The opening title of a Washington Post article by Sarah Wildman from 2016 reads: “After all the survivors have died, the Holocaust will seem as dry and dusty as the Civil War.” The existence of holocaust deniers has been prevalent since the first reports of the extermination camps were brought to light. But now the generation of survivors is dwindling down, and the world seems to be forgetting that they ever existed. Nazism has begun to be less ashamed; there are marches in the streets and flags flown without shame. The suffering of millions of people has become like a footnote; easily overlooked in the grand scheme of things.

In 1941, Joe Simon and Jack Kirby created Steve Rogers better known as Captain America. He gained popularity by becoming the face of all the young patriots in the country ready to sign up for the war to defend the world from the Nazi threat. Captain America took off because the public identified with his ideals and his willingness to fight for what was right. Captain America became iconically known for being the guy who “punched Hitler in the face.” Then, in 2016, something shifted. Captain America was turned into a weapon for HYDRA, the organization that was responsible for the rise of Nazism in Captain America’s world. For a lot of comic book enthusiasts this came like a blow; for those who were looking at the bigger picture of what was going on out in the world this symbolized something much bigger. The victims of Nazism have begun to turn into the same dry and dusty as those of the Civil War.

In the last couple of years, 2016-2017, prejudice has been at the forefront of the news. Though we might like to think that teenagers remain in a bubble where politics and social issues do not affect them that is far from the truth. During my observations there was a boy, I’ll call him Carlos, who refused to get up from his seat when the Pledge of Allegiance came up on the announcements. The teacher, Mrs. Gonzalez-Jones, stood by him with her hand over her heart and recited the pledge. She didn’t make him get up, she didn’t call attention to the fact that he was sitting down, but rather let him express his opinion on his own. This came after a weekend when the controversy of football players kneeling over the national anthem spiked up and gained more notoriety. By the end of the Pledge, she asked told her student that she would like for him to write to her about why he decided to sit down; she said that she didn't want him to tell her right then and there but that she would like to have him write about it.

This incident more than anything else cemented my understanding that teenagers don’t live in a bubble separated from the political world. They are very much in the middle of it; they are observing and thinking and rationalizing where they fit in the context of their society. Taking into account the resurgence of neo-Nazi movements and white supremacist marches I thought it was important that the lives that were lost during the Holocaust were not forgotten. Moreover, if the promise of “never again” is to be kept then the younger generations need to be told about the lives and the hardships that the previous generations went through.

**Introducing the unit:**

I thought that the best way to introduce the unit would be to begin with the historical context of what led to the beginning to the Second World War and the consequences that led up to the onset of what was known as Hitler’s final solution. Seeing as the main focus of my unit would be the novel *Night* by Eli Wiesel which is usually taught to tenth graders. I thought that I would emulate Mrs. G-J, the high school teacher I have been observing, and write the lyrics to a song on the board. Not only that, but as part of the introduction to the unit I thought that it would be beneficial to play the song while the students are filing into the classroom and to have the lyrics written on the board. The song that I thought I would play is *Waiting for the Worms* by Pink Floyd. It’s fitting in the context of what I would hope for my students to realize as we read through the novel and talk about the impact the Holocaust had on the world at large. The song was written in 1979 and it helps emphasize the idea that despite the fact that it occurred in the past it kept affecting people decades later. That is not the only significance of the song, but also the imagery helps set the stage for the harsh reality of the descriptions contained within the novel.

As an introductory activity I thought that I would have the students get together in small groups of four to discuss what they know about the Holocaust. They would be responsible for coming up with three things that they thought were the most important points to know in fill out a worksheet with terms that they may not be familiar with. I believe that it is important for them to know the history involved within the novel and the historical context that it depicts so I would have the students fill out a list of terms and dates so that they are aware of who and what the author is speaking of as the novel progresses. At the end of the worksheet would be a map that the students would be responsible for labeling with the dates certain territories were taken over by Nazi rule and colored accordingly. The worksheet would be assigned as homework and then discussed in class so that every student has the correct information, and those who were unable to find a certain term or the significance of a specific date.

**The main text:**

Before introducing the students to the novel we would focus on, I planned on presenting them with an excerpt from one of Martin Niemöller’s lectures. The excerpt would be printed out and passed around to the students in the class, then I would take volunteers so that each person would read one line of the excerpt. Then the last line would be read as the whole class so as to show how Martin Niemöller described his involvement in the war and the part that good people had in the atrocious acts that occurred in Germany and Eastern Europe. I would then open up the class for discussion on what the students thought Mr. Niemöller was trying to describe as part of his lecture.

Then I would begin introducing the main text for our unit. I would start by giving the students contextual information about Eli Wiesel and his biographical information such as the recognitions he had achieved during his life and the work he did as an advocate. I would also show the students the website for the *Eli Wiesel Foundation for Humanity* and the work that they do as an organization. Before starting the in class reading of *Night* I would explain to the students that, like them, Mr. Wiesel was a teenager when he was taken to the concentration camps. It is important for students to know that many people that were the age they are at the moment had to endure the horrible tragedies of the Holocaust. It would be beneficial to parallel the story of Anne Frank and her account of her experience in the Holocaust with that of Eli Wiesel in *Night*.

The students would start the novel during the weekend before the unit started, but they would not be responsible for completing the whole thing. They would be expected to be familiar with the names and places described in the book, and for them to have a general idea of the author’s history which would be aided by the introduction I would give them and the extra resources that they would be provided with in their worksheet. As a class, we would read the final chapters in the novel so that we could discuss the impact that the students could discuss their thoughts and ideas as they go through the ending of the novel as a class.

To close on the reading and move along to the next part of their assignment, and to set the stage for the next required reading the students would have to do, I thought to read a part of Eli Wiesel’s acceptance speech for his Nobel Prize. Not only does it highlight the themes of his novel, but it also may give the students some ideas for their upcoming writing assignment. While delivering his acceptance speech, Mr. Wiesel pointed out that “I remember: it happened yesterday, or eternities ago… I remember his bewilderment, I remember his anguish. It all happened so fast.” (Wiesel, 118.) If the younger generations were to never forget then it is important that they understand the toll that the horrors of the holocaust left not only on those who perished but also on those who survived.

**Further reading:**

The students would be expected to read and complete a second novel outside of class that they would pair up for their final essay assignment. As stated previously, it is important that the students are able to identify themselves with the reading that they are doing in class. They, hopefully, will never have to experience the type of horror and devastation that Eli Wiesel but they would be able to find a connection with the thought processes and the convoluted emotions and uncertainties that a young narrator would have experienced during such a time of distress. While observing my host teacher, I was able to see that the students become much more engaged if they are able to find a type of connection between themselves and the protagonists of the material they are reading.

**List of outside reading:**

*At the Heart of the White Rose: Letters and Diaries of Hans and Sophie Scholl* is a collection of letters and journal entries written by siblings Hans and Sophie Scholl who led a group of Nazi resistance known as the White Rose. Similarly to Eli Wiesel’s book, the collection of letters is written in first person and from the pen of two young people who lived during the uprising and control of Nazi rule. Also similarly to Martin Niemöller the two young college students were part of the Hitler Youth before they began to identify the problems with the doctrine being taught to the people of Germany. It is important for students to see as many perspectives as they can.

*The Book Thief* by Markus Suzak. Written from the perspective of Death, it follows the journey of Liesel Meminger as she navigates the changes in her society as nazism continues to rise. It provides a good perspective on how a young person might begin to understand the difference between right and wrong and how people break away from the rules that their government sets out for them when their morality is questioned. Again, similarly to Niemöller, the novel presents the reader with the idea that there were “good” people who were caught up in the propaganda of nazism.

*All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr. It is narrated from the perspective of two young people. One blind French girl who flees the occupation of France. The other from a young German orphan boy who sees the Hitler Youth as his ticket to get out of the impoverished town where him and his sister live with the rest of the orphans. The novel does a very good job of presenting two different perspectives of the same struggle, and also manages to convey the way both main characters mature as the war goes on and their sense of self is tested. Furthermore, the novel presents the struggle of a disabled character who would have been affected exponentially more under Nazi rule because of her disability. Often children and young adults forget that Nazi targeted more than just the Jewish faith but also all of those that were deemed undesirable or “useless.” Novels such as Doerr’s bring into focus the truth of how over compassing hate was during the Second World War.

*Salt to the Sea* by Ruta Sepetys. Told from the perspective of four young people trying to find refuge from the war, *Salt to the Sea* shows how the war changed with each person that it touched. It does a very good job of presenting the grey areas of morality, and the way in which young people can be confronted with a complete change of perspective and the harsh truths of life. Like Doerr’s novel, *Salt to the Sea* brings characters that were meant to hate each other because of what their governments dictated overcoming that prejudice and banding together in their humanity. Though the setting is doubly tragic, having as its centerpiece the Second World War and the tragedy of the sinking of the Wilhelm Gustloff, Sepetys’s noel demonstrates the lengths people will go to survive and maintain their humanity.

Though the students will have this list to choose from, as well as the summaries and any other discussion they might like to have with me to further understand the outside reading books, they may also choose a book that is not on the press signed list. If the students would like to choose their own book, however, they would have to meet a few conditions. The books they choose may be fiction if they so choose, but they must be based on a historical event whether it be the Holocaust or a similar event in recent history after the Second World War. Furthermore, the narrator of their chosen outside reading must be a teenager or young adult so as to keep with the theme set for the unit.

**Final Project:**

The final written assignment for the class will be a comparative essay between the novel we read in class together and their choice of a secondary text as its main focus. However, if they so chose, they could also incorporate the other excerpts read and discussed in class to further develop their responses to the prompt. The students will be able to choose their own topic from a list of three or four prompts that I will be handing them as the unit comes to a close. Similarly to the outside reading , however, if a student has an idea for a comparative essay that they would like to explore.

“Martin Niemöller: "First they came for the Socialists...".” *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, [www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007392](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007392).

“Children of the Holocaust.” *Children of the Holocaust - Museum of Tolerance | Los Angeles, CA*, [www.museumoftolerance.com/site/c.tmL6KfNVLtH/b.9168051/k.69D4/Children\_of\_the\_Holocaust/apps/nl/newsletter2.asp](http://www.museumoftolerance.com/site/c.tmL6KfNVLtH/b.9168051/k.69D4/Children_of_the_Holocaust/apps/nl/newsletter2.asp).

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