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ENGL 112B

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History and History Makers: In the Wake of War

From the dawn of humanity through present day we bear witness to the atrocities of war. War has always been a staple of the human condition as it is a way for leaders to gain territories, workers/slaves and more importantly - power. While the leaders of these nations have been the ones to reap the benefits from waging a successful war, his enemies and even his own people who fight are left scarred both mentally and physically. Literature and the humanities are about the human experience, since the effects of war are so visceral and as the masses gained literacy, stories of hardship and struggle filled the pages of novels, history books, poetry and new media. Yet, the devastation that war can cause does seem to have a small silver lining for some of those who wrote about it, and it is one of the most powerful themes across literature, *the power to overcome the greatest adversities*.

I think that this theme's content is something that is relatable to any reader, while challenging their emotions and the conventions of the 21st century world around them. Novels of war show that life isn't always a pleasant experience and in fact so many people who fight to protect that pleasant and peaceful life for others never come back quite the same as when they left. These are powerful themes that push a change for young adult reader's perspective on the world around them. Challenging that worldview is essential to provoking further thought, and furthering cognizant growth. When we feel the struggle of another human being we can learn from that experience. War has many facets that make the subject of *History and History Makers* is such an important one for young adults to read. The books range from a hero's tale to the seed of darkness that lies in every man and everywhere in between, yet their themes are as potent as the imagery the authors use. Most of these novels come from tales of personal

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experiences with the horrors of war and telling that aspect to students can be very important - it helps ground the stories reality and not just as a fictional conception.

I would teach subject matter like this very carefully as it is often not surprising to know someone who has been through war, or has family members who have suffered as a result. I think the importance is to focus on the human experience, the will to overcome or the persistent struggle to survive and resist giving in. I would plot the media in a way that tend to build into a dark climatic novel/film and then taper down into stories of overcoming - to end on a happier note. Reasons for this is that war is heavy, dark material that revisits the shadows in men's hearts that we had hoped to cast away with collective progression and globalization. The struggle to overcome and endure is still more important to learn than the horrors that man can commit to man so closing it off with a film like *Schindler's List*, really highlights that powerful notion and shows how to forgive but never forget.

Annotated Bibliography

The Red Badge of Courage (Read)

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Summary: Taking place during the American Civil War, the story is about a young private of the Union Army, Henry Fleming, who flees from the field of battle. Overcome with shame, he longs for a wound, a "red badge of courage," to counteract his cowardice. When his regiment once again faces the enemy, Henry acts as standard-bearer which is considered an honor.

Analysis: This book is important as it shows that Pvt. Fleming returns to duty as a flag bearer - arguably one of the most terrifying and symbolic positions in the army. He seeks to honor what he stands to fight for now - to rid himself of his cowardice by putting himself in harms way. The story is sort of that of a redemption story. I picked this one as the first novel to read as it fits the symbolic reasons that men fight and go to war, it is about their ideals they stand for being put above the cost of their own human life.

Dulce et decorum est (Read)

Summary: A poem by Wilfred Owen. The text presents a vignette from the front lines of World War I of British soldiers attacked with mustard gas. In the rush when the shells with poison gas explode, one soldier is unable to get his mask on in time. The speaker of the poem describes the gruesome effects of the gas on the man and concludes that, if one were to see firsthand the reality of war, one might not repeat mendacious platitudes like *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*: "it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country."

Analysis: This short poem highlights the exact opposite qualities of *The Red Badge of Courage* it shows that men who left to fight for their country during the first world war believed their were doing so in good principle and ideals, but the horrors of what they saw in battle changed them.

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It's also worth noting that this time period was when a dynamic shift in arts and literature about war took place, as it began to shed light on the reality of combat.

All Quiet on the Western Front (Read)

Summary: A young soldier faces profound disillusionment in the soul-destroying horror of World War I.

Analysis: This novel is pretty much an expansion on the concepts put forth in *Dulce et decorum est*, watching war take your friends, land, family, house, etc is terrifying and the novel comes to show that the only way the protagonist can find peace is in death.

Uncommon Valor (Heard)

Summary: United States soldier stationed in Gia Định, who, after seeing the carnage of battle and the corruption of the Army, begins to question the real motives behind the Vietnam War. R.A. the Rugged Man's verse recounts the war experience of his father, highly decorated war hero Staff Sgt. John A. Thorburn, who was nearly killed in a helicopter crash near Cambodia after his helicopter's pilot was hit. He reaches a moment of clarity while in the hospital, but after being sent home, he discovers he has been exposed to Agent Orange, leaving two of his children severely mentally and physically handicapped, his son Maxx died at the age of 10, his daughter Dee-ann died in 2007 at the age of 27.

Analysis: This piece to me shows that war is not only horrifying to experience, but that those experiences can follow you and haunt you for the rest of your life. His family was destroyed by

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something that had affected him 30 years before and forcing him to see the damage that war had caused everyday.

Full Metal Jacket (Seen)

Summary: A pragmatic U.S. Marine observes the dehumanizing effects the U.S.-Vietnam War has on his fellow recruits from their brutal boot camp training to the bloody street fighting in Hue.

Analysis: I chose this film for the way that it portrays its characters. It is one of the most brilliant pieces of film I have ever seen, it's dark satire is embellished with the reality of the Vietnam War, the horrors committed, and the blatant lack of human decency that should be shown to another human being. (Film Clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S06nlz4scv>)

Catch-22 (Read)

Summary: Set during World War II from 1942 to 1944. The novel follows Captain John Yossarian who flies a bomber for the US. The novel focuses on their attempts to keep their sanity in order to fulfill their service requirements so that they may return home.

Analysis: This novel deals with the grip of control that the Army bureaucracy has over the individual soldiers, watching the number of missions the soldiers have to run constantly becoming increased shows the blatant lack of care the army has for it's own soldiers and is simply throwing them at a problem until they are killed and replaced by a fresh face. This is powerful imagery that the enemy may not always be the guy you are shooting at.

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The Book Thief

Summary: Narrated by Death, the book is set in Nazi Germany, a place and time when the narrator notes he was extremely busy. It describes a young girl's relationship with her foster parents, the other residents of their neighborhood, and a young Jewish man who hides in her home during the escalation of World War II.

Analysis: I chose this for the civilian aspect to war, and while most of the novel is from death's perspective, the way that it is viewed shows that everyone is affected by war not just the men who fight for their country.

Night (Read)

Summary: A work by Elie Wiesel about his experience with his father in the Nazi German concentration camps at Auschwitz and Buchenwald in 1944–1945, at the height of the Holocaust and toward the end of the Second World War. Wiesel writes about the death of God and his own increasing disgust with humanity, reflected in the inversion of the father–child relationship as his father declines to a helpless state and Wiesel becomes his resentful teenage caregiver. In *Night*, everything is inverted, every value destroyed. "Here there are no fathers, no brothers, no friends," a Kapo tells him. "Everyone lives and dies for himself alone."

Analysis: The utmost darkness of war, the concentration camps. This novel shows the darkness of man on an unmatched level, while also showing the eventual coming to forgiveness that Wiesel shows. This is a powerful step toward healing the damages done, but the mantra of Forgive, Not Forget is ever present in this book.

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Schindler's List (Film - Seen) / ***Schindler's Ark*** (Novel)

Summary: An American historical drama film directed and co-produced by Steven Spielberg. It is based on the novel *Schindler's Ark* by Thomas Keneally. The film is based on the life of Oskar Schindler, a German businessman who saved the lives of more than a thousand Polish-Jewish refugees during the Holocaust by employing them in his factories.

Analysis: This is the true story of human compassion, and a great note to end on as a man does everything he can to help, hide and protect Jewish civilians during the devastation of World War II. This piece highlights the light in man's darkest hour, and is another step toward healing the wounds of ignorance and intolerance.

Pursuing Beyond:

The Diary of Anne Frank

Heart of Darkness

Apocalypse Now

Slaughterhouse Five

Things Fall Apart

Animal Farm

Works Cited

Although they have been edited, some summary information came from the book/film/song's respective Wiki Articles - so sources are cited below:

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_Quiet_on_the_Western_Front

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- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Red_Badge_of_Courage
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schindler%27s_List
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncommon_Vvalor:_A_Vietnam_Story
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dulce_et_Decorum_est
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Full_Metal_Jacket
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Night_\(book\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Night_(book))
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Book_Thief
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catch_22

History and History Makers

In the Wake of War

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Why is war an important subject?

- War is the most visceral human experience
- War has the ability to affect all kinds people, not just soldiers in battle
- Even in the worst atrocities, there is often a silver lining that highlights the positive strengths found in the human condition.
- There are so many facets of how humans deal with conflict that have been expressed in media

Dulce Et Decorum Est - Wilfred Owens

It is sweet and fitting (to die for one's country)



World War I changed the way battles were fought, and changed the perspectives of men who fought in them as well.

The line “Dulce Et Decorum Est...” is used sardonically by the poet, who has now seen the horror of war first hand, and has come to discover it is far from the glorious battles spoken about by national leaders

Full Metal Jacket - Stanley Kubrick

Desensitization and Dehumanization

**IN VIETNAM
THE WIND
DOESN'T BLOW
IT SUCKS**



Stanley Kubrick's
**FULL
METAL
JACKET**

WARNER BROS. PRESENTS STANLEY KUBRICK'S FULL METAL JACKET
STARRING: MATTHEW MOORE ADAM BALDWIN VINCENT D'ONOFRIO LEE ERMEY BORIAN BAREWOOD ARLISS HOWARD
KEVIN MAJOR HOWARD ED O'BROUS SCREENPLAY BY STANLEY KUBRICK MICHAEL HERR GUSTAV HASFORD
BASED ON THE NOVELS BY GUSTAV HASFORD EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS PHILIP HOBBS JAN HARLAN PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY STANLEY KUBRICK

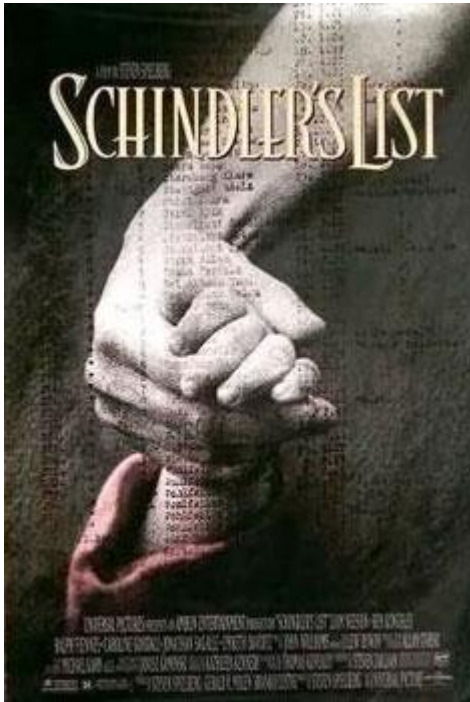
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Ain't War Hell

- War not only takes a toll physically, but mentally as well.
- Some soldiers cope by dehumanizing the enemy, and rationalizing it by claiming they were under orders.
- FMJ highlights the *the duality of man, and the duality of the individual and the organization*

Schindler's Silver Lining

- Even when exposed to man's heart of darkness, there is a glimmer of hope in people who see past the rigid borders of dehumanization and seek to help.
- Schindler's List exudes those qualities in a film, while narrating a true story .
- This teaches us about the sacrifices made by some to help others because they see the darkness in the atrocities.



Other Works

The Red Badge of Courage -

The Book Thief

The Diary of Anne Frank

Catch 22

Jarhead

Uncommon Valor: A Vietnam Story

Slaughterhouse Five

Animal Farm

Heart of Darkness

Things Fall Apart

Works Cited

“Duality of Man:” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMEViYvojtY>

“Ain’t War Hell?” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S06nlz4scvl>

Dulce et Decorum est: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dulce_et_Decorum_est

NY Times on Oskar Schindler:

<http://www.nytimes.com/movies/movie/119912/Schindler-s-List/overview>