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English 112B Sec 01

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Book Talk

The Plot to Kill Hitler: Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Spy, Unlikely Hero

By Patricia McCormick

- I. McCormick, Patricia. *The Plot to Kill Hitler: Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Spy, Unlikely Hero* Publisher: Balzer + Bray, an imprint of Harper Collins; (September 2016) ISBN: 9780062411099**

The story begins in the present time when Dietrich Bonhoeffer is taken away from his home by the Gestapo for being suspected of being involved in the attempts to assassinate Hitler. The narrative goes through the growth and childhood of a young Dietrich and how his Ideology and beliefs formed in relationship to the current events of WW2 going on in the background as we see how he changes over time to the point of his planned attempts of assassination Hitler all the way to the present time to his death. Though Killing is against his Ideologies, “If I see a madman driving a car into a group of innocent bystanders, then I can't simply wait for the catastrophe and then comfort the wounded and bury the dead. I must try to wrestle the steering wheel out of the hands of the driver.”.

Teaching ideas/Resources:

1. “Booktalk this now: *The Plot To Kill Hitler* by Patricia McCormick” by Amy Estersohn in *Three Teachers Talk* is a blog-like site that has middle

school teachers who have not only read but taught this same book and explain why it has succeeded in their curriculum and the response on who this book is intended for.

2. The title of the book seems very intriguing because in most American history classes when discussing the holocaust and WW2 and other Hitler-related topics you always hear the pain and suffering that he inflicts on people and you always hear the story ends with his suicide but you never are taught about the effects on the actual people living in that time period nor the resistance that people tried to employ.
3. McCormik's Novel is a biography of the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer during the WW2 era. Have students look up and find other literary works set in the same time period to compare the experiences of Bonhoeffer and other characters.
4. Considering that the novel highlights a lot of the real-world historical events of the WW2 era have students write an essay response on things that they learned that were not covered in their history classes about the WW2 Era.

Why you should give this book to teens

- Because it gives a close detailed insight into the events on a more condensed scale. How it affected Germans and Jews across Europe. Many things that normally aren't taught in modern History classes can be learned from this novel.

- Because the author does a really good job helping young adult readers digest this novel as long as they know about the Holocaust and WW2 the author basically takes care of the rest.
- It's a good text to get the idea across that no matter what position of power you are in you can still do your part to make a great change in history.

II. Author Biography:

Born: May 23, 1956

Education: Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism

Bio: Born and raised in a Pennsylvania Catholic home. Her family was not supportive of her dreams of being a writer. Wrote silly stories and plays growing up as a kid. Once in college worked for a newspaper. Her hopes for the young reader are that they see her character's struggles and hopes that they too can overcome a challenge in their own lives.

Other Writings:

- *Cut* (2000)
- *My Brother's Keeper* (2005)
- *Sold* (2006)
- *Purple Heart* (2009)
- *Never Fall Down* (2012)
- *I am Malala: How One Girl Stood Up for Education and Changed the World* (2013)
- *The Plot to Kill Hitler: Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Spy, Unlikely Hero* (2016)

III. How to use this book in a classroom:

I would personally coordinate with my colleagues who are teaching history and try to give out this book during a relative time when they are learning of the Holocaust or WW2. If not applicable then I would probably give this book at the beginning of the term as I find it super interesting and hope it gets students excited for what's to come throat the school year. I would have students start off the unit writing what they know about this time period and then have them reference that writing at the end of the book to see if there is anything that they learned.

IV. Favorite Passages:

Quote 1: “But what would happen to their souls if they were to commit murder... I must try and wrestle the steering wheel out of the hands of the driver” (94-95). To me, this quote is a good representation of how religion can conflict between people and what they believe is the right action to do. In this case, although murder is a high offense in their religion, the characters justify it by saying that it can save lives for the greater good. This is a common theme in many stories where religion and politics such as war and leadership clash.

Quote 2: “Dietrich Bonhoeffer had wanted to use the moral authority... And he would do it by using the church as his camouflage” (97). Connecting back to the previous quote Dietrich is personally conflicted as he is a pacifist and a man of god and is having difficulty justifying his actions. Yet after some thought on an MLK quote, he believes it is the right thing to do as it will save many people.

Quote 3: “Stauffenberg entered the map room with his briefcase...Stauffenberg and Haeften were caught and executed by firing squad a little after midnight the next day”(126-127). The closest assassination attempt on Hitler which I found interesting is how it did not kill him as he was the only survivor and yet instead of killing Hitler and the war it unintentionally helped him further strengthen his purpose”

V. **How It Fits Best in Chapters 4-8 of Adolescents in the Search for Meaning**

Chapter 4: Books about Real-Life Experiences

This book definitely connects to chapter 4 as it is centered during a bit of post-WW1 and all of WW2 as we get a timeline throughout events of the story of what's going on in the same time as well as insight from different historical events like the night of the long knives, and the treaty of Versailles.

Chapter 5: Books about Facing Death and Loss

There is a loss both on a personal scale as well as a large scale as the main character, Dietrich loses his brother who dies in the war as well as he himself dies in the end. In a grand scope, millions of innocent people die such as Jewish people, Innocent reporters, and fellow conspirators of Dietrich. Who all lost their lives tragically during WW2.

Chapter 6: Books about Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions

Dietrich is a man of god as well as a pacifist so his struggle with his identity of planning to assassinate Hitler is a big one as he has moments when he is trying to find ways to justify his actions as he doesn't want to be a murderer but he feels like doing nothing is a

sin in and of itself therefore he finds himself struggling to decide what he should do.

There is a moment in the novel where we see discrimination in the US as they talk about segregation in public transport and restaurants as well as Jim Crow laws. There is also the more obvious segregation of Jews being labeled with armbands and sent to concentration camps.

Chapter 7: Books about Courage and Survival

This book is all about the resistance having the courage to stand up to the tyrant Hitler but we also see some more courageous people such as MLK and Frank Fisher. And of course, Dietrich Bonhoeffer had to show courage to go against his beliefs in order to fight for the greater good.

VI. Quantitative

Lexile: Age Range 11-13, 1000L

ATOS: 8.92, AR Points: 11

Dale Chall: 7th-8th grade, 8.0-9.5

Flesh-Kincaid: 7th grade

Qualitative

1. Structure

- Third-Person POV

- Linear plot. The author starts the story with the present time of Dietrich Getting arrested but from there, it's all a congruent linear story of his past straight to his death and we even get dates escalating in a linear matter.

2. Language Conventions and Clarity

- Uses simple understandable language for the 11 to 13 age range

The more complicated terms are non-existent and are easy to read.

3. Knowledge Demands

- Knowledge about the WW2 era is recommended but not required. All you need to know is Hitler is bad and have basic reading skills and the rest is taken care of by the book.

4. Levels of Meaning

- The primary issue is that WW2 was a massive bloodshed with many people putting their lives on the line without any recognition because outside of this book you would never have heard of people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The main message I got out of this was that in order to overcome any challenge, winning must require sacrifice.