effects inwardly. Either way, Holocaust education

allows students to understand more clearly the “roots and ramifications of prejudice, racism and stereotyping” (“Why Teach,” *United States*). In addition to an understanding related to the Holocaust, students also gain a chance to confront the challenges they face in their own lives in regard to not only stereotyping, prejudice, and racism but also bias, peer pressure, conformity, and fairness. Through discussion, students may delve into the potential ramifications of the trials they face on a daily basis.

Related to “understanding the roots and ramifications of prejudice, racism and stereotyping” is students’ ability to acknowledge the “dangers of remaining silent, apathetic and indifferent during the oppression of others” (“Why Teach,” *United States*). Many people question how the Nazis were able to murder millions of people without anyone stopping them. In regard to the Holocaust, some do not understand silence; yet many remain silent when their peers are teased or bullied. Reverend Martin Niemöller spoke the words that best represent the dangers of silence and indifference:

First they came for the Communists,
and I didn’t speak up, because I wasn’t a Communist.

Then they came for the Jews,
and I didn’t speak up, because I wasn’t a Jew.

Then they came for the Catholics,
and I didn’t speak up, because I was a Protestant.

Then they came for me,
and by that time there was no one left to speak up for me. (qtd. in Greenbaum
39)

While it is not fair to compare equally bullying and the Holocaust, silence and indifference escalate mistreatment in both cases. This aspect of Holocaust education eventually proves relatable to many students in their own lives while still helping them gain a better understanding of the Holocaust itself.

It is important for students to speak out against what they know is wrong not only for the sake of our humanity but also to protect our political system. As stated on the Holocaust Memorial Museum website, “Democratic institutions and values are not automatically sustained, but need to be appreciated, nurtured, and protected; democracy is fragile” (“Why Teach”). One factor did not cause the Holocaust; social, economic and political factors all contributed to the disintegration of democratic values. Through the teaching of the Holocaust, students learn that it is the “responsibility of citizens in a democracy to learn to identify the danger signals and to know when to react” (“Why Teach,” *Task Force*).

One of the most logical rationales for teaching students about the Holocaust is that it teaches the “value of pluralism” (“Why Teach,” *United States*). The United States is referred to as “The Melting Pot” because its citizens are of all races, ethnicities, and religions. The Holocaust serves as a prime example of what occurs when diversity is not accepted. The Nazi regime murdered millions of people because of their religion, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and lifestyle. Over half a century later, many people still feel threatened by diversity. As the United States becomes more pluralistic, the importance of instilling an acceptance of diversity in youth grows.

According to historians, educators, and supporters of Holocaust education, these rationales provide more than enough reason to continue teaching youth about the Holocaust. They allow educators to focus on an historical event while making connections to present

dilemmas and concerns in students' lives, emphasizing that the present is always connected to the past. While it is vital for educators to address thoroughly all historical facts and data when teaching about the Holocaust, using literature is an effective way to enhance students' study of the Holocaust, helping to focus on specific rationales.

The Role of Literature in Holocaust Education

As a general rule, people live with both feet firmly in the present. Many students show concern for events that directly affect their lives; they rarely give any thought to the past. In their book *Teaching and Studying the Holocaust*, Samuel Totten and Stephen Feinberg state, "All history seems like 'ancient history' [to students]" (156). The Holocaust occurred over half a century ago, which might as well be millions of years ago in the eyes of an adolescent. Many students no longer know any Holocaust survivors. Soon there will not be any survivors to make trips to schools to help make the past real to students living in the present. To help bridge this gap, Totten and Feinberg suggest that ". . . incorporating literature into a study of the Holocaust may be one of the most powerful and effective entry points into this complex history" (156). Literature creates numerous learning opportunities, but two significant benefits of incorporating literature into Holocaust education are that it makes the historical facts and statistics real and that it increases students' chances of responding emotionally to the event itself.

When students hear the statistic that the Nazi regime murdered over six million Jews during the Holocaust, it is just that—a statistic. Since many students struggle to envision six million deaths, this common Holocaust statistic bears no real meaning to them. By choosing literature to accompany a Holocaust unit, all the facts and statistics that students learn will become more comprehensible and more meaningful because

[l]iterature has a way of illuminating historical content. Well-written literary works have a way of engaging students in ways that traditional histories do not. The history becomes more personalized and thought-provoking. Thus, by reading [literature], the history of the Holocaust could become more than simply learning a series of facts. It could touch students in ways that may cause them to reflect more meaningfully on the significance of this history.

(Totten and Feinberg 71)

Instead of envisioning six million faceless victims enduring torture and struggling to stay alive, students travel with one named victim; together they endure torture and struggle to stay alive. By reading one detailed story, students understand one person's experience as a "microcosm representing a much larger truth" (Totten and Feinberg 73). Literature may not enable students to envision the murder of six million Jews, but it can help them envision one Jew dying six million times.

In addition to transforming facts and statistics into comprehensible stories, literature also increases students' chances of responding emotionally to the Holocaust. Hearing facts about the torture victims endured or about the callousness of the Nazi regime may affect students, but including literary accounts personalizes all of the information. As Milton Teichman describes in his article "Literature of Agony and Triumph: An Encounter with the Holocaust, "One *feels* the tragedy; one is moved to anger, indignation, compassion. And one is often led to confront one's own values and to reflect on the meaning the Holocaust offers for one's own life" (615). While it is important for students to comprehend the facts, an emotional response to history allows for more opportunities for students to connect historical events to their own lives. Personal connections may provide students with lifetime lessons as

well as enhance many students' interest in history because they understand how it relates to them.

Educators cannot ignore the benefits of including literature in a Holocaust unit. It helps make history more comprehensible to students; it also helps achieve the difficult task of showing students how history relates to their lives. However, not all Holocaust literature is considered equal. If educators choose subpar texts, the educational value, as well as the emotional experience, decreases. When this occurs, students actually benefit more from learning only a little about the Holocaust; therefore, it is vital for educators to be aware of pedagogically-based guidelines for choosing appropriate literature to accompany a Holocaust unit.

Guidelines for Choosing Holocaust Literature

While Holocaust literature is easily accessible for educators, it is “[w]ell-written literary works [that] have a way of engaging students in ways that traditional histories do not” (Totten and Feinberg 71). The most important guideline for choosing Holocaust literature is determining the historical accuracy of the text. If students read historically inaccurate literature while being taught about the historical events of the Holocaust, their view of history is distorted. This not only affects their understanding of events, but also their emotional reaction and personal connection. Regardless of the importance of historical accuracy, it is possible for some educators to focus on the plot of a novel and not realize that some details may not be accurate. To avoid historical inaccuracy, educators should consider four factors: dilemmas, experiences, feelings, and language (Totten and Feinberg 141). If a literary work accurately presents these four factors, it can be considered well-written and academically beneficial.

Holocaust literature also needs to support students' emotional reactions and personal reflections. By focusing on one particular story, a well-written literary work is able to include characters' specific actions, reactions, and emotional responses, creating character appeal and a vivid plot. When a literary work personalizes historical events, ". . . empathy, compassion, involvement, and identification with victims and survivors" occurs (Totten and Feinberg 141). These emotional reactions also lead to students' personal reflections, forcing them to examine their own lives and world. During reflection, students may acknowledge personal and social prejudices and various violations of civil and human rights (Totten and Feinberg 164). The combination of emotions and reflections helps enhance students' awareness of themselves and their society, but the only chance of raising this awareness through Holocaust literature is for educators to choose a well-written work.

Another important guideline for choosing Holocaust literature is the readability of the text. This includes two factors. First, educators need to evaluate the reading level of the literary work. If the text is overly challenging or not challenging enough, engaging students becomes more difficult. A text that includes vocabulary, sentence structure, and ideas that are too challenging may discourage some students, making comprehension of the text feel unobtainable. A text that is too simple for students risks the chance of becoming boring. Second, the literary work also needs to be "developmentally appropriate, presenting the truth without unduly traumatizing young readers" (Totten and Feinberg 141). Holocaust literature could include graphic, terrifying images that either emotionally scar students or distract them from the overall importance of the Holocaust as an historical event. When educators choose grade-appropriate texts, it increases their chances of teaching a successful literature unit.

If educators choose Holocaust literature that follows these guidelines, they increase the likelihood of preparing effective lessons that benefit their students both academically and personally. Holocaust literature appears in various genres, including memoirs, poetry, and fiction. One type of Holocaust literature that is often overlooked by educators is young adult literature. To help make Holocaust education even more beneficial to students, educators should use more young adult literature, such as Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*, John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, Jerry Spinelli's *Milkweed*, and Art Spiegelman's *The Complete Maus*, instead of relying solely on traditional Holocaust novels, such as Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* and Elie Wiesel's *Night*. By incorporating these novels into a Holocaust unit, secondary educators provide students with a clearer understanding of the Holocaust while using literature that students find engaging and relatable and that also creates learning opportunities that address potential curricular concerns and correlate with Common Core educational standards.

Chapter Two: Using Young Adult Literature in the Classroom

A Brief History of Young Adult Literature

When young adults walk into a library or a bookstore today, their eyes are likely to fall upon numerous books written especially for them. This was not always the case, though. In *Essentials of Young Adult Literature*, Carl Tomlinson and Carol Lynch-Brown explain that, in the past, there was no need for young adult literature because “. . . adolescence did not exist” (5). Since society centered on farming until the mid-eighteenth century, members of the rural society transformed from children into adults at a young age. Instead of attending school full-time and pursuing athletic or artistic interests, young adults worked to help their families survive. In fact, fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds were “fully incorporated into the workforce of the nation” (5). Since young adults kept the work hours of a typical adult, they had no time and no need for young adult literature.

Eventually, the government passed child labor laws, which meant that adolescents attended school instead of working. Other factors that influenced young adults’ attendance at school were the change from rural agriculture to urban industry and stricter educational requirements for employment (Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown 5). Between 1900 and 1940, the National Center for Education Statistics found that the number of high school graduates increased by more than 1,700 percent (Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown 5). These changes, in a sense, created adolescents or young adults, but young adult literature still did not exist as it does today.

Many young adult literature experts agree that the first books written specifically for young adults were published in 1967; these were S.E Hinton’s *The Outsiders* and Robert Lipsyte’s *The Contender* (Cart 96). Some argue that young adult literature existed as early as

the late 1920s when sixteen-year-old Nancy Drew started solving mysteries; others believe the first young adult novel arrived a little later in 1942 with Maureen Daly's *Seventeenth Summer* (Bond 49). Everyone agrees that young adult literature gained popularity in the 1960s and went through various transformations. In the 1960s, authors focused on different problems adolescents faced while growing up and created realistic stories to which they could relate (Bucher and Hinton, "Understanding" 5). Authors in the 1970s and 1980s tackled taboo topics by writing what are known as "problem novels" (Bond 50). Focusing on alcoholism, drug abuse, divorce, poverty, homelessness, abuse and other related topics, authors strove to write literature that was relatable to young adults but published mediocre literary works that caused a stir in book censorship (Bond 50; Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown 5). The late 1980s also became the decade of original series, such as *Sweet Valley* and *Fear Street*, leaving behind "problem novels" and embracing genre literature (Cart 96). Although these books are still available in some libraries and bookstores, young adults have essentially left these series behind because authors continued to transform young adult literature into something new and more exciting.

From the 1990s until the present day, authors have continued to explore all of the possibilities of young adult literature. One change is that pictures are no longer meant for only children's books; instead, authors use images to enhance literature for young adults. Some authors, such as Art Spiegelman, use as many pictures as a comic book; this combination of literature and images is called a graphic novel. Most young adults find graphic novels unique and exciting, but the combination of words and pictures also creates a different level of analysis that encourages students to think outside the box. Another change that has occurred within young adult literature is the appearance of books that "reflect the

interactivity and connectivity of the digital world with shifting perspectives, diverse voices, and even multiple genres within a single book” (Bucher and Hinton, “Understanding” 6). As young adult literature continues to change and adapt to the current lives of adolescents, many educators began using young adult literature in their classrooms but still continue not to utilize it enough.

In 1997, John Bushman published his article “Young Adult Literature in the Classroom—Or Is It?” in *The English Journal*. Bushman surveyed 380 students in grades six through twelve from schools of various size and location; he asked them questions about literature read for class and literature read for pleasure. Although Bushman found that educators used young adult literature in grades six and seven, students in grades eight through twelve mostly read literature from the classical canon (36). Common literary works read by eighth graders were *Julius Caesar*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *The Pearl*; students listed a total of forty-eight different books, but only six of those were young adult with each title only mentioned once (36). Bushman found similar results in grades nine through twelve where students commonly read *The Old Man and the Sea*, *Beowulf*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *Hamlet*, just to name a few (37). Because students read more difficult literary works, the amount of required reading throughout the school year was significantly less than in grades six through eight. Also, older students avoided reading outside of school because they lacked the time, while sixth through eighth graders enjoyed reading a mixture of young adult and adult titles for fun (36-37). Although Bushman’s study is fifteen years old, it does not drastically differ from a more current one.

In 2006, educators Louel Gibbons, Jennifer Dail, and Joyce Stallworth sent questionnaires to 142 English language arts teachers, asking them about their school’s

literature curriculum, their use of young adult literature, and their students' attitude toward reading. After analyzing both the quantitative and qualitative data that they received, they discovered common themes. One theme explains why educators choose not to implement young adult literature into their curriculum; they believe that young adult literature "lacks sophistication and literary merit" (Gibbons, Dail, and Stallworth 55). Some educators, as well as literary scholars, believe that the only use of young adult literature is to motivate adolescents to read. It cannot teach students about the literary devices that they are required to know about for standardized testing; therefore, it should only be read outside of the classroom.

Although many educators are still hesitant to incorporate young adult literature into their curriculum, it continues to gain popularity. Educators and literary critics complete more research and write more scholarly articles that promote the use of young adult literature in the classroom. Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether a literary work is meant specifically for young adults, though. Because of this, scholars focus on pinpointing traits that clearly define young adult literature.

Defining Traits of Young Adult Literature

Whenever scholars attempt to determine defining traits of young adult literature, they always begin by discussing who are considered young adults. Thus far, there is no consensus, but various definitions exist. From a psychological viewpoint, young adulthood or adolescence is "the period of transition from early childhood to early adulthood, entered at approximately [eleven to thirteen] years of age and ending at [eighteen to twenty-one] years of age—the exact time period, however, depending on such diverse factors as the surrounding culture and biological development" (qtd. in Pavonetti 33). Others support more

specific beginning and ending ages. For example, both the American Library Association and young adult scholars Kenneth Donelson and Allen Nilsen propose that adolescence occurs between ages twelve and eighteen (Pavonetti 33). Donelson and Nilsen also broaden their definition, stating that young adults are “those who think they’re too old to be children but who others think are too young to be adult” (qtd. in Pavonetti 33). Educators typically view young adulthood in terms of grade level; therefore, students are young adults throughout both middle school, grades six through eight, and high school, grades nine through twelve (Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown 4). Regardless of the accepted age range, scholars of young adult literature agree on many defining characteristics of young adult literature.

According to many young adult literature scholars, literary works written specifically for young adults should include a protagonist who is a young adult and whose actions affect the plot (Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown 4). In general, most scholars believe that young adults are more apt to read a literary work if they are able to relate to it. The best way to ensure young adults’ interest is to focus on telling stories involving young adults. Rob Thomas, an author of young adult literature, states, “I think the best [young adult] writers don’t try to write to teens; they write about them” (qtd. in Bond 6). Of course, not all young adult literature includes strictly adolescents as the main characters; sometimes they focus on adults or mythical creatures, but typically young adult authors focus on “youthful protagonists” (Bond 6).

Since young adult protagonists are the norm, the dialogue in young adult literature also needs to reflect young adults’ speech. This not only makes the literature more realistic, but helps increase students’ interest because it is written in a language that is familiar to them.

Also, the vocabulary used within the literary work cannot be “prohibitive” (White 53). Since the plots of young adult literature are typically easy to follow, students understand what occurs even if they do not understand all of the words used. Because students are not keen on vocabulary lessons and dictionaries, it is important that they are able to understand the plot without them.

In addition, the events that make up the plot need to be relatable to young adults. When students can relate with what literary characters are experiencing, they are more likely to find the story engaging. Some contemporary issues, problems, and experiences that work well to engage young adults include the following: “dealing with parents and other adults in authority; facing illness and death; dealing with peer pressure, specifically relating to drugs, alcohol, and sexual experimentation; and facing the realities of addiction and pregnancy” (Bucher and Manning 9). Because these are all common issues for young adults, they find them more relatable than some of the events that take place in literary works from the classical canon.

Literary works also need to embrace young adults’ perspective. Authors of young adult literature must think about their intended audience, but they must also embrace the “young adult consciousness,” which means that “young adult literature is written in the consciousness of a young adult. It isn’t just a question of ‘seeing life through young adult eyes.’ It is must more than that. The entire book is controlled by the young adult consciousness of the narrator (who might or might not be a character in the story)” (qtd. in Bond 7). Not every young adult experiences the same issues, problems, or events; therefore, a literary work that embraces one student’s perspective may not be fitting for another student in the same class.

When educators pick a literary work written for young adults, they must remember that they cannot please every student. Just as students' perspectives differ, so do their preferences in literature. If educators pick a literary work that includes at least a few defining traits of young adult literature, they increase their chances of helping to engage their students in the literary world. The defining traits of young adult literature are important to consider when selecting a literary work for adolescents, but educators also need to be aware of the benefits of using young adult literature in the classroom so that they can best utilize it.

Benefits of Using Young Adult Literature in the Classroom

As students devote more time to athletic and artistic endeavors, television, computers, and video games, fewer and fewer students spend time reading books. The only time many students open a book is in the classroom, so educators' literature choices serve as a turning point for students. If students find the assigned literature boring or not relatable to their own lives, they will not become lifelong readers. Young adult literature “. . . accurately portrays the developmental and emotional stages of adolescence,” making it relevant to students, and therefore, more enjoyable (Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown 8). Struggling readers especially find young adult literature beneficial because it is written in an accessible way. This encourages students to read more often and also increases their literacy skills (Gibbons, Dail, and Stallworth 57). As students read more often, they perform better academically in all content areas (9). All educators strive to help their students academically, and young adult literature is a simple and effective way to increase students' opportunities for academic success.

Young adult literature also creates opportunities for students to mature as individuals. It allows students to become involved with the issue of diversity, encouraging discussions

where students can learn that people are not as different as they may think. This instills both a sense of understanding and of acceptance (Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown 9). Moral development may also occur through the use of young adult literature. When a literary text engages students, they begin to place themselves into the story, asking themselves how they would handle certain situations. Whenever students do this, they are thinking more critically, developing their sense of right and wrong (Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown 9). Once students become involved with the story, they also experience stronger emotional reactions. This encourages students to be compassionate and helps them to develop a sense of social justice. Young adult literature lends itself to better encouraging these discoveries because of its relatable and engaging nature.

Adolescents also gain personal experiences through young adult literature. These experiences may relate to their everyday lives. The events that occur through the literary text offer students “guidance, comfort, and answers to the many questions [they] have . . .” (Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown 9), helping them understand the difficulties they face. Other literature allows students to live vicariously through the stories they read. By experiencing places and times where they have never been, students learn more about history and the world. Vicarious experiences also help students to think critically because it forces them to view the world from a different perspective (Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown 9). Both types of personal experience help students confront the trials of their own lives in a healthy manner.

Once educators realize the benefits of using young adult literature in the classroom, they are more capable of utilizing it to its full extent. They can find ways to enhance their academic objectives while striving to engage their students through a more suitable and relatable literary text. Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether a book is actually

considered young adult literature, though, especially when many of the benefits are similar to adult literature. Because of this, it is important for educators to read critically all literary texts before choosing which one to use in their classroom. When literary works that are considered both young adult literature and historical literature are being considered for classroom use, thorough readings become even more important because educators must consider if the text meets both the young adult literature guidelines and the historical guidelines.

Chapter Three: Reconciling Holocaust Literature and Young Adult Literature Guidelines

When educators choose to teach a literary work that falls within both historical and young adult genres, it is important to remember the guidelines for choosing effective literature within both genres. Each set of guidelines focuses specifically on either historical or young adult literature, but certain elements overlap, while others combine effectively, making it easier to reconcile the two distinct sets of guidelines. Both historical literature and young adult literature should foster personal reflections and emotional reactions of readers. Historical texts do this by focusing on detailing the experiences of specific characters, while still depicting historical events and details accurately (Totten and Feinberg 141). According to historical novelist Caro Clarke, “good historical fiction demonstrates a balance between story and fact . . . and presents ‘the right fact for the right effect’” (Bucher and Hinton, “Exploring Historical” 223). Young adult literature, on the other hand, creates personal and emotional connections by focusing on a young adult protagonist whose actions affect the plot. Some of these actions need to be relatable to young adults (Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown 4). Both genres also emphasize the importance of the readability of a text. One element of this includes choosing literature that meets the appropriate reading level of students. Because young adult literature is often “less complex in structure” than adult literature (Bucher and Hinton, “Understanding” 12), it is easier to meet this guideline. In addition to readability, historical literature must also be “developmentally appropriate” in regard to depiction of trauma (Totten and Feinberg 141). A final guideline to consider when choosing historical and young adult texts is dialogue. Historical literary works should include dialogue that is appropriate for the period, while young adult literature should exhibit language with which young adults are familiar (Bucher and Hinton, “Understanding” 10). With these guidelines

in mind, educators can confidently begin searching for effective young adult Holocaust literature to use in their classrooms.

When students, educators, and even the general public are asked to name titles of Holocaust literature, Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, more commonly referred to as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, is almost always mentioned first. After its publication in the United States in 1952, it quickly gained popularity. Melissa Muller, the author of *Anne Frank: The Biography*, explains society's general attitude toward this young Holocaust victim and why her diary is such a successful literary work:

Over the past fifty years, Anne Frank has become a universal symbol of the oppressed in a world of violence and tyranny. Her name invokes humanity, tolerance, human rights, and democracy; her image is the epitome of optimism and the will to live. Millions of people have felt kinship with her and revere her as a heroine. Her diary—required reading in schools throughout the world—has been interpreted as an eternal testament of courage and hope, relevant to all. Some of the things she wrote have acquired near proverbial status, and—often taken out of context—they have been used as slogans for any number of points of view. If there were Jewish saints, someone would probably have long since proposed her beatification. (qtd. in Rogers par. 3)

The Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education found that *The Diary of Anne Frank* is the most popular literary text used to teach about the Holocaust in the United States; Elie Wiesel's *Night* is the second most popular Holocaust text ("Country Report" 12). Although both literary texts are educational and moving, educators should not limit themselves to only these two Holocaust texts because they are not written specifically

for young adults. Also, only one major element of the Holocaust is presented and darker details are presented too graphically in *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Night* respectively. Instead, educators should incorporate young adult Holocaust literature, such as Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*, John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, Jerry Spinelli's *Milkweed*, and Art Spiegelman's *The Complete Maus*, into their classrooms because the texts better meet the guidelines for choosing both Holocaust literature and young adult literature.

These four literary works all approach depicting the Holocaust in different ways. In *The Book Thief*, Markus Zusak tells the story of Liesel Meminger, a foster girl living outside Munich during the Second World War. After stealing *The Grave Digger's Handbook* at her brother's funeral, Liesel, with the help of her accordion-playing foster father, struggles to learn how to read. This initiates multiple acts of book thievery, including a book meant to be burned at a Nazi celebration. Liesel and her foster parents face a situation more dangerous than Liesel's love of words, though. Keeping a promise he made to the man who saved his life, Liesel's foster father hides Max Vandenburg, a Jewish man, in his basement. Liesel and Max form a friendship; and eventually, Liesel begins to despise the words she used to love because, through a series of events, she realizes how Hitler's use of words is partly to blame for so much pain in her life and in the lives of those she loves. Instead of giving up on words, Liesel, with Max's encouragement, documents her life story. An unlikely character stumbles across her writing; thus, the story of the book thief is told.

John Boyne also tells a unique Holocaust story in *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. His novel follows nine-year-old Bruno, who is the son of a Nazi commandant, as he travels to his new home in "Out-With." As Bruno begins to explore the land surrounding his home, he becomes friends with a nine-year-old boy named Shmuel. Their friendship is unusual

because they cannot play games or go exploring; all they can do is talk. Bruno and Shmuel's friendship grows even though they live on opposite sides of a fence. Through these two boys, Boyne depicts a heart-wrenching innocence that exists even during a time of atrocity.

Another unique depiction of the Holocaust is seen in Jerry Spinelli's *Milkweed*. This novel presents the story of a young Gypsy orphan who remembers nothing about his life, not even his name. While in Warsaw, the young boy is befriended by a group of Jewish orphans who name him Misha Pilsudski. Misha spends his time roaming around Warsaw and stealing food, but one day he meets a girl named Janina. When he sees Janina and her family herded into a ghetto, he knows that he must follow them even though he does not understand what is happening. Misha utilizes his size and stealth to help Janina's family survive; but when the trains come to take the Jews from the ghetto, Misha realizes that even he cannot help them and that it might be safer to be nobody at all.

While Art Spiegelman's *The Complete Maus* tells the most traditional Holocaust story, he presents it in a unique format. Spiegelman tells the story of Vladek and Anja Spiegelman, Jewish survivors of Nazi Germany, but he presents their experiences before, during, and after their imprisonment in concentration camps in cartoon format with Jews as mice and Nazis as cats. Interwoven with the historical details are Spiegelman's accounts of his relationship with his aging father, including their trivial fights and unhappy visits. In this way, *The Complete Maus* tells not only the story of Holocaust survivors but of the children of survivors who struggle to understand their parents' experiences. Although *The Book Thief*, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, *Milkweed*, and *The Complete Maus* are unique and informative depictions of the Holocaust, educators do not always choose to use them in their classrooms.

Most educators choose to teach *The Diary of Anne Frank* because it follows the life of a young adult during an important historical event. They assume that because it is about a young adult and written by a young adult, then it must be considered young adult literature. This is not the case. When scholars of young adult literature discuss the appropriate age range of young adults, they are determining a target audience for authors of young adult literature. These authors not only write about young adults, but they write their stories with young adults in mind. In essence, they embrace the young adult consciousness and consider what is most appropriate and most beneficial for young adults to read (Bond 7). Because *The Diary of Anne Frank* is not a typical literary text but an actual published diary, most scholars would agree that it was not written with young adults in mind; instead, it was written for Anne's benefit. Many argue that Anne intended to publish her diary after the war ("Anne Frank's Diary"), so no one can definitively state that she was not writing for her peers.

Elie Wiesel's *Night* is similar to *The Diary of Anne Frank* in that it was not intended specifically for young adults. Initially, Wiesel's personal account of the Holocaust filled 900 pages in his book *And the World Remained Silent* ("About Elie Wiesel"). Somehow Wiesel cut his 900-page story down to barely one hundred pages and calls this new version *Night*, which was first published in English in 1960 ("About Elie Wiesel"). Because Wiesel was fifteen when he was taken to the concentration camp and because it is a short literary work, many educators view it as young adult literature. While it is an appropriate novel for some young adults, Wiesel actually tells his story for everyone, not specifically young adults.

Unlike the uncertainty of Anne Frank's and Elie Wiesel's intended audience, many authors of Holocaust literature assuredly write with young adults in mind. For example, Jerry Spinelli is well-known for his young adult literature. He initially wanted to write adult

novels, but he struggled to find someone who wanted to publish them. After four failed attempts at publishing adult novels, Spinelli brought his fifth novel, which was about a thirteen-year-old-boy, to another adult publishing company. Since they were not interested, Spinelli took his novel to a children's publisher; they loved it. Although it was, in essence, an accident, Spinelli has been writing books for children and young adults ever since ("Jerry Spinelli"). Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* is also written and appropriate for young adults. In fact, Zusak was a recipient of a 2006 Printz Honor for excellence in young adult literature for *The Book Thief* ("Markus Zusak"). Spinelli and Zusak, along with John Boyne, author of *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, have written at least one young adult novel about the Holocaust, but, as John Boyne acknowledges, people hesitate to let children or young adults read about such a serious and graphic topic. During a book talk and reading at Dublin City Public Library, Boyne explains how young adult literature can approach serious topics:

When the idea for [*The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*] first came to me, a very simple image at the start of just the two boys sitting on a fence talking to each other, I felt I couldn't walk away from that story and I felt that because I was going to be writing it from the point of view of a [nine]-year-old boy then it would seem natural that it was going to be written as a book for children, for young readers. And after it was published of course there are people, there were people, who felt that a subject matter like this such a serious story, such a sad story, tragic story, is not an appropriate one to give to young people to read which of course I didn't agree with, I mean I do feel that young readers can approach serious subjects like this if the stories are told in the right way and I tried to tell it in the right way. ("John Boyne")

It is a certainty that Spinelli's, Zusak's, and Boyne's Holocaust novels were written for young adults to read because their authorial histories and personal statements are focused on young adults.

Art Spiegelman's *The Complete Maus*, on the other hand, is not necessarily aimed at young adults, but young adults find its unique format appealing. Spiegelman tells about both his father's and mother's experiences during the Holocaust, but he puts it in the form of a graphic novel. Since young adults grow up in a visual world that is filled with television, magazines, computers, and video games, many are naturally attracted to visual elements; therefore, graphic novels "represent a welcome move away from what [students] consider traditional 'school' reading" (Bucher and Hinton, "Exploring Other" 321). Whether students enjoy visual representations of what they are reading or just equate pictures to fewer words to read, the pictures catch their interest. The images of Jewish mice and Nazi cats in Spiegelman's *The Complete Maus* also enhance the story itself: "Reading a visual format requires 'active participation in the text . . . [as readers] make connections between the images and the text and create the links between the panels and the page as a whole'" (qtd. in Bucher and Hinton, "Exploring Other" 321), creating a new medium for literacy. This is why *The Complete Maus* is an appropriate text for young adults; it relays historical events in comic book form, which students find unique and entertaining, but also encourages them to look further into the interpretation.

One of the guidelines for young adult literature is that there is a young adult protagonist who affects the plot. By placing a young adult protagonist into a historical setting, the literary work is considered both young adult literature and historical literature. Once that step is taken, the novel must present dilemmas and experiences that are historically

accurate. In *Milkweed*, Spinelli focuses on depicting the Holocaust through the life of a Gypsy orphan Misha. Readers experience Misha's thrill when he steals food and Misha's feelings toward his Jewish companions, but Spinelli also includes accurate details that create a clear historical setting. For example, Spinelli includes different ways the Jews suffered. First, he depicts the Jewish males' beards being cut off and Jewish businesses being either destroyed or taken over (21, 36). He also shows how Jews were identified by the public: "[Misha] knew by the armbands they wore. Every Jew had to wear a white armband with a blue star" (69). Spinelli eventually progresses to the Jews' lives in the ghetto. He creates scenes that include specific people, such as Henrich Himmler who was the second most powerful man in Germany at the time. Although Himmler does not play a large role in *Milkweed*, the inclusion of the scene where he visits the ghetto helps add to the historicity of the novel (111).

Other historical details in *Milkweed* add credibility, but they also need to be explored more thoroughly. Multiple scenes in the novel include a specific Jewish cop named Buffo. Buffo is known for tormenting and even killing Jewish children (114). Many inmates in ghettos and concentration camps were given authority over the other prisoners; some looked out for the other prisoners, but others behaved similarly to Buffo. Since Spinelli only presents the negative aspects of having Jewish cops, it is important for educators to emphasize that they were not all like Buffo if they want their students to have an accurate understanding of this element of ghettos and concentration camps. Educators should also spend time discussing the ghetto itself. Spinelli includes numerous details about living conditions, lack of food, and disease. He describes the brick wall surrounding the ghetto, emphasizing how barbed wire and broken glass topped the fence (79), and scenes are included

where Misha and his friends are seen hitting each other in an attempt to rid their hair of lice (127). Spinelli adds one detail that is truly essential to his novel. While Misha is living in the ghetto, he is able to sneak into town to bring food back into the ghetto. Although Spinelli explains how Misha gets past the fence and acknowledges the danger of doing so, it is an aspect of the novel that some students might have difficulty believing. To help students understand that prisoners sneaking out of the ghettos actually occurred, educators need to provide examples, which can be found on the *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* website. By discussing certain historical details presented in *Milkweed* in more depth, educators are not only acknowledging the novel's historicity but are helping students gain a more thorough understanding of the events depicted.

John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* includes less historical information than Spinelli's *Milkweed* because Boyne focuses on the relationship between Bruno and Shmuel, but there are still enough details to enforce historical accuracy. Since Bruno is a naïve character, Boyne chooses to describe historical information in an innocent manner. He includes details about the disheartening physical features of the concentration camps, which have "no greenery anywhere to be seen . . ." just "low huts and large square buildings . . . and one or two smoke stacks in the distance" (32). He also mentions the clothing prisoners in concentration camps are forced to wear: "[The boy] wore the same striped pajamas that all the other people on that side of the fence wore, and a striped cloth cap on his head. He wasn't wearing any shoes or socks and his feet were rather dirty. On his arm he wore an armband with a star on it" (106). An important aspect of Nazi Germany that Boyne includes in his novel is that not all Germans supported Hitler. Boyne approaches this fact through his representation of Bruno's grandmother. While talking to her son, a Nazi commandant, she

furiously exclaims that soldiers are only interested in their “fine uniforms” and “[d]ressing up and doing the terrible, terrible things [they] do” (92). Bruno’s grandmother never conceals her feelings from her family; thus, she is ultimately disowned by her son. Boyne includes another scene that reinforces the fact that not all Germans supported the Nazi ideals. A young lieutenant stationed at “Out-With” accidentally tells the Commandant that his father left Germany to teach in Switzerland. It quickly becomes evident from the Commandant’s comments that anyone who left Germany is considered a traitor: “Or perhaps he had . . . disagreements . . . [w]ith government policy. One hears tales of men like this from time to time. Curious fellows, I imagine. Disturbed, some of them. Traitors, others. Cowards, too” (147). The lieutenant fully realizes his mistake after the Commandant asks him if he told his superiors about his father. Naturally, every detail pertaining to the Holocaust cannot be included, but Boyne includes enough details to establish an historical background and to create opportunities for further historical research and study.

Markus Zusak’s *The Book Thief* introduces an historical detail that neither Spinelli nor Boyne include in their novels. He focuses a large portion of his novel on Liesel and her foster parents, Hans and Rosa Hubermann, hiding Max Vandenburg in their basement because he is a Jew. Scenes arise throughout the novel that emphasize how dangerous it is for the Hubermanns to hide Max and how they remain inconspicuous. For example, Hans refused to apply for membership to the Nazi Party. Once he did apply, his application was denied because he painted over slurs written on a Jewish store (104). Since people viewed him as being sympathetic toward Jews, he continued to check on the status of his application and even purchased *Mein Kampf* from a member of the Nazi Party (128). This eased suspicions, making it less likely for the Hubermanns’ house to be searched. Zusak also

mentions throughout the novel the organizations that youth joined; boys participated in Hitler Youth, while girls joined The League of German Girls. Both of these organizations are historical, and students could benefit from studying them more thoroughly. Zusak presents other facts about the Holocaust as well, such as the labor camps and death camps. As the imprisoned Jews are paraded through town the narrator states, “Perhaps death camps were kept secret, but at times, people were shown the glory of a labor camp like Dachau” (391). This brief historical detail creates an opportunity for students to learn more about both labor camps and death camps. Not all historical information focuses specifically on the Holocaust, though. Zusak also includes details about the Second World War, such as measuring basements to find appropriate air-raid shelters and collecting dead bodies as a soldier in the Air Raid Special Unit (340, 431). By including details about the Holocaust and the Second World War in his novel, Zusak reinforces the historicity of his novel.

While *Milkweed*, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, and *The Book Thief* all include important historical details, Art Spiegelman’s *The Complete Maus* is the literary text based most soundly in specifics about the Holocaust. Since Spiegelman relays his father’s experiences in Europe from the late 1930s until 1945, he covers various events that occurred before, during, and after the Holocaust. Vladek talks to his son about the first time he saw the swastika in 1938 and how sightings of the Nazi flag quickly escalated to burnt synagogues, stolen Jewish businesses, and beaten Jews (32-33). He also mentions his time spent fighting against Germany after he was drafted into the Polish Reserves Army (38), which creates a segue for discussing those who opposed Nazi Germany. Then Spiegelman presents his father’s experiences within a ghetto, including his time spent in hiding in order to avoid the concentration camps: “In the kitchen was a coal cabinet maybe four foot wide,

inside I made a hole to go down to the cellar. And there we made a brick wall filled high with coal. Behind this wall we could be a little safe” (110). Eventually, the Nazis caught Vladek and took him to Auschwitz, so Spiegelman includes details from the concentration camp as well. For example, he mentions the striped clothes and wooden shoes that the prisoners wore even though they did not fit correctly and the identification numbers tattooed on their forearms (186). Throughout the rest of the novel, details about prisoners’ food, diseases, and treatment appear, creating a strong historical picture. Spiegelman even includes a description of the layout of Auschwitz, using images to show where Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II / Birkenau, workshops and camp extensions, and the Sola River are located (211). Historical information continues to be presented after the Americans save the prisoners from the concentration camps. Vladek’s stories reveal how he was not immediately safe. Nazis still tried to capture them, and some German citizens refused to help them (268). These experiences emphasize the fact that the lives of concentration camp prisoners did not automatically improve, which might be a detail that is overlooked.

Although *The Diary of Anne Frank* includes a young adult protagonist and is considered an historical Holocaust novel, it is not as founded in historical dilemmas and experiences as other Holocaust novels, such as *Milkweed*, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, *The Book Thief*, and *The Complete Maus*. According to Elaine Culbertson, author of “*The Diary of Anne Frank: Why I Don’t Teach It*,” details of the Holocaust are never clearly presented because the real story “takes place apart from them” (Totten, *Teaching* 64). Instead, Anne focuses on her thoughts and feelings during her time in hiding, making her diary a coming-of-age story. Even Anne’s father Otto Frank commented that “the Diary may be no more than a story of adolescence, [so] how can it now be re-historicized and

understood as a Holocaust document?” (Rogers). Anne’s diary reveals historical details pertaining to the Holocaust, but it focuses more on her life as an adolescent while she is in hiding. While it is a moving and important literary work, *The Diary of Anne Frank* does not contain enough historical information to justify having students read it, especially if it is the only piece of Holocaust literature that they will encounter.

It is important in both Holocaust literature and in young adult literature that the literature helps support students’ emotional reactions and personal reflections. By focusing on one character’s experiences, the Holocaust is personalized. When students experience the Holocaust as someone’s personal experience and not as a series of facts and statistics, they become more involved with the topic:

Outstanding literature is also capable of “personalizing” this history, placing a “face” on horrendous facts and events. In a real sense, the incorporating of high quality literature into a study of the Holocaust is often capable of moving the study from a welter of statistics, remote places and events, to one that is immersed in the “personal” and the “particular.” By combining the study of literature with the study of history, students are often more apt to contemplate and reflect on the significance of the history of the Holocaust.

(Totten and Feinberg 156-57)

The personalization of the novel cannot outshine the historical details, though. There must be an appropriate balance (Bucher and Hinton, “Exploring Historical” 223), which is not seen in *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Zusak, Boyne, Spinelli, and Spiegelman all successfully display this balance in their novels.

Zusak's *The Book Thief* depicts the life of Liesel Meminger as she lives in Nazi Germany, but Zusak provides Liesel with a life outside of the Second World War and the Holocaust. He includes a scene about Liesel's brother dying on the train ride to the Hubermann's house and shows the effect his death had on her when she wakes up screaming from night terrors (21, 53). Certainly not all young adults have experienced the death of a loved one, but Zusak includes other details as well. Many students struggle academically at some time or another; Liesel is no different. Since Liesel learns to read much later than her classmates, her teacher never asks her to read aloud in class. One day Liesel insists on reading, but she freezes when she tries to say the words (77). When Liesel reads aloud to her family and neighbors during an air raid, she learns that she is able to read aloud beautifully (381). Some students might relate to Liesel's experience; if they do not, it still serves as a beneficial depiction that people can overcome their fears even during times of adversity. Others may relate more to Liesel's friend Rudy, who trained for six weeks in hopes of winning four running events during a Hitler Youth event (359). Others may understand how Liesel and Rudy felt when they had to say goodbye to their fathers who left for war (425). Regardless of which aspect of the novel students relate with, these details help some young adults become more invested in Liesel and other characters as people. When this happens, it makes it easier for students to remain connected to the characters and to the story as historical information pertaining to the Holocaust continues to appear.

This same approach is seen in Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. Since students have not lived next door to a Holocaust concentration camp, Boyne includes details that allow young adults to better relate with Bruno. At the beginning of the novel, Boyne emphasizes the difficulties both Bruno and his older sister Gretel have with moving to a new

home. The siblings hate leaving their friends behind, especially since there are not any children close to their new home (11). Bruno is so upset about moving that he risks punishment by telling his mother what she should do: “I think you should just tell Father that you’ve changed your mind and, well, if we have to stay here for the rest of the day and have dinner here this evening and sleep here tonight because we’re all tired, then that’s all right, but we should probably get up early in the morning if we’re to make it back to Berlin by tea-time tomorrow” (14). Many families end up moving at least once, so this plot point serves as a relatable detail for a lot of young adults. Parents arguing or committing adultery are other unfortunate occurrences in numerous households. If young adults have not experienced this in their own family, they may have a friend who has and talked to them about it; therefore, these unpleasant moments can also support students’ reflections and emotional reactions. In *The Boy with the Striped Pajamas*, the Commandant and his wife exhibit a tense relationship. The Commandant yells at his wife, ignoring her concerns about their upcoming move (10). Boyne also implies that Bruno’s mother has an affair with the young lieutenant; Bruno mentions seeing the lieutenant more often when his father is out of town and notices that the lieutenant is even there when he wakes up in the morning (163). For students who have never moved and who have never witnessed marital problems, Boyne includes sibling arguments between Bruno and Gretel and Gretel’s adolescent crush on the young lieutenant. Without these details, students may struggle to form a connection with the characters in the book, decreasing their chances of gaining the benefits of personal reflection and emotional reactions.

Spiegelman forms a connection between his graphic novel and young adults in a different way. The historical aspect of the tale focuses on his father and mother, who are

presented as adults. While students, especially female students, may at least find the love story between Vladek and Anja engaging, there are few other opportunities for students to connect with characters on a personal level; they may sympathize with characters or imagine what characters' experiences are like, but they have no direct experience with the Holocaust. Instead, Spiegelman helps young adults relate to characters during the scenes set in the present. Throughout the literary work, Spiegelman interacts with his family, especially his father. Friction is visible between Spiegelman and his father as they rarely agree with each other, which is something to which most young adults can relate. Once they realize that Spiegelman still cares about his father's story even though he does not always enjoy spending time with his father, students are able to create a connection of their own. While this connection may not be as effective as those in *The Book Thief* or *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, it still serves its purpose and helps keep the integrity of this more biographical literary text.

Although Spinelli includes substantial amounts of historical information in *Milkweed*, there are fewer events and details that support young adults' ability to make personal connections. One detail that he does establish is the relationship between Misha and Janina. Almost immediately after Misha and Janina meet, their relationship resembles that of siblings. Janina mimics Misha's actions by taunting Buffo and leaving the ghetto for food (140). Misha never hides his annoyance, but he still looks out for Janina. For example, the young girl runs away every night to watch the trains come into the ghetto. Instead of leaving her by herself, Misha follows her to make sure she stays safe (176). Not all young adults can relate to Misha's feelings toward Janina, but many who are older siblings undoubtedly can. Spinelli also focuses on some of the more serious topics young adults may discuss, such as

beliefs. While in the cemetery, Misha and the group of Jewish orphans see a statue of an angel. They discuss what angels are, where they live, and why they cannot be seen; one boy even questions their existence (47). *Milkweed* is an example of a text that does not equally meet the guidelines. Since the novel is firmly founded in historical accuracy, it is still an effective literary work; it just relies more on young adults responding emotionally to the historical details. If the novel focused on forming connections to young adults' lives and only sprinkled in historical details similar to *The Diary of Anne Frank*, the novel's success as historical literature would be less likely.

Unfortunately, the guidelines for choosing Holocaust literature and young adult literature are not always easily reconciled. For instance, both genres require appropriate dialogue. To meet the guidelines for effective historical literature, dialogue should be representative of the historical period; but to meet young adult standards, dialogue should sound how young adults speak. Since historically accurate dialogue would be written in twentieth-century German, it is difficult for dialogue to sound similar to how American young adults living in the twenty-first century speak. Authors have found ways to handle this dilemma, though. One method, which has been used for centuries, is including translations. Throughout *The Book Thief*, Zusak includes German words and phrases that are followed by English translations that flow as part of the text. For example, Liesel is taken to her foster parents' house to live, and the foster care lady says, "*Dein neues Heim*. Your new home" (27). This reminds students that the characters would not historically be speaking English and provides them with a feel for the language, yet they are still able to understand everything that is said. Spinelli approaches the dialogue dilemma in another way; his young

adult characters speak in either short sentences or sentence fragments. When Misha and his Jewish friend Uri pass by a dead boy in the ghetto, the following conversation occurs:

“Why is he dead?” I said. “Did a Jackboot shoot him?”

Uri shrugged. “Maybe. Or no food. Or the cold. Or typhus. Take your pick.”

“What’s typhus?”

“A sickness. Very popular.”

“Unlucky orphans.”

“Yeah.” (86)

Spinelli could have written this conversation using complete sentences, but he chose to use a mixture of short sentences and sentence fragments instead. People naturally speak in this way, so it is both historically accurate and common to young adults. Even though students probably would not be able to relate to passing by a dead boy and discussing the cause of his death with a friend, they can relate to the structure of the dialogue because it is common to them (Bucher and Hinton, “Understanding” 10); it makes sense to them. Balancing historically accurate dialogue with how young adults currently speak can be difficult, but it helps keep students connected to the story and to the characters while increasing the novel’s historical accuracy.

To choose an effective literary work, the readability of the text must be appropriate. Educators find a wide range of reading levels in most secondary school classrooms, which makes it more challenging to meet each student’s needs. Some literary works, such as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, include many challenging and possibly unfamiliar words. Although young adults can handle difficult words, such as *incorrigible* and *pedantic*, it is easy for

educators to place more focus on vocabulary than on the text itself because they want to make sure that students understand what they are reading. The Holocaust is a difficult topic to teach, to learn, and to discuss; since the topic itself requires both mental and emotional energy, it is best to not have to struggle with vocabulary on every page. Some young adults are capable of handling more challenging texts, but educators need to choose literature that is appropriate for the class as a whole. More challenging literature can be introduced to individual students one-on-one. When literary works are written specifically with young adults in mind, the vocabulary and word choice is usually more appropriate for students, making it easier to focus on the story and on the history, which is beneficial for the majority of students.

Sometimes the reading level of a text is appropriate for young adults, but the text itself is not developmentally appropriate. During the Holocaust, people experienced and saw traumatic events. Authors could describe these events in gruesome and terrifying ways, but that style of writing may emotionally scar some young adults or distract them from the importance of the Holocaust as an historical event. The same problem arises that occurred with the reading level of texts; what is too horrific for some students may be fine for others. Once again, educators must choose literary works that are appropriate for the class as a whole. While the protagonist, the plot, and the historical information are all effective in Wiesel's *Night*, he includes vivid descriptions of the atrocities he encountered. For example, Nazis constantly refer to the Jews as "filthy sons of bitches," and there are lengthy passages about torture. One such passage describes a Kapo beating Wiesel twenty-five times with a whip to make an example of him (55-56). Although both of these examples accurately depict how prisoners were treated during the Holocaust, they are not suitable for all young adults. Those

who are fifteen- or sixteen-years-old and older can probably maturely handle Wiesel's style of writing, but fourteen-year-olds and younger might not be able to do so.

Educators need to choose Holocaust literature that accurately depicts the historical happenings but is still appropriate for all young adults in their classrooms. Literary works written specifically for young adults makes this easier to accomplish. In *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, Boyne's use of description is simple and innocent because Bruno is an innocent protagonist. For example, Bruno finally sees inside the concentration camp when he sneaks under the fence to help Shmuel search for his father, but Boyne does not bombard readers with gruesome images:

[T]here were crowds of people sitting together in groups, staring at the ground, looking horribly sad; they all had one thing in common: they were all terribly skinny and their eyes were sunken and they all had shaved heads, which Bruno thought must have meant there had been an outbreak of lice here too.

In one corner Bruno could see three soldiers who seemed to be in charge of a group of about twenty men. They were shouting at them, and some of the men had fallen to their knees and were remaining there with their heads in their hands. (207-08)

This passage presents facts simply. Educators can add to these facts based on the age of their students, but Boyne's description allows readers a glimpse into concentration camps without being overwhelmed.

Some argue that Zusak's *The Book Thief* and Spiegelman's *The Complete Maus* include plenty of graphic details. In *The Book Thief*, one of the details that are more graphic is a brief anecdote:

* * * A SMALL WAR STORY * * *

His legs were blown off at the
shins and he died with his
brother watching in a cold,
stench-filled hospital. (459)

These are four powerful lines, and some may find them emotionally scarring while others may only find them upsetting. Zusak does not include details that distract from the themes of the novel, but his novel may be more appropriate for older students. The same can be said about Spiegelman's *The Complete Maus*, especially since he includes images. Vladek tells his son about a horrific moment from his time in the ghetto: "That spring, on one day, the Germans took from Srodula to Auschwitz over 1,000 people. Most they took were kids—some only two or three years. Some kids were screaming and screaming. They couldn't stop. So the Germans swunged them by the legs against a wall . . . and they never anymore screamed (108). The last sentence is accompanied by an image of a German soldier slamming a small body against a brick wall; it even shows the blood splattering across the wall. For young adults on the lower end of the age spectrum, this scene is developmentally inappropriate. It is important to remember that young adult literature is not appropriate for young adults of all ages, especially since many suggest that eleven to twenty-one years old is the age range for young adults (Pavonetti 33). Since *The Book Thief* and *The Complete Maus* include more graphic details, they may be more suitable for young adults in either their junior or senior years of high school.

There is other Holocaust literature that is suitable for younger young adults, however. For example, *Spinelli* controls his use of description well throughout *Milkweed*. During the

Holocaust, people living in the ghettos saw dead bodies; Spinelli presents this without using graphic details:

One cold day Uri and I were on the street. I was wearing two coats, but I could not make my feet warm. There were many people. I saw a boy. At least I thought it was a boy, from his size. He was lying on the sidewalk. I wondered how he could sleep with all the noise and people.

It was very strange. He was not in a doorway, where I had often seen people sleeping. He was not even on the edge of the sidewalk. He was right in the middle. The people just walked around him, making the shape of an eye. It was also strange that although no one seemed to see him, no one tripped over him.

But the strangest thing of all was the newspaper. It covered him like a blanket. (85)

When authors are writing specifically for young adults, they are more aware of their audience and how the details they include within their novels may affect their readers. Although they do not recreate every gruesome detail of the Holocaust, they present enough information to get the point across without overwhelming students.

Although it is difficult to meet every guideline for choosing Holocaust literature and young adult literature, some authors succeed in reconciling the two. When they do, a literary work is created that is capable of effectively helping students learn about the Holocaust. Traditional Holocaust novels, such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Night*, present this historical event in powerful ways and should not always be dismissed from the classroom. Young adult literature, such as *The Book Thief*, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, *Milkweed*,

and *The Complete Maus*, also powerfully discuss the Holocaust, but they do so in a way that is more universally appropriate and accessible for young adults.

Chapter Four: Lesson Ideas and Considerations

After the initial excitement of choosing to use young adult Holocaust literature in the classroom fades, educators are faced with the hard work of creating lesson plans that will both interest their students and increase their academic knowledge. This is no easy task. Educators must work around time constraints, which force them to limit the amount of information presented in the unit. Even harder than this is creating lessons that encourage students to face the reality of the Holocaust. As Holocaust survivor Eli Wiesel said, “How do you teach events that defy knowledge, experiences that go beyond imagination? How do you tell children, big and small, that society could lose its mind and start murdering its own soul and its own future?” (qtd. in Greenbaum 173). Undoubtedly, creating new lesson plans is always a daunting task, but it becomes easier if educators take them one step at a time. When using literature in the classroom, educators should strive to include before-, during-, and after-reading activities because this creates a clear organizational plan that supports reading comprehension (Lenz). This contributes to students’ engagement in the classroom and helps students reap more knowledge and benefits from the literary work. Before educators create various reading activities, they need to draw on the professional standards already in place to help them formulate specific objectives that state learning goals for the unit.

Developing Objectives

The successful teaching of any unit requires educators to determine what their objectives are for the unit. Objectives help keep educators focused on academics, so creating objectives is particularly important in regard to Holocaust education because there is so much

Holocaust-related information to study and to discuss. According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's *Guidelines for Teaching about the Holocaust*,

Because the objective of teaching any subject is to engage the intellectual curiosity of the students in order to inspire critical thought and personal growth, it is helpful to structure lesson plans on the Holocaust by considering throughout questions of rationale. Before addressing what and how to teach, one should contemplate the following: Why should students learn this history? What are the most significant lessons students can learn about the Holocaust? Why is a particular reading, image, document, or film an appropriate medium for conveying the lessons about the Holocaust which you wish to teach? (qtd. in Totten, *Teaching and Studying 2*)

After educators contemplate these questions, they will be one step closer to developing specific objectives that will provide structure for their Holocaust unit; but there are other factors that must be considered, as well.

In secondary school settings, it is impossible to teach all history, so educators must decide what and how much information they want to cover throughout the Holocaust unit. This may be the most difficult decision educators have to make because, according to Elliot Eisner, a professor of Art and Education at Stanford University, “[W]hat schools do not teach may be as important as what they do teach” (qtd. in Totten and Feinberg 3). By leaving out certain elements of the Holocaust, educators alter students’ perception of history, affecting their ability to examine critically and discuss the event. Since it is difficult to determine what information to leave out or not to focus on in depth, many educators choose to cover all elements of the Holocaust very generally. This “superficial coverage” is not beneficial to

students, though, because they find it “nonsensical” (Totten and Feinberg 8). Without learning about the Holocaust in depth, students will never begin to understand what happened or grow academically, emotionally, or morally.

Unfortunately, educators do not have the luxury of idly choosing to cover the Holocaust in depth; school standards are a factor that must be considered. Every public school follows a set of standards that details what students are expected to learn at each grade level. Instead of following state-specific standards, many schools have recently switched to Common Core Standards. The Common Core State Standards Initiative is an educational plan led by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers to provide “a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce” (“About the Standards”). The standards, which were released in their final format in June 2012, have currently been adopted by forty-five states and the District of Columbia, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands (“In the States”). Common Core State Standards and other school standards affect how educators plan their units because it is important that each lesson and activity be supported by a specific standard. Common Core State Standards even provide lists of suggested literary works that are effective for different grades; Markus Zusak’s *The Book Thief* is one novel that made the list. Educators must consider what information is vital to the study of the Holocaust, what activities can be used to teach this information while meeting school standards, and how much information and how many standards can be covered in the number of class periods available for the unit. Considering one of these factors, let alone all three, can make it difficult to create unit objectives. Fortunately, Holocaust scholars and educators publish specific objectives that help secondary school educators plan their own unit objectives. One

reliable resource is Samuel Totten's and Stephen Feinberg's *Teaching and Studying the Holocaust*. These men compiled a list of reliable and thought-provoking objectives that educators created over the past twenty years. Looking at sample objectives helps educators articulate what they want their students to gain from the unit. Once educators feel more comfortable and confident about teaching a young adult Holocaust literature unit, they can concentrate on reformulating their objectives to make them their own.

Before-Reading Activities

Before students read a literary work about the Holocaust, it is important for educators to prepare students historically. First, students' prior knowledge should be gathered. There are numerous ways to do this. One well-known method is a KWL chart. On a paper divided into three sections, students write down both what they know about the topic, K, and what they want to know about the topic, W. After the unit is completed, students think about what they learned, L. Educators can include additional columns as they see fit, such as further questions and summarization. Regardless of the format, a KWL chart is an effective way to begin a unit and is considered “. . . one of the instructional strategies essential in the repertoire of every secondary content area educator” (Fisher, et al. 47). Educators can also create an Anticipation Guide for their students to complete at the beginning of the unit. An Anticipation Guide can include specific questions related to the topic or true / false, yes / no, or agree / disagree statements. For example, it is shown in both Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* and John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* that not all Germans supported Hitler. Since this would be an important fact to be aware of while reading these novels, educators could ask their students whether the following statement is true or false: All Germans supported Hitler. As long as an Anticipation Guide is created effectively, it can

“prompt students to become active seekers of important information and ideas” (Fisher, et al. 7). Gathering students’ prior knowledge can even be as simple as holding a class discussion. After writing the topic on the board, educators ask students to mention anything they can think of that is related to the topic. The topic can be broad, such as the Holocaust, or it can be more specific, such as ghettos or concentration camps. By gathering students’ prior knowledge using this activity, educators can see where there are gaps in their students’ historical knowledge. This activity can also be done individually or in small groups. In addition to determining with which aspects of Holocaust history students are familiar, prior-knowledge activities are also helpful in determining any misconceptions students may have about the Holocaust.

Misconceptions students have about the Holocaust vary, but all of them need to be confronted at the beginning of and throughout the unit. It is important for students to understand why some of their notions are incorrect because misconceptions affect not only how students respond to studying the Holocaust but also how educators approach teaching about the Holocaust. Since some students may feel embarrassed about their incorrect notions, educators should handle them in a learning-conducive manner.

To confront students’ misconceptions in an academic yet nurturing manner, educators may find it helpful to educate themselves about common misconceptions beforehand. Educator Samuel Totten, who wrote “Student Misconceptions about the Genesis of the Holocaust,” explains common misconceptions students have about the Holocaust and includes credible information that supports why the misconceptions are inaccurate. Many students believe that Hitler was the sole cause of the Holocaust because they hear his name so often (81). Although he did play a vital role, “the goal of annihilation called for

participation by every arm of the government” (81). It is important for students to realize this because blaming the Holocaust on only Hitler is too simplistic. Totten also discovered that students believe that “German Jews controlled the economy, were uniformly wealthy, and were the cause of the Great Depression, which caused great misery in Germany and throughout the world” and also led to the Holocaust (82). Based on this misconception, it is evident that students need to gain an understanding of Jews’ role in society and non-Jewish Germans’ disdain for Jewish Germans. Also, it creates an opportunity to emphasize that the Holocaust did not stem from one solitary event (82). Some students believe that the Holocaust stemmed from a fight against “races”—the Aryan “race” versus the Jewish “race” (83). Educators need to clarify what constitutes a race and that there is not an Aryan or Jewish race. When students think about the Second World War, they often think about the Holocaust, as well. According to Totten, “many students are under the impression that the Holocaust caused the Second World War or that the two events were in fact one event” (82). With this misconception in mind, educators need to explain to students how the two events are related yet disparate at the same time. By considering possible misconceptions students may have, educators will be better prepared to plan lessons that will correct these misconceptions and relay the historical facts.

Discussing common misconceptions creates an opportunity for educators to provide their students with ample background knowledge about the Holocaust. As author Margaret Drew states, “[L]iterature without history is only a story” (qtd. in. Totten and Feinberg 72). If students are going to understand the Holocaust and the historical literature that they read, educators need to ensure that their students “have a solid sense of the ‘whos,’ ‘whens,’ ‘hows,’ and ‘whys’ of the Holocaust” (Totten and Feinberg 72). If educators do not feel

confident in relating this background information or if they do not have enough time during the unit, collaborative teaching is an option. Schools encourage teachers from different fields of study to work together throughout the school year to help students see how subjects are related to one another. Language Arts and Social Sciences educators can plan Holocaust units together. Students may receive the historical information in their history class and then read the historical literature in their language arts class. This approach also helps students understand “the connectedness of knowledge and life” (qtd. in T. Savage, M. Savage, and Armstrong). Collaboration provides students with double the allotted time of study, while still focusing on learning historical information and personalizing the Holocaust.

During-Reading Activities

After students have spent time learning about the historical facts of the Holocaust, they can begin reading the literary work because they will better understand the historical context of the text. Because the Holocaust can be an overwhelming and emotional topic, Totten suggests creating a response-centered classroom where the subject can be both explored and personalized (Totten and Feinberg 139). By allowing students to interact with the text and not just listen to a lecture, educators will be able to help lead students in discussions based on information that they either find interesting or that pertains to them and helps them mature academically. Initiating class discussions can be difficult, though, so it is beneficial for educators to begin with individual activities for students.

An activity that helps students respond to literary works is having them write reader response papers or keep a personal journal. Both of these activities allow students to think about the text on their own and to explore their initial responses. By allowing students to respond to the text as readers before moving on to critical analysis, they “. . . often respond

more positively to reading” (Alsup 7). Response papers and journal entries do not have to be open-ended every time, though. If educators want their students to focus on a specific aspect of the novel, guidelines can be provided that initiate a critical analysis of the text. For example, in Boyne’s *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, Bruno constantly refers to his new home as “Out-With” and to Hitler as the “Fury” (25, 117). These details could easily be overlooked by students; therefore, educators might pose a question that encourages students to critically think about Boyne’s use of these two words. These writing activities help students organize their thoughts before a class discussion, which helps the discussion run more smoothly (Greenbaum 2). Response papers and journals are also an appropriate activity for students because they are an effective way to meet some of Common Core’s Standards for Writing and for Reading: “[Students] write routinely over . . . short times frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences;” “[Students] read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it [and] cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text” (“College Standards Reading”; “College Standards Writing”).

While response papers and personal journals can initiate critical analysis, it is important for students to delve deeper into analysis by making connections. First, students must understand the text, which ensures the implementation of the following Standards for Reading: “[D]etermine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas” and “read and comprehend complex literary . . . texts independently and proficiently” (“College Standards Reading”). Once students understand the novel, they can begin making connections to their own lives and to

the lives of others. For example, students may explore the issue of hate in society, discussing both the Nazis' hatred of Jews, Gypsies, and other select groups and Ku Klux Klan's hatred of African Americans (Greenbaum 35). There is also the Nazis' "disregard of human life," their "urge to kill," and their "ability to kill," which can also be discussed in regard to the Columbine shootings and other similar incidents (Greenbaum 4). Discussing connections helps reinforce that many of the same emotions, mindsets, and urges initiated atrocities that occurred both over half a century ago and barely a decade ago.

Students gain historical knowledge before they begin reading the literary work, but topics can also be explored in more detail throughout the unit. An important element of Common Core is research. The College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing includes three research standards: first, "[students should] conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation;" second, "[students need to] gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism;" third, "[students will] draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research." As historical people, places, and events are revealed throughout the literary work, educators can have students complete either individual or group research to learn more about the topic. In Zusak's *The Book Thief*, Liesel, the protagonist, witnesses a "parade" of Jews being marched to a labor camp (391-92). This passage provides various opportunities for research. Students could research the marches Jews were forced to make or specific labor camps. They could present their findings through writing, or they could create presentations to share with the class. A similar activity could be implemented using Spinelli's *Milkweed*. Toward the end

of the novel, people living in the ghetto are transported by train to concentration camps (168-69). Although the novel does not include information about concentration camps, students could complete research about them to gain more knowledge.

Although there are many activities that benefit students, some activities sound fun but are not necessarily appropriate. Educators try to make class exciting for their students by including unique activities; one such activity is simulations. The goal of simulations is to encourage students' engagement in class by providing them an opportunity to experience what victims of the Holocaust experienced. Students may be engaged during simulations, but the activity is detrimental to the unit: both role playing and simulations “. . . have been known to produce unprecedented emotional tensions in the classroom, among some students arousing fear, panic, and overidentification with Jewish victims and among others, releasing sadomasochistic urges, violent responses, and overidentification with the murderers” (qtd. in Totten and Feinberg 73). Simulations may also make students feel as if they experienced exactly what a prisoner in a concentration camp endured. Only those who suffered the atrocities truly understand what the experience entailed, so it is unwise to suggest to students that they can completely understand what it felt like to live through the Holocaust.

After-Reading Activities

After students finish reading the literary work, it is beneficial to introduce an activity to end the unit. Although tests are a legitimate method of gauging students' understanding of the unit, it can be even more beneficial for them to write a paper or create a project. If time is limited, RAFT Writing is a quick and beneficial activity to help end a unit. RAFT stands for Role, Audience, Format, and Topic. As stated in *50 Content Area Strategies for Adolescent Literacy*,

Writing to learn differs from other types of writing because it is not a process piece that will go through multiple refinements toward an intended final project. Instead, it is meant to be a catalyst for further learning—an opportunity for students to recall, clarify, and question what they know and what they still wonder about. In other words, writing provides students an opportunity to clarify their own thinking. (Fisher, et al. 79)

This is what is accomplished with RAFT Writing. Students pick a role, such as a character from a book. Then they pick an audience, which could be an individual or a group. Next, a format must be chosen; formats include, but are not limited to, newspaper articles, postcards, poems, brochures, letters, diary entries, obituaries, and persuasive writing. Finally, students choose a topic to write about that is related to the discussions throughout the unit (Fisher, et al. 79-80). These four elements combine to create a project. For example, if students read Spinelli's *Milkweed*, students could choose to write a letter to the young Misha from the more knowledgeable Uri. Since Misha does not understand the atrocities occurring around him, Uri's letter could explain them. Students could include details from the novel about the events Misha witnessed involving the treatment of Jews, such as a Jewish man being forced to clean a sidewalk with his beard (21). This detail could be expanded upon by including researched information about why Jews were treated this way. The project would be a creative piece of writing that exhibits both historical knowledge and knowledge of the novel.

While shorter writing activities are useful, some educators prefer having students write essays. Essay topics are numerous, so it is important for educators to provide guidance to their students. For example, Beth Aviv Greenbaum includes an instruction sheet for a writing assignment in her book *Bearing Witness: Teaching About the Holocaust*. After

students finish Spiegelman's *The Complete Maus*, Greenbaum suggests that they write a two- to three-page essay over a motif or theme from the novel (60). She provides students with these questions to examine:

How is the motif or theme important?; How does Spiegelman use the motif or theme? What are some questions or emotions the motif or theme evokes?;

How is the use of this motif or theme effective? Is it resolved in the book?

(That is, how does the motif fit with the thrust or main point of the book?)

Ultimately what is the significance of the motif? (60)

She even includes a list of suggested topics: "swastika, Art's smoking, money, Vladek's stationary bike, Art's relationship with his father, mother, or stepmother, Spiegelman's use of animals for humans, and the interior comic, "Prisoner on Hell Planet" (60). Providing students with topic examples and specific instructions increases their chances of writing a successful paper, yet they still have to think critically. This assigned essay over *The Complete Maus* also meets multiple Common Core Standards. According to the Standards for Reading, "[Students should] determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development" ("College Standards Reading"), which is the topic of this example essay. By completing this assignment, students have the opportunity to write either an argument essay or an informative or explanatory essay, which are two required essays listed on the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing.

A common way of ending units in secondary schools is showing films. This can add a new dimension to the unit if it is handled in an academic manner. In 2008, Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* was turned into a motion picture. Educators could show this film to their students after they finish reading the novel. A logical project to complete would be

to write a paper that compares and contrasts the film with the novel. Students could consider how the similarities and differences affect the novel and / or the film. By writing this paper, students “integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually . . . , as well as in words” and also “analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches [taken]” (“College Standards Reading”). In regard to the Standards for Writing, students “draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research” and also “produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to the task, purpose, and audience” (“College Standards Writing”). Writing is an effective way to encourage critical thinking, but sometimes educators try to incorporate different methods of testing students’ knowledge.

Instead of allowing students only to write about a novel, educators can provide students with artistic options, as well. Zusak’s *The Book Thief* is a great text for this because Zusak uses a lot of description and figurative language. Students could create a visual representation of a specific scene from the novel and write a short paper explaining the importance of the scene to the novel as a whole. Another artistic approach would be for students to create a picture book that focuses on depicting various themes throughout the novel. This activity also ties in with Zusak’s use of short picture books within his book. Although these activities still include writing, they also allow students to show their knowledge and creativity in another way. They also meet the following Standards for Reading: “[Students] interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone”; “[Students] analyze the structure of texts, including specific

sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole” (“College Standards Reading”). Whether students create artistic projects or write a traditional essay, it is important that the after-reading activities encourage students to make final critical analyses and present their knowledge about and understanding of a literary work in an academic format.

One of the benefits of being an educator is that second chances exist. If an activity is not as effective as hoped or more time needs to be spent on a specific historical concept, lesson plans can be revised for the next group of students. According to Samuel Totten, the most important thing to remember when teaching about the Holocaust is that lessons need to “. . . enable students to glean unique insights into the history of the Holocaust and leave them with something of importance to ponder far past the conclusion of the lesson itself” (Totten and Feinberg 62). With this goal in mind, educators can persevere, creating a young adult Holocaust literature unit that expands students’ historical and societal knowledge, encourages their personal growth as members of society, and increases their awareness of the world around them.

Numerous literary works about the Holocaust exist; and as long as they are historically accurate, they can be both academically and personally beneficial to readers. Both Anne Frank’s *The Diary of a Young Girl* and Elie Wiesel’s *Night* provide a personal perspective about the Holocaust that has the capability of stimulating emotional reactions, and many young adults value the opportunity to read them. Other Holocaust literature, including young adult literature, should not be overlooked, though. Young adult novels present important historical information, but they also bring something different to the classroom that many young adults find appealing. Markus Zusak’s *The Book Thief*, John

Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, and Jerry Spinelli's *Milkweed* all relate fictional stories about people who lived during the Second World War and the Holocaust, but these authors still effectively include accurate historical details that meld with details about typical occurrences in young adults' lives in both the past and present. Their attention to detail and ability to write with young adults in mind results in literary works that allow students to focus on history and its relationship with the present, not on deciphering confusing passages and complicated vocabulary. Art Spiegelman's *The Complete Maus*, on the other hand, focuses almost solely on biographical information, but the novel's comic book format continues to intrigue most young adults. Whether the Holocaust is depicted in a unique literary format or the literary work is outside of the typical Holocaust canon, educators can utilize young adult Holocaust literature to engage students. Once educators choose an historically accurate and engaging text and create a unit with clear objectives, they increase their likelihood of successfully teaching the unspeakable.

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