

What Happens to Humanity During Cruel Times?

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INTRODUCTION

Where to start an understanding of humanity during cruel times is a serious question. Having long since read and thought about the historically well-known events that were occurring at the time of my birth, my search for understanding now plumbs the question of why? What conditions prevailed during the early 20th century that allowed the atrocities that occurred during the middle of that century, and to some degree today, to occur and indeed to gain the active support of the people living during those times?

This unit of study will include literature regarding the Holocaust as well as other periods in which times were difficult. Students will read of the Holocaust through nonfiction, historical, and biographical accounts, and through fiction set within the realities of those times. Perhaps it is enough at their young age to learn of the intent and effects of political forces that attempt to destroy the lives of others – even attempting to annihilate an entire ethnic population in order to enrich other groups at their expense. What histories of hatred, disregard for others, and feelings of superiority exist that allow people who profess to be good to participate through active involvement, passive ignorance, or complete denial, in the attempt to annihilate millions of people? It appears that these questions have roots many generations prior to what we now know as the Holocaust.

The Holocaust is one of many examples throughout history of man's cruelty to man. The enslavement of one tribe of people by another is as old as history itself, with one of our own country's most poignant examples likely to be that of the African by white traders supplying workers for Europe and North America. The near annihilation of the Native Americans by settlers as they populated what is now the United States of America is another story of cruelty close to home. There continue to be stories throughout the world of the attempts of political powers to dominate and increase their status among their neighbors at the expense of other groups, and the situations continuing to disrupt lives in the Middle East are not likely to be settled any time soon. All are worthy of study, yet the Holocaust seems to be a presence of its own, due largely to the vastness, the intensity, and the single-mindedness of its creators to dominate the world in such a way that they could do so with impunity and even respect and admiration.

EVENTS LEADING UP TO WORLD WAR II AND THE HOLOCAUST

In all times, people learn the attitudes of those around them both consciously and unconsciously. In looking at the Holocaust, I am most interested in why the people who lived through those times decided to participate in Hitler's plans, which could not have

succeeded without the help of the citizens of more than one country. Kershaw explains that “it was the behaviour and attitudes of ordinary Germans in that extraordinary era that excited my attention, not Hitler and his entourage” (Kershaw, *Hubris* xi).

Hitler’s paternal genealogy beyond his father is unknown. His father, born on June 7, 1837, the illegitimate child of Maria Anna Schicklgruber, was named Alois Schicklgruber, but his name was changed to Alois Hitler in 1876, and Alois’s father’s name entered as George Hitler (Kershaw, *Hubris* 5). While there has been and continues to be speculation on the identity of Adolf’s paternal grandfather, both Alois and his son Adolf were quite happy with the name Hitler (7). Although there has been speculation over the years that perhaps Alois’s father and therefore Adolf’s grandfather had been Jewish, careful investigation of those rumors does not prove them to be true (Heiden 36). After much research on the topic by many biographers, however, one likely possibility is that both Adolf’s father and mother, Alois’s third wife, and the mother of Adolf and five siblings, were grandchildren of Johann Nepomuk Hiedler (Huttler), one of the three men who may have been Alois’s father (Kershaw, *Hubris* 8).

Adolf’s early years are reported to have been spent under “the smothering protectiveness of an over-anxious mother in a household dominated by the threatening presence of a disciplinarian father, against whose wrath the submissive Klara was helpless to protect her offspring” (Kershaw, *Hubris* 12). All biographies of Hitler speculate as to the influences of his formative years on his attitudes as a very cruel, self-centered man. While the events of Hitler’s life in retrospect are of interest, I am more interested in why the German people found his hateful plan for his and their future so appealing.

What was going on in Germany during the time of Hitler’s youth? In his work *The Man Who Invented the Third Reich*, Laurysens explores Hitler’s contemporaries in Vienna and Munich as an opening to his claim that Moeller van den Bruck’s *The Third Reich* was the real blueprint and bible for Nazi Ideology (176). Laurysens provides evidence in terms of book sales, finding that *Mein Kampf* only sold millions of copies after Hitler had commandeered power and required that it could only be sold new (no second-hand copies for sale) and that every German couple about to be married was expected (forced?) to buy the book (179). All copies of *The Third Reich* were thought to have been destroyed in the famous Nazi book-burning in order for Hitler to appear to have been the inventor of many ideas he had borrowed from Moeller van den Bruck, and yet Hitler himself left a copy of *The Third Reich* open at his death scene on April 30, 1945 (182).

ANTI-SEMITISM

In the sixteenth-century, Martin Luther hoped that Jews would convert to Christianity, and when they did not, he denounced them as evil and enemies of the gospel (Marty 169). Christianity has been rife with anti-Semitism both before and after the influence of

Luther, and during the early twentieth-century, anti-Semitism flourished in Europe and much of the world. In fact, Rogasky offers the following quote from Martin Luther in 1543: “Their synagogues should be set on fire . . . Their homes should likewise be broken down and destroyed . . . Let us drive them out of the country for all time” (1). History is rife with examples of Jews being burned at the stake, expelled from countries, restricted in employment, forced to wear identifying insignia, and pushed into ghettos (2).

In order to create conditions that would build upon and exacerbate existing anti-Semitism, two pieces of fiction were converted to propaganda and foisted on the public. It seems that Maurice Joly, a French lawyer described as conservative, legitimist, and monarchist, wrote a satire, published in Brussels in 1864, regarding Napoleon III, the Emperor of the French at that time. The book, the title of which in English would read: *Dialogue in Hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu, or the Politics of Machiavelli in the Nineteenth Century, by a Contemporary*, landed the author in jail for fifteen months (Heiden 12). The author had the fictitious dictator brag about the ways in which he controlled the thought of the masses. While the book, a work of fiction, was aimed at criticizing Napoleon III’s fascist rule of twenty years, it was misrepresented as having been written by a group of Jewish leaders intent upon ruling the world. The intention of this rumor was to foster fear and loathing of the Jewish people.

Another work of fiction, a novel entitled *Biarritz* written by Hermann Godsche under the penname Sir John Recliffe the Younger in 1868, was likewise co-opted and produced as a pamphlet supposedly proving a Jewish world conspiracy (Heiden 14). Materials from these two pieces of fiction were forged into *The Protocol of The Wise Men of Zion* and foisted upon an unsuspecting public as factual, raising anti-Semitism to heated levels and resulting in massacres of Jews (14). In actuality, there was a group of Jewish leaders, the founding congress of the Zionist Movement in Basel, Switzerland in 1897, whose goal it was to create a separate state in Palestine where the Jews could live peacefully away from the oppression they were experiencing in Germany. Even though this was proven to be a forgery by 1921, people chose to regard it as truth (Rogasky 4).

“And here history turns over a new leaf. The conspirators did not have to invent anti-Semitism; no, what they did was to create anti-Semitism as a weapon in the class struggle; something quite apart from the hostility which, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, had been aroused by the bourgeois society of Europe” (Heiden 21).

While all serious students of the Holocaust include the period into which Hitler was born as important to his development, Goldhagen looks almost completely to the people, ordinary Germans who voted for Hitler and who willingly undertook the eradication of the Jewish population, not only in Germany where they comprised less than 1% of the population (42) but also in the rest of Europe as Hitler’s armies invaded nearby countries.

Goldhagen looks beyond the obvious acts of coercion, fear, and greed as explanations for the German people’s willingness to slaughter millions of people. “People must be

motivated to kills others, or else they would not do so” (24). He looked for a structure in German society during the first half of the twentieth century that would account for the willingness of ordinary people who considered themselves moral to engage in acts of murder so vast as to be incomprehensible to most. Goldhagen found that “structure of cognition and value was located in and integral to German culture” (24).

Goldhagen’s book was written in English and has been translated into German. Although its reception was extremely negative at first, many of today’s Germans are willing to address issues central to the Holocaust that have not been and must be addressed, which they are willing to do in order to move on to a more democratic Germany (466). The hypothesis of Goldhagen’s study was that the “perpetrators were motivated to take part in the lethal persecution of the Jews because of their beliefs about the victims, and that various German institutions were therefore easily able to harness the perpetrators’ pre-existing anti-Semitism once Hitler gave the order to undertake the extermination” (467). Goldhagen asked three questions: Did the perpetrators of the Holocaust kill willingly?; If so, what motivated them to kill and brutalize Jews?; and How was this motivation engendered?(375).

Goldhagen found that there was much evidence that the German perpetrators were proud of their endeavors to exterminate the Jews. The fact that they “had their wives live among them while they slaughtered Jews by the thousands, their eagerness to preserve their memories of their genocidal deeds by means of photographs . . . the boasting of cruelties that took place among them . . .”(378). Had they been coerced, ashamed of their actions, because they were unthinking, obedient executors of state order, because of social psychological pressure, because of their prospects of personal advancement, or because they did not comprehend or feel responsible for what they were doing, their behavior would have played out differently. Never once was a German killed, sent to a concentration camp, jailed or punished in any serious way for refusing to kill Jews (379).

William Brustein examines who became members of the Nazi party and why. The fact that the Nazi Party was one of 42 racist and ultranationalist fringe groups in 1923 and had become the most popular German political party by 1932 (Brustein 2) indicates that those years were a time of open racism and ultranationalism. Brustein suggests that at the time of voting for Hitler in 1932, the people of Germany, over the various socio-economic strata did so out of self-interest: Hitler’s party seemed to offer the greatest economic advantage at that time. What happened next, dictatorship, world war, and the slaughter of innocent victims (184) was probably not apparent as early as 1932. Even though hundreds of thousands of copies of *Mein Kampf* had been sold by that time, it is generally agreed by scholars that many of those purchasers did not read the book, which was a long, arduous read, and, according to many, those who did read it carefully found it too ridiculous to take seriously (Foxman in Hitler xxii).

While there are many accounts of German cruelty, indifference, and complicity, there are also accounts of courage and resistance. Carsten documents German working-class

opposition to Hitler and the Nazis during the 12 years of the Third Reich. Although opposition was hazardous (51), workers were often successful (56) because there was a great need of their services, especially in terms of skilled labor.

Many accounts of heroism in regard to hiding Jews, relocating their children, and providing food and money took place in Holland, where Jews had been openly welcomed prior to Holland's fall to the Nazis (Ayer 15). As it became more and more apparent that Jews were transported to be killed, young people still alive outside of concentration camps resisted rather than go passively to an almost certain death (Ayer 99). Holocaust literature, almost by definition, includes both the cruelty on the part of some and the courage and conviction of others. It makes sense the Dutch were willing to help the Jews, as they were equally held hostage by the Nazis, whereas the Germans were more loyal to their country than to the Jews, toward which they held either latent or active anti-Semitic views (Goldhagen 15). People in hiding had to rely on the underground resistance workers for all of their needs (Ayer 103).

Detailed personal accounts through memoirs (Shandler xliii) and letters between family members (Doerry ix) document the suffering, alienation, and gradual realization of the realities of Hitler's Final Solution. "The perpetrators of the Holocaust took pride in their accomplishments, in their genocidal vocation, to which they were dedicated. They expressed this again and again in their actions, in the endless stream of choices that they made to tread the killing fields-and while they were there" (Goldhagen 405).

Ayer's alternating chapters from the point of view of a Jewish girl, Helen, and an Aryan boy, Alfons, coming of age in the only world they knew, Germany following World War I, show a marked contrast in effect between their two very dissimilar realities. In Holland, Corrie ten Bloom worked tirelessly along with others to protect Jews as best they could from the Nazis (89) by hiding and relocating them.

By all accounts, Hitler rose to power quickly and absolutely with little resistance both in and outside of Germany. By 1935, the Nazi party had grown to 2.5 million members. While many Germans stopped short of actually joining the Nazi party, many of them certainly voted for Hitler and supported his policies (Aycoberry 83). After Hitler's appointment as Chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933, he quickly created a crisis atmosphere in order to surround himself with powerful accomplices. By March, he was already opening concentration camps, and on March 24, 1933 the German Parliament passed the Enabling Act, granting Hitler dictatorial powers. On August 2, 1934, Hitler became Fuhrer. Jewish rights were reduced and eliminated in quick succession, leading to the Nuremberg Race Laws against Jews on September 15, 1935.

Although it appeared that Hitler's rise was unresisted, in fact there were Germans aware that he was a dangerous, deceitful man who would bring disaster to Germany. Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin, a prosperous and influential German, made numerous attempts to warn leaders both within and outside of Germany of the dangers of Hitler as

early as 1933 (Fest 72), but his predictions were undervalued to the point of being ignored. Meanwhile, the lives of Jews were suffering greater and greater restrictions.

On September 3, 1939, England and France declared war on Germany. Germany continued to invade other countries: the Sutenland, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark, Norway, France, Belgium, Holland, and Luxembourg. On June 14, 1940, Germany occupied Paris. Later that year, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia became allies of Germany. Germany invaded Yugoslavia and Greece. On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked the United States Navy at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and the following day, U. S. and Britain declared war on Japan. By December 11, the United States was officially at war with Germany (Aycoberry 351-355).

While Concentration Camps were established as early as 1933, by all accounts, large-scale, open killing of Jews, Hitler's Final Solution, began in the summer of 1941 and continued unabated through April, 1945. Heston & Heston, through a thorough examination of Hitler's medical history, have concluded that he was both mentally and physically ill from approximately the mid 1930s through the time of his death, commonly viewed as suicide, in 1945. Glass found in Hitler's mouth at autopsy could indicate that he had committed suicide by potassium cyanide and was shot after or near death by an aide to make his death look more courageous (112). They have ascertained through both medical records and interviews that he was administered doses of amphetamine on a regular basis and conclude that many of his symptoms for the last ten years of his life were consistent with addiction to amphetamine (121).

"Rule by sheer violence comes into play where power is being lost . . ." (Arendt, *On Violence* 53). As the war dragged on and Germany was forced to recruit younger and older German males to replenish the thousands of German soldiers killed by the Allies, there was a great deal of resistance within Germany to Hitler and his Nazis. Late that year, for instance, Oskar Schindler managed to save 1200 Jews from Plaszow labor camp, moving them to his hometown of Brunnlitz (Keneally 376). Fest has catalogued fifteen separate attempts to assassinate Hitler, the best known of which occurred on July 20, 1944 (Fest 258). None of the assassination attempts was successful, and Hitler chose to die by his own hand on April 30, 1945. Germany's unconditional surrender was signed on May 7, 1945.

Adolf Eichmann (Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* 22) at his trial in 1961, denied every having killed a single person, a single Jew. While it was his job to organize transports and efficient killing methods for thousands of Jews, Eichmann did not make a point of observing the actual execution of his plans. As a law-abiding citizen, Eichmann felt it his duty to meet his responsibilities with enthusiasm, as they were the result of direct orders from his Fuhrer, "the absolute center of the present legal order" (24). He would have had a bad conscience only if he had not done what he had been ordered to do – "to ship millions of men, women, and children to their death with great zeal and the most meticulous care" (25).

WHY DID THE JEWS DO SO LITTLE TO RESIST?

Rogasky explores the question of why so many Jewish people were herded into cattle cars and taken to their death with such ease. The answers are broad and include a long history of persecution, religious beliefs, and the fact that hundreds or even thousands of Jews might be killed in retaliation for a single act of resistance (111). Under Nazi control, there were severe penalties for aiding Jewish people in any way. Although there are now many stories of personal bravery in regard to providing a safe haven for children (Buchignani 99), people put their own lives at risk by doing so.

Hitler's reign of terror included two fronts. His military goal was to take over all of Europe and perhaps the world. Simultaneously, he intended to eradicate the entire Jewish population in order that the world he envisioned would be free of all Jews. His "Final Solution" was to kill all Jews. While the Nazis killed many more millions of people who were not Jewish, this was done during invasion and occupation. Killing Jews was strictly a civilian act because Jews were not allowed to serve in the German military during World War II.

LITERATURE AND THE STUDY OF CRUEL TIMES

The eighth grade social studies curriculum in HISD includes American history through the Civil War, and the Language Arts curriculum extends that history through the Holocaust. There are myriad opportunities to connect social studies and literature throughout those times. There are countless stories of both the worst and the best of humanity in both fiction and nonfiction; the Nazi perpetrators and their collaborators comprise the worst. Miep Gies and thousands of citizens in each of the countries invaded show us a unique picture of humanity during cruel times. For myself, each fills in some of the missing pieces as to how the Holocaust could ever have been allowed to happen and how some people managed to survive it, while millions were murdered, starved to death, or killed by disease.

While the Holocaust period may be the largest and the best documented example of man's inhumanity to man, the entire history of humans extending through our present time is replete with the horrors of inhumanity. Whether they act as individuals, families, or political groups, each time an individual or group of people attempt to take from or interfere with another group of people, there will be hardship for some. Literature and film bring us those stories, that history. Stories of the Great Depression may help us understand a little of the desperation and cruelty of the times and events that followed.

When Europeans became aware of this great land now known as North America and South America, they immediately set forth to make it their own one way or another, and the fact that millions of people already lived here did not detract from that goal. There are countless stories of the relationships, both positive and negative, related to the newcomers and the native people coming together as these continents grew.

During our own colonial times, King George III felt the divine right to extract allegiance and taxes from the people who were establishing colonies in North America. It was only after many years of struggle that it occurred to some of the colonists, certainly not all, that it was time to start a new country. It took years of great suffering on the part of many to accomplish the separation of the colonists from that king and to begin the arduous task of self-government, at which endeavor we continue to struggle.

The Lewis and Clark expedition offers many ways to explore that part of our history in which we made a concerted effort to learn just how huge this continent really is. During the years of great expansion from east toward the west, native people sometimes cooperated and often resisted their ouster. Their stories survive.

Our history with slavery continues to influence the lives of many. Our Civil War is generally known as the most devastating war in which we have engaged because not only was it fought on our land, but also both armies were American. The Civil War is an important part of the eighth grade Social Studies curriculum and one that offers a great deal of both literature and film. Our Civil Rights era in the 1950s and 1960s brought great change to our ways of thinking and doing with laws against discrimination, but many forms of discrimination continue to fester even today.

More recently, laws regarding abusive behavior within families have furthered the rights of individuals in places that were previously exempt from interference. In his book *A Child Called "IT"* Pelzer chronicles his years of abuse at the hands of his mother, which led to the first laws against child abuse in this country.

Many of our students are Hispanic, and it is important to study the influence of Latin Americans on our country. It is good to read fiction and nonfiction about these influences in the classroom. Pam Ryan Munoz writes of the plight of a well-to-do Mexican family at risk in their own country when political changes send them fleeing to safety and into the process of starting over. Gary Soto writes of the particular perils of growing up Mexican in the US. Along with opportunities come discrimination and clashes between the old ways of thinking and new.

In addition to learning about times of strife, there are many stories of people coming together to make the world a kinder, gentler place, including both nonfiction and fiction, and daily entries in newspapers and magazines as well as books. It is my pleasure to provide books, films, and experiences of a variety of types to students looking for meaning in life as they search for their own place in the world with the hope that they will find factual information and protagonists who can serve as their guides through their own difficult times.

Teaching the “What Happens to Humanity during Cruel Times?” Unit

While the Holocaust is a unique period of time in many aspects, wide-spread bullying and the resultant human suffering are not unique to the Holocaust. In large and small ways, denying the rights of a person or of a people leads to strife, and our history is constituted of many varieties of such strife. Literature is one very meaningful way to look at our history with all of the good and bad. Eighth graders read the diary left by Anne Frank as part of the required curriculum in their English class, which is as moving as any work they will ever read, and yet there is much, much more. Every survivor has a story of deprivation and loss as well as courage and the good fortune to have lived through the horror. Many of those stories have survived.

This unit of study is more directed toward discovering various aspects of the cruelty we find in life and literature than in blaming the many varieties of perpetrators. The deeper one delves, the clearer it becomes that much of the world participated in the slaughter during the Holocaust through active involvement or more latent participation. Although the Allied Forces eventually liberated those Jews who were still alive in 1945, many of those enslaved and killed could have been saved by simply having allowed them sanctuary years earlier. Two examples of many include the S.S. *St. Louis* carrying 937 passengers who were turned away from the United States and returned to Europe in June 1939 and the ship “*Struma*” which was carrying 769 Jews that was sunk as an enemy target by Soviet submarines in February 1942 (Holocaust Timeline found in Lesson Plan 1).

One way to “front-load” any unit of study so that all students have some shared information at the very beginning and before they strike off in different directions to pursue individual areas for further research is to view films and invite speakers from the Holocaust Museum. Some of the Holocaust films are rated too harshly for viewing in school, but *Rescuers: Stories of Courage* produced by Barbara Streisand and Cis Corman are highly informative without being overly harsh. Either or both of the two videos, available from the Holocaust Museum, will start our journey into understanding the Holocaust. The two titles are *Two Families* and *Two Women*. In *Two Families*, a family helps Jewish prisoners escape. In *Two Women*, a nanny keeps her friend’s child alive until the end of the war, and another woman hides refugees and falsifies their documents, both ways that everyday people showed increased humanity during cruel times.

Along with the horrendous cruelty documented throughout the Holocaust and all wars, there are also many excellent examples of humanity at its best. I think it is important to balance both ends of the spectrum in literature and film as we study cruel times. In the final analysis, we all choose our approach to life in both kind and cruel times. Discussing these choices and observing the options that people have during the cruel times may help students during their adolescent years at which time they have opportunity for intense social and emotional growth.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan 1

Following the viewing of one or both films mentioned above, we will discuss the timeline and locations of Nazi aggression, at the *Holocaust Timeline* website, <<http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/holocaust/timeline.html>>, and see when and where these particular stories (in the films mentioned above) take place. There are hundreds of websites related to the Holocaust. An hour at a computer lab will allow students to explore aspects of the Holocaust and start a file for future research.

Because a great deal of time and ink would be required for each student to print out the timeline above, it would be preferable to have copies ready for each student as well as classroom copies of Holocaust resources.

A classroom set of Rogasky's *Smoke and Ashes: The Story of the Holocaust* will help students build a beginning understanding of World War II and the Holocaust. This text, available from Scholastic, Inc., is an excellent comprehensive nonfiction resource for both students and teachers.

At this stage, students will find an area for further study, including but not limited to the following possibilities:

- An individual related to the Holocaust
- An event related to the Holocaust
- A concentration camp
- A particular battle

Lesson Plan 2

The December 7, 2003 issue of *Parade Magazine* featured the article "What Became of Them?" about the S.S. St. Louis, a ship carrying 937 men, women, and children fleeing the Nazis in June 1939. Many countries, including the US, refused Jewish refugees sanctuary, often sealing their fate at the hands of the Nazis. I have multiple copies and website addresses that connect to the story.

Why did the US and other countries refuse entry to this group and to so many Jews trying to flee almost certain death? Certainly, world leaders were aware that Hitler's intent was to kill as many Jews as possible. Keeping in mind that the 1930s were a time of worldwide economic depression, we will look at the many opportunities available for other countries to have spared the lives of many Jews. Some countries, including Denmark and Sweden, were notably not affected by the underlying anti-Semitism that has been documented throughout Europe at that time. Most other countries, the United States of America included, held beliefs that viewed Jews as fundamentally different

from the mainstream citizen. Until Civil Rights for everyone were made law in the United States, Jews were regularly discriminated against in many ways in the USA.

This example of Jews having been denied entrance into many countries is one of many throughout the world, making it clear that more could have been done earlier to interfere with the Nazi goal of ridding the world of Jews.

Students, after studying this example, will be encouraged to explore who is allowed in to the US and who is denied. Our newspapers provide almost daily reminders of our attempts to keep people from entering our country. Our tremendous losses on September 11, 2001, our current involvement in Iraq and other parts of the world, as well as frequent acts of disregard for the suffering of those trying to cross our southern border from Mexico and Central America serve as constant reminders of how all acts of inhumanity affect all of us.

Classroom discussions will stem from the very specific S.S. St. Louis incident to more general acts that intentionally exclude people trying to enter this country. For balance, it is important to notice who is accepted and who is excluded along with the official reasons for each. This may lead to individual study of immigration rules and quotas.

Lesson Plan 3: Speaker from the Holocaust Museum TBA

There is nothing like a personal account of the tragedies of the Holocaust to reach students' personal understanding. It is important to be sure that students are sufficiently mature and aware of the seriousness of the suffering of our guest prior to the visit(s).

Once we have placed our request for a guest speaker, it will be necessary to do some background research into the particular concentration camps or countries related to his/her experiences. What artifacts, if any, will be provided? What should our students know in order to understand the message of the speaker? Using the Internet, we will research specific events related to our speaker's visit.

Following the visit, students will write letters, poems, and/or personal responses to our group experience. If appropriate, some of the writing will be forwarded to our guest.

Independent Choices following the first three introductions:

As a regular part of their reading classes, students are required to read self-selected books daily and record them. It would make sense that some of their titles would include Holocaust-related and many forms of literature that connect with the history of difficult times within the world, of which much is available.

Following the first three lessons related to the Holocaust, students are to choose from a number of preselected titles OR search for other titles available, either fiction or nonfiction, from our school and other libraries. Students will read and write about their selections as we all gain knowledge about the Holocaust or other periods of choice that relate to difficult/cruel times of interest. In the spring of their eighth grade year, students read *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl* in Readers Theater fashion in their English class. The “What Happens to Humanity during Cruel Times?” unit extends far beyond and expands upon the learning of the official curriculum.

Project CLEAR is the written curriculum for Language Arts in the Houston Independent School District. Project CLEAR is based on and aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills upon which the new TAKS or Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills is based. The following knowledge and skills statements are among those that are very important to students becoming sophisticated readers and writers and are primary in the “What Happens to Humanity during Cruel Times?” unit of study.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

TEKS

8.10 Reading Comprehension (HISD CLEAR ELAR 8.5)

The student comprehends selections using a variety of strategies

8.11 Reading/Literary Response (HISD CLEAR ELAR 8.6)

The student expresses & supports responses to various types of texts.

8.12 Reading/text structure/literary concepts (HISD CLEAR ELAR 8.2)

The student analyzes the characteristics of types of texts (genres).

8.14 Reading/culture (HISD CLEAR ELAR 8.7)

The student reads to increase knowledge of his/her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures.

TEKS

8.15 Writing/purposes (HISD CLEAR ELAW 8.2)

8.16 Writing/pennmanship/capitalization/spelling (HISD CLEAR ELAW 8.3)

8.17 Writing/grammar usage (HISD CLEAR ELAW 8.4)

8.18 Writing/process (HISD CLEAR ELAW 8.5)

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Helen and Alfons write in alternating chapters their very different experiences during the times of Nazi control, Helen as a young Jew and Alfons as a Nazi Youth.
- Brustein, William. *The Social Origins of the Nazi Party, 1925-1933*. Yale UP, 1996.
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Carsten documents many instances of resistance and revolt by the German workers during World War II. When they were given orders to increase production beyond what was humanly possible, for example, they said no, and the Nazis in power found it necessary to listen.

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The lives of people living in the countries affected by Hitler's attempt to rule the world were interrupted and ended prematurely. Their families cherish whatever is left by which to remember them, and sometimes share those memories through publication.

Fest, Joachim. *Plotting Hitler's Death: The Story of German Resistance*. Trans. Bruce Little. New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 1994.

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The Russian Revolution and Marxism were related in time, geography, and political struggle to the Holocaust period in Germany and the rest of the world.

Gies, Miep. *Anne Frank Remembered*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987.

Miep Gies, identified by Anne Frank as Miep Van Santen, was the woman who helped the Frank family hide for over two years. She retells her story as she remembers it many years later.

Goldhagen, Daniel Jonah. *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*. New York: Vintage Books, 1997.

While most books concerning the Holocaust tend to focus on Hitler and his henchmen, this book, based on Goldhagen's doctoral dissertation, looks at the people who performed the day-to-day killings and constant acts of degradation and cruelty. Rejecting the mythology of people coerced against their will as unfounded, Goldhagen looked instead at the culture of intense, uninterrupted anti-Semitism of Germany throughout the centuries preceding the Holocaust. In doing so, he found that people who considered themselves moral beings saw nothing immoral about ridding the Earth of the scourge of Jews, portrayed throughout centuries as evil and subhuman, an affront to good Christian people.

Heiden, Konrad. *The Fuhrer*. New Jersey: Castle Books, 2002.

Heiden (1901-66) watched the rise of Hitler and was one of his first biographers. The details included are often from first-hand experience, as Heiden was there and was one of the first people to recognize the perversity of Hitler's self-serving ideology.

Heston, Leonard L. and Renate Heston. *The Medical Casebook of Adolf Hitler*. UP of America, 1980.

The Hestons have researched Hitler's medical history through documents and interviews of people who treated him medically and were in his company on a

regular basis. Their conclusion is that Hitler was a very unhealthy person, both physically and mentally, from the mid 1930's through his death, with amphetamine addiction a major contributor to his mental and physical decline.

Hitler, Adolf. *Mein Kampf*. Trans. Ralph Manheim, with an introduction by Abraham Foxman. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1943.

“Hitler’s contribution to the history of ideas can be found in his clear and forceful articulation of numerous theories already in circulation during the early twentieth century rather than any original thoughts of his own” (Foxman xix). Hitler wrote about his struggles and his plan for the future of Germany. It is a pity that people did not read and heed his madness, putting a stop to him before he did so much harm.

Holocaust Timeline. 1997. The History Place. 6 April 2004.

<www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/holocaust/timeline.html>.

A detailed timeline featuring events during the Holocaust.

Kann, Robert A. *A History of the Habsburg Empire 1526 – 1918*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1974.

This text examines the multinational entity of the Austro-German orbit, including the Magyars, the Czechs, the Slovaks, the Poles, the Ruthenians, the Southern Slavs, and the Latins. What happened in Nazi Germany following World War I was rooted in the long history that preceded it.

Kershaw, Ian. *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999.

A compelling biography of Hitler’s early years, from birth through his manipulations of the German people. By 1936, Hitler was adored by many, and there was a single political party, of which he was the leader. Hitler “became the foremost believer in his own Fuhrer cult. Hubris – that overweening arrogance which courts disaster – was inevitable. The point where nemesis takes over had been reached by 1936 (591).”

. *Hitler 1936-1945: Nemesis*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000.

On March 29, 1936, 98.9 percent of the people voting in Germany voted for Hitler, if the number reported by a one-party system can be trusted. “His position within Germany was unchallenged. No serious threat of opposition faced him” (xxxvi).

Lauryssens, Stan. *The Man Who Invented the Third Reich*. Gloucestershire, UK: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 2002.

Interesting account of the influence of Moeller van den Bruck on Hitler's thinking. A copy of his book, *The Third Reich* first published in 1923, was open beside Hitler when he committed suicide in 1945.

Marty, Martin. *Martin Luther*. New York: Lipper/Viking, 2004.

Martin Luther was one of the most influential and prominent figures of sixteenth-century Europe. This book relates to the Holocaust in regard to the ongoing anti-Semitism that continued into the twentieth-century and contributed so heavily to people's willingness to participate in the murder of millions of Jews.

Rogasky, Barbara. *Smoke and Ashes: The Story of the Holocaust*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 2002.

This is a very comprehensive history of the Holocaust which is appropriate for readers in the intermediate grades. Rogasky includes many photographs, most of which were taken by German prison guards and soldiers in order to record their own participation in the mistreatment and murder of Jews.

Shandler, Jeffrey, ed. *Awakening Lives: Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland Before the Holocaust*. Yale UP in cooperation with The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 2002.

Writers were encouraged to document their lives before Poland was invaded by the Nazis. Their stories humanize the people who were brutalized during the Nazi occupation.

Ten Boom, Corrie. *The Hiding Place*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1984.

Corrie Ten Boom was born into a family in which kindness, charity, and happiness were the most important aspects of life. During the years of German occupation of Holland (from May 10, 1940), the situation went from bad to much, much worse. Corrie, a Christian, decided to devote her life to helping the Jews. She, her father, and sister hid Jews in their home until they were arrested and sent to a concentration camp for aiding Jews. Corrie's deep faith made her incarceration and life after her release a joy and comfort to others.

Wassiljewa, Tatjana. *Hostage to War*. Trans. Anna Trenter. New York: Scholastic, 1999.

Not only the Jews were persecuted, starved, and enslaved. In every country invaded, people's lives were destroyed. Hunger, fear, and death by starvation, disease, and murder were all parts of the realities of people's daily torment.

Supplemental Resources

Adolescent Literature

Bagdasarian, Adam. *Forgotten Fire*. New York: DK Publishing, 2000.

The history of Armenia is one of being invaded by Greek, Persian, Roman, Mongolian, and Turkish. During the early twentieth century, Nazis gained control of the Armenians in Turkey. This fictional account based on the true story of the life of one child recounts the history of the suffering of this period.

Banks, Sara H. *Remember My Name*. Niwot, CO: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1993. Known as the Trail of Tears, Native Americans, specifically the Cherokees in this remarkable piece of historical fiction, were removed from their land and sent to reservations far to the west, against their will. Annie, the 11 year-old protagonist, suffers through the Indian Removal of 1838 with dignity and courage. In this book, Banks chronicles what is known as one of the most shameful episodes of American history.

Bartoletti, Susan. *No Man's Land*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1999. Like many young boys, 14 year-old Thrasher Magee thought going to war was exciting, and he had something to prove to his father – to prove that he had what it takes to be a man, a hero. In this war, with brothers and cousins on either side of the dispute, the Yankees and Rebels took the time to share coffee and play baseball between battles.

Borton de Trevino, Elizabeth. *El Guero: A True Adventure Story*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company. In the Author's Note, Borton de Trevino explains the fine line between nonfiction and fiction. Most of this story was told to her by her father-in-law, Porfirio Trevino Arreola, a recounting of his arduous journey from Mexico City to Ensenada following the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Highly factual, this work cannot be considered nonfiction because the author created some small characters in order to keep the story sequential when portions of her father-in-laws memories were missing.

Brenaman, Miriam. *Evy's Civil War*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 2002. In this piece of well-written historical fiction, Brenaman captures the essence of the world of a southern girl of privilege growing up before and during the Civil War.

Carlson, Ron. *The Speed of Light*. New York: HarperTrophy, 2003. In this coming of age story that explores child abuse and its effects on the victims, Larry spends the summer between elementary and junior high school becoming familiar with the inevitable changes boys experience. Although his friendships with Witt and Rafferty are about to end, this last summer of childhood has its highs and lows, forcing Larry to make some decisions regarding the direction of his life.

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *Bud, Not Buddy*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1999.

Very accessible story of the Great Depression in the USA and how it affected the protagonist, Bud, a young black boy. As one follows Bud's travails and determination for a better life, Curtis introduces the reader to the hardships of all people, but specifically Blacks. Compared to Jews in Nazi Germany, perhaps, Bud's life was not so bad, but the Great Depression affected the entire world.

Dahlberg, Maurine F. *Play to the Angel*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 2000.

In this novel set in Austria, Dahlberg explores the way in which the lives of non-Jews were disrupted by Hitler's intention to rule the world. By evoking fears, such as a takeover by Communists, the Nazis were able to force themselves on countries. When the Nazis threatened to take Austria by force, costing many lives, if the Nazis were not allowed to control of the country, regrettably, the Chancellor of Austria stepped down in order to avoid bloodshed. As in each country invaded by the Nazis, people lost their livelihoods and belongings, if not their lives. Many tried to become invisible to the Nazis by going through with the required "Heil Hitler" nonsense as a way of just getting by. Others secretly did their best to help others escape or hide.

DeFelice, Cynthia. *Nowhere to Call Home*. New York: HarperTrophy, 1999.

Frances becomes Frankie and hits the roads (rails) after her father commits suicide following financial losses in 1929. DeFelice describes Frankie's life on her own after choosing the life of a hobo over going to live with an aunt she does not know, assuming that the aunt would be as demanding as her now deceased father. She takes us through Hoovervilles and Railroad Jungles which spring up everywhere during that horrible decade, introducing the reader to the best and worst of humanity.

DiCamillo, Kate. *The Tale of Despereaux*. Cambridge: Candlewick Press, 2003.

Because of tradition, a tiny mouse's death penalty was supported by both his father and his brother. This book explores conformity, power, privilege, abuse of power, desire for privilege, hope, remorse, revenge, light and dark. It can serve as an allegory for the roles people play during difficult times. "Might just as well be happy, seeing as it doesn't make a difference to anyone but you if you are or not," says a soldier (143). It is probably easier to examine some thoughts and actions in allegory and fantasy rather than realistic work.

Giff, Patricia Reilly. *Lily's Crossing*. New York: Random House, 1997.

Life during war time is precarious even when not in the war zone. Far from the fighting in Europe, Lily befriends Albert, a refugee from Hungary with a secret sewn into his coat. Directly or indirectly, everyone was profoundly affected by war raging around the world in the 1940s.

Hesse, Karen. *Out of the Dust*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1997.

In *Out of the Dust*, the personal misery of the protagonist and her family is set within the larger picture of the Great Depression. In Oklahoma, in addition to the poor economy, Hesse also explores the underlying contributions of the contributions that the prosperity of farmers during WWI that led to physical backlash in the Dustbowl. The severity of the Dustbowl was exacerbated by the over-cultivation in order to profit from Europe's need of wheat, leaving the prairies of Oklahoma particularly vulnerable to the ravages of drought.

Holman, Felice. *Slake's Limbo*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974.

Slake, at thirteen, has never had the family support that he needs, but now is homeless and nearly hopeless. He lives through a terrible period of time in which he finds refuge inside the wall of a subway tunnel, staying alive by virtue of his own persistence and the help of a few kind souls who share what little they have. Hope returns as he realizes the likelihood of being walled into his hidey hole permanently and decides to ask for help. The help he receives revives him from illness and desperation, and yet he knows that he must go on to be self-sufficient, leaving the reader with the hope that he will manage on his own.

Hunt, Irene. *Across Five Aprils*. New York: Berkeley Books, 1986.

More fact than fiction, the author tells the story of her grandfather's memories of life during the Civil War, with families making difficult choices as to which cause was the one to die for. Historically factual, the author has created characters which convey the problems of living life through a terrible period.

Isaacs, Anne. *Torn Thread*. New York: Scholastic, 2000.

Based on the life of Eva Buchbinder and her sister, this book relates the trials and tribulations they suffered at a slave labor camp in Parschnitz, Czechoslovakia from June 1943 – May 1945. The two girls managed to survive, but after their liberation, they learned that the rest of their family had been killed in Auschwitz. Somehow, they managed to maintain hope as the war raged on, with part of that hope related to the eventual reuniting with their family, which, sadly, did not happen.

McSwigan, Marie. *Snow Treasure*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1942.

Based on a story possibly true but unsubstantiated, children participated in moving \$9,000,000 in gold bullion during the Nazi occupation of Norway in 1940. Like many every day heroes who helped outsmart the troops who held them under siege, these children risked their very lives to keep money out of the hands of Hitler.

Munoz, Pam Ryan. *Esperanza Rising*. New York: Scholastic, 2002.

Transforming from a wealthy, well-placed family to field workers in a strange country, Esperanza and her mother have escaped the perils of life under threat after the murder of their protector, father and husband. New perils face them as

they try to adjust to their new situation. Esperanza, hope, is their salvation, along with a work ethic and great love.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Scorpions*. New York: HarperTrophy, 1988.

Gang life is a reality for many people. Myers explores the control gangs have over young people in some neighborhoods, even when being part of a gang is the last thing a young man plans to do.

Napoli, Donna Jo. *Stones in Water*. New York: Puffin Books, 1997.

Although Italy at the time was an ally of Germany, Italian boys were rounded up and forced into a harsh work camp. As terrible as the situation was for Roberto, it was worse for his friend Samuele who was hiding the secret of his being Jewish. As the war rages on, the horrors of hunger and deprivation take a terrible toll on all of Europe. People once impressed with Mussolini and Hitler saw that this war was not what they had bargained for, and they looked toward a better future. After much suffering while trying to stay alive, Roberto explains that if you have enough stones in the water, you can build a bridge. He wants to be one of the stones from which a new Europe is to be built.

Paulsen, Gary. *Nightjohn*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1993.

Many of the facts of the worst-case scenarios of slavery are woven into this story of a man who resists enslavement at the price of many beatings. Realizing that literacy is a necessity for his people to understand their situation and its solution, John travels under the cover of darkness to teach people to read and to give them hope of a better future.

Sachar, Louis. *Holes*. New York: Scholastic, 1998.

Stanley Yelnats is sent to a juvenile detention center somewhere in a desolate area of Texas where a vicious warden and her equally horrible assistants go through the motions of improving their charges' attitudes and behavior through hard work while their real intentions are a secret. Through several generations of flashbacks, we learn about how the main characters end up in the same time and place and how circumstances evolve toward the present. Both the book and film are excellent.

Soto, Gary. *Buried Onions*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1997.

While Eddie had never run with gangs, his life, and the lives of all young Mexicans in Fresno and other California cities, was rife with danger. Eddie tried to go to college and get started on a better life, but his friends and family keep him trapped in a vicious cycle of revenge for past wrongs. Will he be able to put his life on track and carve a better future for himself?

Speare, Elizabeth George. *Calico Captive*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957.

During the French and Indian War in the mid-eighteenth century, it was common for the Native Americans to kidnap settlers. Sometimes the captives were made slaves, but, especially with young people, some of the captives became willing members of the tribes who had captured them.

Spinelli, Jerry. *Milkweed*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001.

In Nazi-occupied Warsaw, a young boy somehow survives by trying to get along in unthinkable circumstances. He has no identity and accepts whatever identity is provided to him, understanding little of the labels applied to him or the political meanings of the different labels. This book is unusual in that it looks into his life as an adult after having had no semblance of a normal childhood.

Yolen, Jane. *The Devil's Arithmetic*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1990.

Hannah is transported back in time to a Polish village in 1942. Only she knows what the future holds for her relatives during the Holocaust. Although she keeps her knowledge to herself, knowing that Hitler is eventually conquered gives her the hope that keeps her alive.

Adult and Adolescent Nonfiction

Buchignani, Walter. *Tell No One Who You Are: The Hidden Childhood of Regine Miller*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1994.

The author reconstructs the childhood of Regine Miller in Nazi-occupied Belgium. Her parents kept her hidden in an effort to keep her alive until a time when it would become safe to be a Jew. Like most survivors, Regine did not speak of the horror of the Holocaust until decades after it was over.

Hautzig, Esther. *The Endless Steppe*. New York: HarperKeypoint, 1968.

This Jewish family was deported from Vilna, Poland to Siberia in 1941 for being Capitalists as well as Jews and managed to stay alive through the war until they were finally allowed to leave their exile. Hautzig wrote to Adlai Stevenson after she had read some articles he had written about his trip to Rubtsovsk, where she had spent her years during the war. He suggested that her first-hand knowledge should be written, and she took his suggestion.

Keneally, Thomas. *Schindler's List*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982.

Well-known after Steven Spielberg directed and produced the film, *Schindler's List* is an important work related to the human suffering and the personal courage of sometimes unlikely people who stood up in a time of totalitarian oppression and complete disdain for humanity of those considered *other*. The book includes the testimony of some of the people Oskar Schindler hid from the Nazis ready to kill them.

Koehn, Ilse. *Mischling, Second Degree: My Childhood in Nazi Germany*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1977.

Koehn was unaware that she was a Jew until after the demise of the Nazis. During her years as a member of the Hitler Youth, she had quite a different experience and vantage point than she would have had if her Jewishness had been known. While many Jewish survivors have written their own accounts and many more have been compiled in fictional accounts of the Holocaust, accounts of the experiences of those whose stories came from a different, although perhaps no less devastating, point of view.

Pelzer, Dave. *A Child Called "It"*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 1995.

Dave tells his story of abuse by his mother and subsequently his entire family from ages 4 through 12. Dave's detailed account of the many forms of abuse applied by his mother and the lack of laws to make her stop is a heartbreaking but very important piece of writing.

_____. *Lost Boy: A Foster Child's Search for the Love of a Family*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 1997.

After years of abuse at the hands of his mother, Dave was finally removed from his biological family and placed in a series of foster homes. Having had such an abnormal childhood, it is not surprising that his adolescent years were turbulent.

Perl, Lila and Marion Blumenthal Lazan. *Four Perfect Pebbles*. New York: Scholastic, 1996.

This is a first person account of a Jewish family's 6 ½ years as refugees and in prison camps, which eventually led to liberation and relocation to the US. Lazan has devoted much of her life since approximately 1980 to enlightening others to the horrors of Nazi Germany and all it touched.

Rogasky, Barbara. *Smoke and Ashes: The Story of the Holocaust*. New York: Scholastic, 2002.

This is a very comprehensive history of the Holocaust which is appropriate for readers in the intermediate grades. Rogasky includes many photographs, most of which were taken by German prison guards and soldiers in order to record their own participation in the mistreatment and murder of Jews.

Siegel, Aranka. *Upon the Head of a Goat: A Childhood in Hungary 1939-1944*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1981.

This is an account of the author's own Jewish childhood in the Holocaust. The trials and tribulations of just staying alive are riveting, devastating, and sometimes inspiring.

Wassiljewa, Tatjana. *Hostage to War*. Trans. Anna Trenter. New York: Scholastic, 1999.

Although Joseph Stalin of Russia and Adolf Hitler of Germany agreed to be allies in 1938, Hitler broke their mutual pact of nonaggression on June 22, 1941. As a strategy of the “scorched earth” policy (185), the Russian “Red Army” laid waste to the crops of Russian farmers in order to deprive the advancing German soldiers of this food source. While this was effective for that purpose, it also caused famine for the Russian people. Of all the allies fighting Nazi Germany in WWII, Russian losses were the greatest, with approximately 7,000,000 soldiers and perhaps 13,000,000 civilians (187), many through starvation. Wassiljewa relates her memories of a personal journey as a child, having been sent to Germany as slave labor. Even victory against the enemy proved to be devastating. “For Tatjana and others like her, Russia’s part in the Allied Victory promised much and delivered nothing” (188).

Wilkomirski, Benjamin. *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood*. New York: Schocken Books, 1995.

Benjamin Wilkomirski is not certain of his name or date of birth because his conscious knowledge of his childhood began after he was liberated from Auschwitz in 1945. Fragments of memories return after his survival of several harsh years many of his peers did not survive. He saw the cruel deaths of babies who chewed their own frozen fingers before they died. He saw too much cruelty and death to remember it as a whole – just pieces, fragments, remained to him.