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Doctor Warner

Young Adult Literature

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### Field Experience Essay

Over a period of two days I observed Ms. St. John's sophomore English class at Woodside High School. The class was in the beginning stages of reading the novel Night by Elie Wiesel. Ms. St. John started off the class by having each kid check out a laptop to go online to quizlet.com, Ms. St. John had set up an account where the students are tested on new vocabulary in the novel Night. The online account records all the students scores along with how long it took them to finish. Each kid can look up where their score ranks amongst the rest of the class, it creates a fun competitive game within the class while teaching the students new vocabulary. After all the students were done playing two or three vocabulary games online they put away their laptops and met up in their groups they had created in the previous class. In the previous class Ms. St. John had set up six different group research stations that deal with six different historical aspects of the novel Night and assigned three to four kids to each station. The stations included a laptop with an open browser to the website that had the information each group needed for their topic and the groups job was to transfer the basic information of their group onto poster paper and present it to the class. During this class Ms. St. John asked that one student come up from each group to present their posters for their group. Ms. St. John started off the presentations by choosing the larger topic that relates to the book and moved to the more directly related to the book. The presentations went from explaining who the major players involved in

WWII were and how they were involved (Hitler, Churchill, Roosevelt, etc), the map of Europe divided by which side they choose in the war, concentration and extermination camps, persecuted and persecutors, numbers and statistics of deaths during WWII, and the presentations finish up with the group that share information on the author of Night, Elie Wiesel. It struck me that it is important to have students understand what is going on historically in time while reading such a powerful true story of a young jewish boys journey in Europe during WWII. While the students presented their posters, the rest of the class was instructed to take notes to keep their attention to the presenters. Each student who came up for their group did an great job at presenting the information but it was Ms. St. John's job to help the presenters pronounce names and add certain facts that the group did not have time to put on their posters. I found the presentations to be very informational, to not only the students but myself as well and that is what Ms. St. John intended when she created this group project. She wants her students to educate each other on the historical aspects of the book, it was a creative way to turn a class lecture about boring historical facts into a fun project that allowed the students to teach each other. After all the posters were presented, and the class was in its final ten minutes, Ms. St. John instructed her students to take out their notebooks for her class and write down three facts that they had been taught today that they didn't know before about WWII. The notebooks were collected at the end of the class so that Ms. St. John could skim over each one to make sure her students are taking notes and following along with her instructions.

On the second day I observed the sophomore class at Woodside High School the lesson plan was more interactive with the text of the novel Night. Ms. St. John read Night to her students out loud but before she started she asks them to take out their notebooks and as she is

reads to find certain quotes that could be seen as dehumanizing in the novel. Ms. St. John read about ten pages to her students, stopping at certain sections to ask questions to her students that got them thinking like what could this be foreshadowing? what is actually going on in the scene? For example, in the novel Night a young Elie lies about his age and his father does as well at the concentration camp, Ms. St. John stops reading to ask her students why he might have done this? It struck me that asking these questions not only helps the teacher see if the students are following along but it also makes the students think critically about what is occurring in the novel and reflect on why it is happening. After reading about one chapter to the students Ms. St. John breaks up the class into four groups. Two of the groups will look through the pages that were read aloud in class for quotes that show evidence of dehumanization during Elie's journey to the concentration camps while the other two groups brainstorm discussion questions to ask the class about the reading they have done so far. As the groups meet Ms. St. John, along with her teachers aid and myself, went around the class to make sure each group was staying on topic and helping them if they got stuck. The group that I helped with was looking for dehumanizing quotes and when they got stuck I asked them simple questions that would make them think like how did they transport Elie and the other jews to the concentration camp? was it a luxury train? As the students would answer my questions I could see them making their own conclusion in their minds without myself ever flat out saying the answer. The group assignment took up the rest of the class period and the students would present their discussion questions along with the other groups quotes on dehumanization next class. Ms. St. John explained that next class they would break up into two large groups, each group would consist of one group that looked for

quotes and one group that created discussion questions and they would educate each other and create a discussion about what they found.

As I was observing Ms. St. John's sophomore class reading the novel Night I kept thinking about other materials a teacher could use while reading this novel. By using other materials it would help students fully grasp the situation Elie goes through and understand that this is not fiction but what really occurred. One material that could be greatly utilized in the classroom is film. I remember when I had read the novel Night in high school my teacher brought in the film *The Pianist* for us to watch. The film helped me grasp the idea of what was occurring in Europe at the time and how harsh it was, the image of the actor Adrain Brody looking at himself in the mirror being just skin and bones will forever be burned into my mind. A few other films that are good to show along with reading Night are *Schindler's List*, *Sophie's Choice*, *The Reader*, and *Life is Beautiful*. Also having the students look at the history behind what is occurring in the book, like what Ms. St. John did with her group poster project, allows students to understand how what was happening politically was effecting the citizens of Europe. Along with film, poetry can also be a great material to utilize because it can give the students perspective of the emotions during the holocaust without getting them swept up in a completely different story. Some poems that I found to be good for the classroom is Sudeep Pagedar's poems "Holocaust" and "Tale of a Sprinter" along with Avrom Zutzkever's "Frozen Jews". These poems capture the emotions of the holocaust and allows the students learn and analyze poetry. One main aspect that I believe is important to teach students while reading the book Night is that this all happened to Elie Wiesel when he wasn't much older then most of the students in the class. I want to teach students that over sixty years ago this was the harsh reality for jewish kids their age in

Europe. One exercise I'd like to utilize if I ever get the opportunity to teach Night is Doctor Warners book pass exercise. There are thousands of powerful books written about the Holocaust and I'd want my student to continue reading non-fiction novels about it so I would bring in books like The Zookeeper's Wife, The Book Thief, Yellow Star, The Diary of Anne Frank, Night Father, I am a Star, Holocaust Kingdom, along with other books written by Wiesel like Dawn, Day and many others novels the students could choose from to continue to read. I'd have them choose one, like Doctor Warner did with our class, and create a book talk presentation on the novel. That will allow students to not only continued to read about the Holocaust but it will also give students the opportunity to present their choice of novel and educate other students as to what other stories are out there about the Holocaust they can read about. It is important to utilize materials like film, poetry, and other novels that are available to teach students about the harsh reality of what Europe was like in during the Holocaust.

While I observed Ms. St. John's class for the first time as a future teacher I found many connections between what was being taught and the certain topics and ideas that we've discussed or read about in our Young Adult Literature class. One main aspect I remembered about Night was that it is on the list of books recommend by seventeen year olds in a survey in Doctor Warners book Adolescents in the Search for Meaning (Warner, 67). I found it interesting that a book that was published in 1955 could be recommended by seventeen year olds to other young adult reader today and it struck me that it is because the book deals with universal themes. Even though the Holocaust was over sixty years ago it still had themes that bleed into today's society. Night can be see as an example for many of the 'major issues' that are outlined in Adolescents and the Search for Meaning, that is why the novel is still very relatable today (Warner, 8). Some

of the major themes or issues that Night touches on are social conditions, death of a family member/friends, and last but not least emotional issues. At a very young age Elie's family is ripped apart because of War, he loses his father and all his friends, and he is left alone dealing with the emotional repercussion of the trauma he endured. Not everyone can understand what Wiesel witnessed and survived from but the universal themes can connect to many readers to the novel from all walks of life. This book also put in perspective for myself how you can tell the students the ending without ruining the book for them because this story is truly about the journey Wiesel went through not about the ending. Another aspect I found interesting about this novel Night is I found myself asking what archetype from chapter ten in Literature for Today's Young Adults is Wiesel in the context of his story. I found myself torn because he does not fit just one, Elie is the innocent embarking on a journey but he is also the warrior/hero because he endured everything that came his way and he was stronger for it. Many aspects of the Young Adult Literature class I will utilize if I ever get to teach this novel because it helps explain why it is important to learn about one boy's journey during the holocaust.

After observing Ms. St. John's class, discussing what other materials would work well to present with the novel Night and seeing how it connects to Young Adult Literature class I've come to the conclusion that I've chosen the right career path for myself. It is true that you never really know if you're good at something till you try and honestly I loved it. I loved hearing what the students had to say and how they connected with this novel. I enjoyed finding other materials that would pair well with the book and I liked seeing how it connects back to the reading and discussions we've done in Young Adult Literature class.

Works Cited

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### History and History Makers

I choose to do Night by Elie Wiesel because it was the book that was being taught to the students when I did my field experience and it made me think of how I would teach this novel. It was also a novel that was taught to me in high school and it stuck with me and made an impact on my life. It fit in perfectly with the history and history makers genre so I thought I would choose this novel as my unit of study presentation. It is important to teach students non-fiction novels about historical things like the Holocaust because in order not to repeat history we need to teach history and why these atrocities shouldn't happen again in the future. One main point that impacted me the most while I was a student was knowing that the main character in the novel, Elie, was around my age when he had to deal with the separation of his family and the long torturous journey to the concentration camps and in them.

The activities I would use to get my students invested in the book and Elie's story would be starting a writing assignment that would get them in the mindset of what Elie had to endure. I would give my students a list of names of young teens that survived or died in the holocaust with a small description of their journey. They would choose one name and every week I would have them write a diary of what they believed these kids had to endure, what their daily life might be like. While reading Night there are many descriptions of what Elie goes through so it would be interesting to read how the students interpret what Elie's life was like.



One exercise I would use to teach further readings on the holocaust is Doctor Warners book pass exercise. There are thousands of powerful books written about the Holocaust and I'd want my students to continue reading non-fiction novels about it so I would bring in books like The Zookeeper's Wife, The Book Thief, The Pianist, Yellow Star, The Diary of Anne Frank, Night Father, I am a Star, Holocaust Kingdom, along with other books written by Wiesel like Dawn, Day and many others novels the students could choose from to continue to read. I'd have them choose one, like Doctor Warner did with our class, and create a book talk presentation on the novel. That will allow students to continue to read about the Holocaust but it will also give students the opportunity to present their choice of novel and educate other students as to what other stories are out there about the Holocaust they can read about.

The supplementary works I'd use along with teaching the novel Night would be the films The Pianist and The Book Thief. Both films are also novels, so not only can the students have a visual depiction of what the holocaust was like but it might also spark their interest in actually reading the novels for fun, which is what I did once I saw these films. The Pianist is a great film to show students how life was really like for a young jewish man trying to escape the Nazi's. I remembered what stuck with myself the most was the evolution of the main character, play by Adrian Brody. He goes from a healthy looking happy young man to a horrifically skinny and unhealthy sad and sickly old man. Another movie I would use would be The Book Thief because it gives an different perspective of what was happening in Europe at the time. The movie follows a young girl that is adopted into a family that lives in a town that is under Nazi rule but the people she stays with hides a young jewish man. This film also shows the struggles and losses the young girl faces at such a young age because she lived in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Both these amazing films sparked my interest in reading the novels and further reading into the Holocaust and what people had to endure, that is why I would use them along with teaching the Night. Another reason I would use it is it gives young adults a visual reference to think about when reading this novel and the harsh reality that this actually occurred.

One main aspect I want to hit on and spend time making my students understand is the fact that Elie endured all these awful things and he still found the strength to continue on. Elie did not give up and eventually make it through the concentration camps and is now a successful author, activist, and professor. It is important to teach students that their voice matters, that they can make a difference. That is why the last photo I want to show is my favorite quote from my favorite film Dead Poets Society, that no matter what anyone tells you words and idea's can change the world. We see more and more young kids committing suicide because they feel hopeless, they feel like that don't matter, like they can't make an impact and that isn't true and I want to remind my students of that.

BANTAM BOOKS

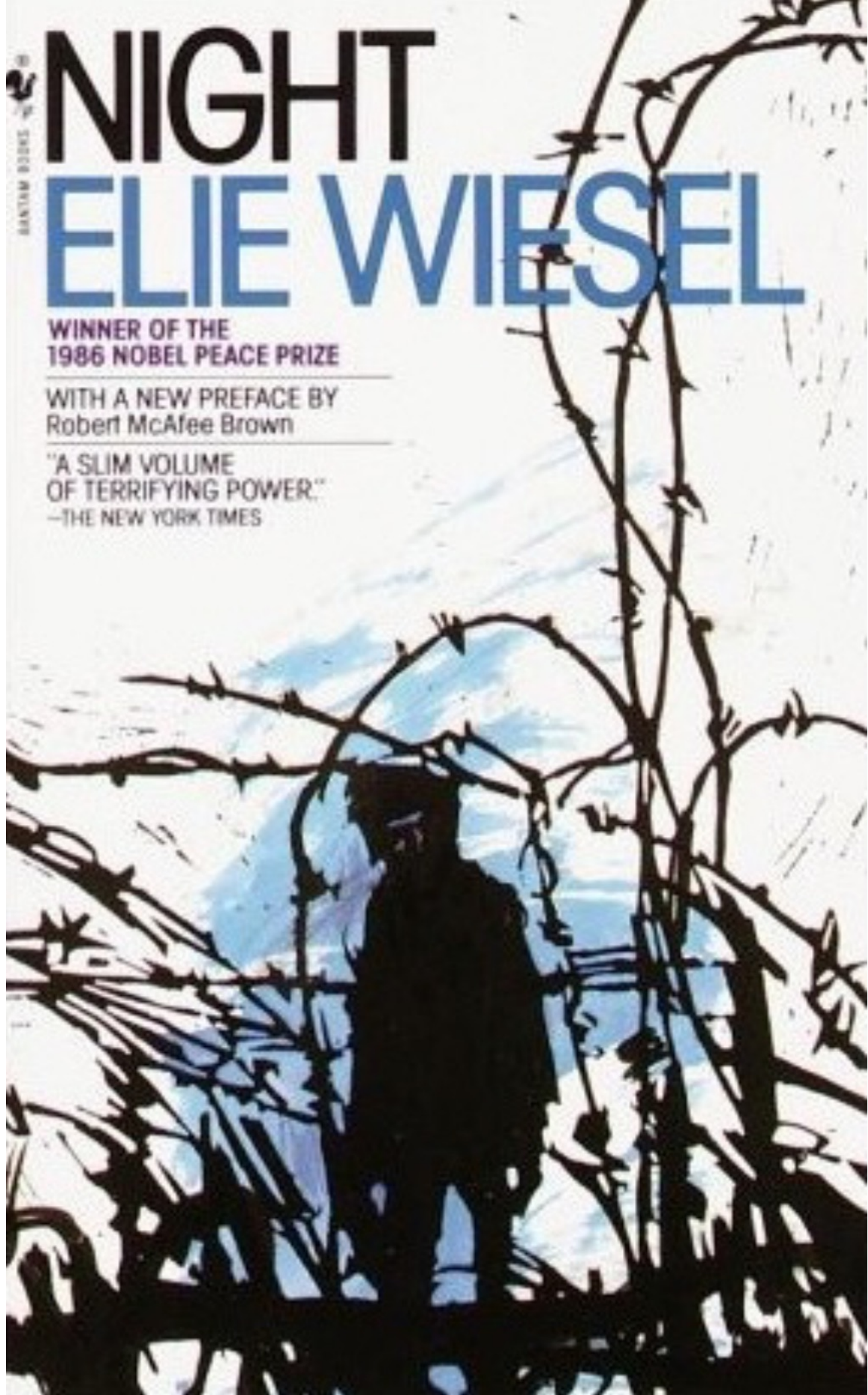
# NIGHT

# ELIE WIESEL

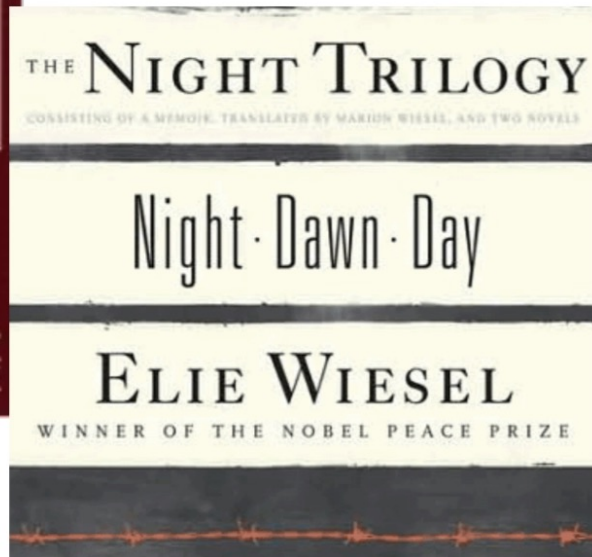
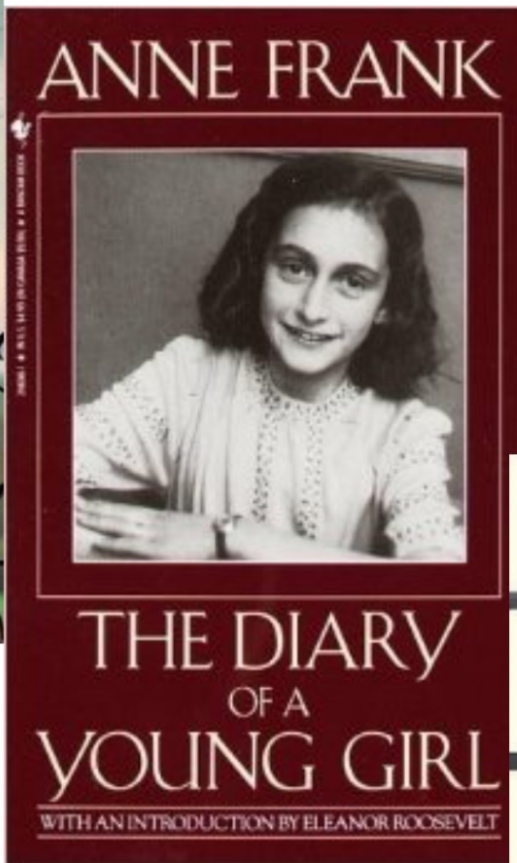
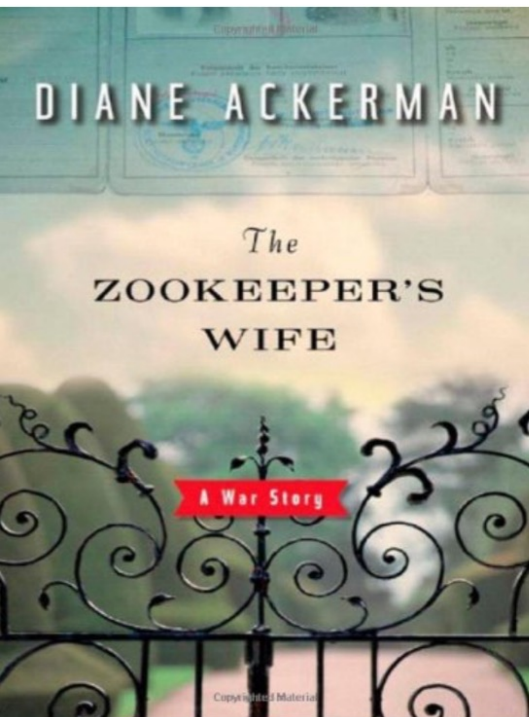
WINNER OF THE  
1986 NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

WITH A NEW PREFACE BY  
Robert McAfee Brown

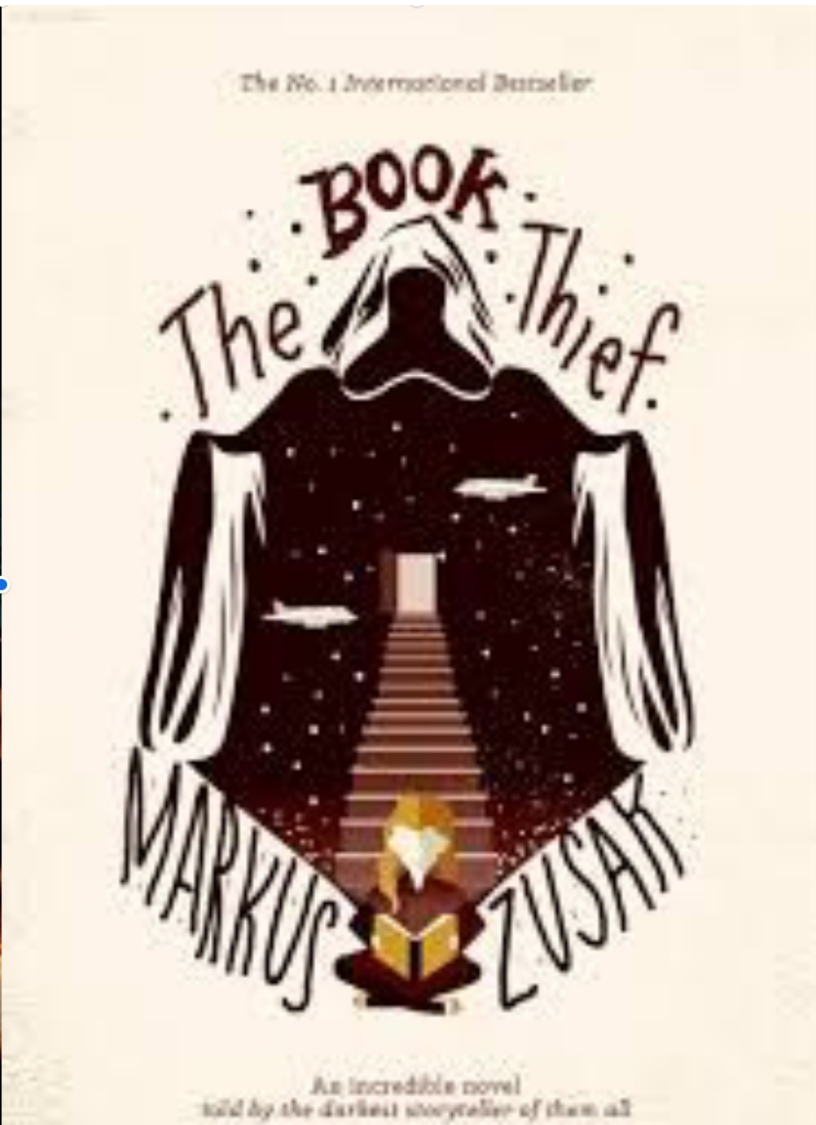
"A SLIM VOLUME  
OF TERRIFYING POWER."  
—THE NEW YORK TIMES

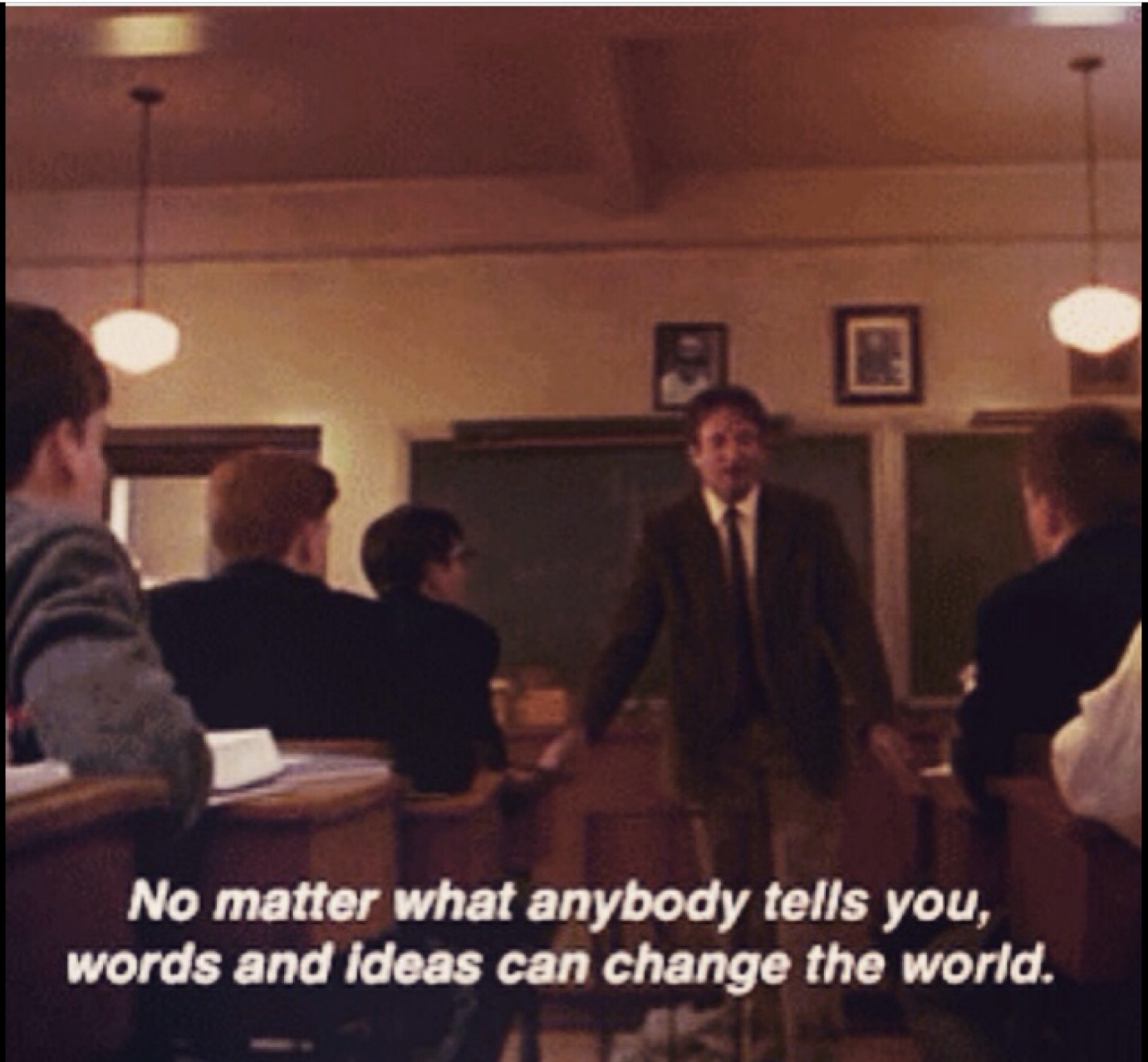












***No matter what anybody tells you,  
words and ideas can change the world.***