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Unit of Study: The Holocaust

**Rationale**

 Discrimination presents itself in a variety of ways, and most recently it has peeked its ugly head out from behind white nationalist groups that have been encouraged. Racism and discrimination are ugly parts of human nature, and even though it is easy to ignore for some, it’s a large part of many people’s lives. The danger of discrimination needs to be talked about, taught and learned, and the best example of that danger is the Holocaust.

 Students, specifically in tenth grade, need to understand the power one person can have with the misuse of information and propaganda- especially in today’s world where misinformation runs rampant through social media. An example of dangerous misinformation is the 2020 election. Many people chose to continuously lie about the election as well as push conspiracy theories. Those who weren’t careful fell for these lies and contributed to the infectious spread.

 The 2020 election of course is nothing comparable to what Hitler did in the 1930’s, weaseling his way into being a dictator. What is similar, though, is the way politicians are able to push their agendas with false claims. It has become as easy as ever with the expansion of social media and the internet, and it’s a scary place for people without critical thinking skills. Hitler was a propagandist his entire life, and it ended with the genocide of approximately 6,000,000 Jews.

 *Night* by Elie Wiesel is a true story that Wiesel details about his young experience during the holocaust, and it is the main canonical work for this unit. He describes his experience being pulled from his home in Sighet in 1944, taken to Birkenau/Auschwitz and Buchenwald, and the horrors he experiences there. The book explores human nature, faith, dignity, and of course, freedom. Wiesel’s insight into human nature and his real-life experience with evil provides a larger understanding for the pain that was caused by a single person and his hate-filled lies.

**Launching the Unit**

 Because students need to understand the harms of propaganda, they first have to be told what propaganda is. The evil of the holocaust and its reasons are a lot to unpack, so the intro activities will take a few days.

1. Pull up some common examples of ads, like:
* “I’m lovin’ it” (McDonalds)
* “Is it in you?” (Gatorade)
* “Expect more, pay less” (Target)
* “It’s waaay better than fast food.” (Wendy’s)
* “Snap, crackle, pop!” (Rice Crispies)
* “Just do it” (Nike)
* “Eat fresh” (Subway)
1. When they undoubtedly recognize them, ask them what it means that they know who these slogans belong to. Also ask them how it makes them feel, and what they want to do about it. Have them do a journal entry about their experience.
2. Provide the definition of propaganda, as well as share some propaganda techniques like fallacy, name calling, ad hominem and ad nauseum. Ask for examples of each, as well as provide some.
3. Show image examples of negative propaganda. Start subtle, then work up to propaganda used in WWII by both Germany and the U.S. For each image, give the students 3 minutes to write about what they think the ad is trying to do, whether they think it’s effective, as well as how it makes them feel.
4. Pass out a worksheet that gives a bit of background on Hitler and his use of propaganda, the Holocaust, and a map showing the locations mentioned in the novel. They will fill it out as the information is presented.
5. Have them do a tableau activity with the following poem:

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| Childhood Memories- Night Raids  by Mary Mc CreathThe siren screechedIts warning, signalingus to take cover frombombers above.My brother and Ihastily donned ourjumpsuits, knittedby our mother forJust this occasion.We played the game of 'who can get into it quickest'Our lives dependedon this.We fled down tothe reinforced closebelow and huddledthere with twelveother families.The adults playedgames with usto distract fromthe seriousnessof the situation.We all could hearthe bomb blastshitting other targetsand we prayed theywould miss us. |

Assign one group to each verse and have them create a tableau image with their bodies that represents the verse.

**Working Through the Text**

Student’s will have an autobiographical story due at the end of the unit. The following activities will hopefully inspire some thoughts for what they’d like to write about, and how.

1. Active Reading Packet
2. Student’s will be given a packet that has a designated section for each chapter. They will be required to read 1-2 chapters per night and will have to write down vocabulary words they don’t know and make note of 2-3 quotes that stand out and why. Identifying powerful quotes will help students think about what makes them so powerful. Looking back at the strategies used will be helpful to their story.
3. SSW’s
4. When student’s come into class each day, they will do a Silent Sustained Writing assignment based on a question I give them when they come in. It will be related to the previous night’s reading. This will be a way of checking understanding, checking that they’ve read, and making sure that they’re critically thinking about what they read.
5. Question examples: How does Eliezer describe himself? How important is religion to Eliezer? Why is it so important to Moshe that he be believed? What do the Jews of Sighet know about the outside world in 1941? How do they respond to what they know? Etc.
6. “Never Shall I forget” Art Collages
7. Wiesel uses a lot of repetition on page 34, when he goes into his “Never shall I forget…” sentences. The repetition of the statement as well as the images he describes evokes a lot of emotion. Student’s will channel that emotion into a collage that they will make in class. Magazines and construction paper will be provided, and each student has to individually make their own collage. They will be given two days to work on the collage in class, and they will have the opportunity to work on it at home, as well. This gives them the opportunity to find more images online. The goal of this project is for the students to think about how it makes them feel and why. Identifying images for their emotions should help do that.

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| Elie Wiesel, *Night*, 1958Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, that turned my life into one long night seven times sealed.Never shall I forget that smoke.Never shall I forget the small faces of the children whose bodies I saw transformed into smoke under a silent sky. Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever.Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence that deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live.Never shall I forget those moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to ashes. Never shall I forget those things, even were I condemned to live as long as God Himself.Never. (34) |

1. Class Discussion
2. This video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9ThIli7oVQ> will be played for the students. It is Dr. Leon Bass, a WWII vet, talking about his experience with racism as well as his experience with a holocaust survivor when he was a principal in the US. Some students weren’t believing the survivor, so Dr. Bass came forward and told them that he had witnessed it. He had never admitted it before. He continued to travel all over to share his testimony with people, making sure they knew that this evil was true.
3. After watching this video, questions will be provided to the student’s that will be discussed as a class.

**Extending the Unit**

This section will take the opportunity to expand outside of *Night*’s canon and explore a different version of storytelling- plays!

1. The class will read the play *Anne Frank and Me* by Cherie Bennett. Parts will be assigned in the beginning of each class, and every student will read for at least one class period. This exposes students to a new medium of sharing stories. Even though the story is fiction, it’s ideas and themes are very real. This play can show students the many options for writing a story. This is a great example because of the way it uniquely intertwines a fictional story with a real person/non-fiction story.
2. Before reading the play, students will write about a time in history they would like to travel back to and why. This small activity will get them in the mindset needed for *Anne Frank and Me.* They will share with their small groups, and there will also be a class share if they’re so inclined.
3. A class discussion will follow the end of the play, with question prompts I prepare ahead of time. The meaning and the reason why this play was written will be driving forces for the conversation.

**Young Adult Literature Selections**

There are many books about the Holocaust for young adults because many of the people that survived were children when they experienced it. Not all Holocaust literature is autobiographical/non-fiction, but it’s often written from the point-of-view of a child. Holocaust literature explores themes that not many other genres are able to do. The following pieces would be paired with this unit because of their relationship to the Holocaust, as well as the many perspectives it provides:

1. *The Book Thief*  by Markus Zusak. This story is narrated by Death, and is a story about a 9 year-old German girl Liesel. This book provides another point-of-view of the Holocaust, from a German child’s perspective. Liesel see’s Hitler’s propaganda first-hand, which we don’t necessarily see in *Night.* The propaganda aspect is important to this unit, making this book necessary.
2. *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank. This provides the point-of-view of a Jewish girl, Anne Frank, hiding in an attic. This is true story pairs well with *Night* because of its truth, and because it shares two completely different experiences with the same event. This will show students that even though so many people experienced the Holocaust, no one has the same story.
3. *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyne. This historical fiction book gives the perspective of a child whose father belongs to the Nazi party. Again, a completely different perspective. This story gives an intimate look at the evils of the Nazi party from a child’s point-of-view.
4. *All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr. Historical fiction, this book is from two people’s perspectives: one from a blind girl, and one from a boy in the Nazi Youth. It shows the fear people lived in that weren’t even Jewish, as well as how someone would even get involved with the Nazi party. It also explores how the Holocaust had lasting impacts on survivors.

**Concluding Activities**

This unit is more than knowing the Holocaust is evil. The goal is to make sure that students understand or begin to understand how it became possible and why it’s so important to talk about. That’s why one of their final activities will be an autobiographical story.

1. *Witness to History*
2. For this assignment, students will be writing about an incident that affected them deeply that they think should be known by others. They will be given brainstorming time in class and will be given some guiding questions. Students will write a first draft, about 2 pages. There will be some peer reviewing as well as my notes. They will revise with the suggested edits and turn it in. The paper does have to be one that they’re willing for other people to see.

 I will also do a showing of the movie *JoJo Rabbit*. This movie will end the unit well because it talks about the difficult topics in a comedic light. The reading the students will do throughout the semester is extremely heavy and violent, and ending on this movie would leave them in a good place.

**Works Cited**

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