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AN IDENTITY TOOLBOX: A READER-RESPONSE APPROACH TO HOLOCAUST
LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will explore the theme of identity in Holocaust Literature specifically through the lens of Reader-Response Criticism for students in a 10th grade English classroom. Through the works of Han Nolan's *If I Should Die Before I Wake* and Elie Wiesel's *Night*, I analyze this theme, which is also a prevalent developmental task in the lives of adolescent readers. The method of analyzing the text through Reader-Response Criticism was chosen because it posits that the reader makes meaning of the reading based on the text and their own personal experiences that they bring to the table. In addition, lesson plans that support the analysis of identity in these two works are provided.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The way children and adolescents make meaning of the world around them is, without a doubt, linked in part to the education that they receive. Part of this education includes exposure to different genres of literature that allow students to read about many differing characters and plots. Due to this, children learn from a young age that there are many different characters and scenarios in the world with which they can identify. This thesis will focus on the importance of allowing adolescents to shape their own meaning of a work of literature in the current educational system. The goal of this project is to explore the theme of identity within two works of Holocaust literature. The two works that I will focus on are Han Nolan's work of historical fiction titled *If I Should Die Before I Wake* and Elie Wiesel's memoir *Night*.

First, I will review existing literature surrounding literary theory and how literary theories are discussed and applied to adolescent literature. In this literature review, I will discuss why analyzing the theme of identity is so imperative for adolescent readers. From this review of existing literature, I will move on to explain the theory by which I will analyze *If I Should Die Before I Wake* and *Night*. Then, I will analyze the theme of identity within both works of literature quoting passages from the texts. Following the analysis of the text, I will take the chosen theory and attempt to apply my research through lesson plans created for a secondary English classroom.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Many theories, genres of literature, and relevant themes present in literature have been discussed in Secondary English classrooms around the globe. Although there is a plethora of literature surrounding these three areas, I will be focusing on how Reader-Response Criticism can be incorporated into a Secondary Language-Arts curriculum through the use of studying the theme of identity in Holocaust Literature.

Reader-Response Criticism, a theory that leaves room for the reader to make meaning of the text based on their previous life experiences and beliefs (Bressler, 2011, p. 73) can be one way for adolescents to look at specific themes within literature. In the book *Understanding Children's Literature*, Michael Benton claims, "Others employ reader-response methods in order to explore children's concepts and social attitudes" (2005, p. 89). While there are several reasons to implement this theory with adolescent readers, one reason of significance is that it allows them to talk about and understand their social attitudes toward their peers and other people in the world around them. This specific attribute of Reader-Response Criticism makes it a theory that adolescents can relate with and then grow from. Reader-Response Criticism has been used to explore social attitudes in children readers through multicultural and cross-cultural studies (Benton, 2005, p. 95). In a study presented by Benton (2005) done by Beverly Naidoo, it is recorded that, "...reader-response methods can help to illuminate the values and attitudes that readers sometimes hide, even from themselves (p. 96). In this particular study, the teacher used four books with her students, one of which was a work of Holocaust literature titled *Friedrich* by Hans Peter Richter. This research led me to analyze Han Nolan's *If I Should Die Before I Wake* and Elie Wiesel's *Night* through the lens of Reader-Response Criticism. Although I have chosen

to use Reader-Response Criticism to analyze the theme of identity, there are other possibilities by which scholars choose to look at and take apart adolescent literature.

While many books and genres attempt to have the reader learn about social injustice or prejudice, Holocaust literature provides more for students in terms of discussing obstacles that adolescent readers are facing in their development. Holocaust literature reaches beyond commenting on the social injustices of our world and brings to light themes that adolescents are dealing with in their own lives. Anne Dublin, a teacher and librarian, notes that through Holocaust literature, “Young adult readers can gain insight into human behavior as well as an historical perspective through their reading of Holocaust literature” (2002, p. 139). Not only does Holocaust literature provide an avenue for students to understand their own thoughts, but it also opens the door for them to understand the broader idea of human behavior. Furthermore, using Holocaust literature to teach students about the events:

creates a human connection to events, personalizes the impersonal historical data, creates a sense of response from the reader, and reduces students’ tendencies to dismiss information and events as generally meaningless because they have no significant context in which to place—and process—the data (Danks, 1996, p. 102).

If teachers want their students to understand the Holocaust, Danks is arguing that literature is the best way to do so instead of only using a history textbook. By using literature in this way, students can have a more personal understanding of the events that goes beyond a mere chronological understanding of what occurred. Using Holocaust literature and analyzing it through Reader-Response Criticism shows students that they can both have a personal connection with the text based on their own experiences and that they can also learn more about themselves and others.

While there is a plethora of literature surrounding the Holocaust that is grade-appropriate for adolescent readers, the texts analyzed and presented in this thesis have been picked with great appreciation to research and detail. Joan Knickerbocker and James Rycik indicate that:

The pairing of these novels [*If I Should Die Before I Wake* and *Night*], of female protagonist and male protagonist, of closed and open endings, and of similar themes, provides a structure for analyses that will likely result in a level of literary interpretation and appreciation not achieved by reading the classic [*Night*] alone (2002, p. 202).

While one of these works could be taught on its own, the juxtaposition of the two creates a new and more meaningful experience for adolescent readers and provides them with multiple perspectives that highlight the same themes.

One major theme in both literary works is identity. For adolescents, this identity struggle and formation is real and takes up a significant amount of energy. Kate McLean from the University of Toronto summarizes this point through psychologist Erik Erikson by writing, “Identity development is one of the major psychological tasks of late adolescence and has important implications for healthy psychological development throughout the life course” (2005, p. 683). While the search for identity is essentially a lifelong process, adolescence is a time of heightened identity formation and meaning making in which students in secondary classrooms are working toward a more concrete version of themselves (McLean, 2005, p. 683). I argue that this time of heightened identity development and meaning making is a critical one to reveal to adolescent readers the struggle of identity formation of the characters in literature that they encounter in the classroom. The research above on Holocaust literature further proves that it is a genre that can do just that. Lessons that incorporate the themes and stories of adolescent identity have even been critical in helping academic scholars navigate through the period of adolescence.

In Luana Ross's essay, "From the F Word to Indigenous/Feminisms," the author quotes scholar Julie Cajune on her experience with the power of stories. Cajune expresses, "Much of my life has been spent searching for stories to make meaning of who I am and how this world came to be.... Stories are such an important part of my life that I remember recounting them silently in my mind when faced with personal difficulties" (2009, p. 50). Cajune's personal reflection on how stories shaped her life justifies the use of stories in the classroom. Stories are not only for children or growing adolescent readers. Stories have the power to reach the brightest and most intellectual people in the academy. Lessons that provide this experience for adolescents in their early stages of reading literature have the ability to impact them for the rest of their lives like in Cajune's case. She also voices that, "These stories carried me through adolescence and teenage identity" (Ross, 2009, p. 50). Cajune's ability to find her identity is only one claim from one person; however, reaching one student on this level could be considered a success in this unit.

In the following pages, I will contribute to this scholarship by analyzing a critical and ubiquitous theme in the lives of adolescent students. I aim to bridge the gap that exists between reading literature for a surface level understanding and digging deeper to uncover issues that today's adolescents cannot escape.

Chapter 3

Methodology

As mentioned earlier, this thesis will utilize Reader-Response Criticism as a basis for exploring adolescent literature, namely two works of Holocaust literature. Before delving into the specifics of how this theory plays a role in the analysis of these two works, I will lay out the foundations of Reader-Response Criticism. It is important to note that this theory can also be referred to as Reader-Oriented Criticism, but for the purposes of this thesis, I will use the term Reader-Response Criticism.

Reader-Response Criticism became popular in the United States around the 1970s; however, the movement toward this way of thinking about literature can be traced back to the 1920s and 1930s. Despite its roots in the early 1900s, this theory still remains an avenue for analyzing literature today (Bressler, 2011). Simply put, proponents of this theory believe that the text exists only once there is a reader to experience what is written on the page. Charles Bressler writes an equation to sum this up, “Reader + Text = Meaning” (2011, p. 74). This equation gives the reader and the text an equal share in creating the meaning of what the author has written. An approach like this one allows for the reader to become part of the text and to incorporate his or her thoughts and beliefs into what is written on the page. This means that students can bring in their personal experiences, both inside and outside of the classroom, to help them make sense of what they are reading.

Although Reader-Response Criticism allows readers to make meaning of the text based on their own experiences and interpretations, it does not leave room for all interpretations or argue that all responses are equally correct or pertinent. This is important to point out in the discussion of literature surrounding the Holocaust because teachers must always teach what is

historically accurate despite the meaning that students make from their own reading and interpretation. Instead of teaching so students make their own meaning of the events of the Holocaust, educators should instead focus on having students make meaning of very specific themes that are in the works of literature. In order to maintain historical accuracy, teachers must stay away from allowing students to make a personal statement of the actual event.

On the topic of historical context, Reader-Response Critics also believe that the meaning of the text has the power to change over a period of time based on the time period the reader is occupying and how that time relates to the time period in the text. Hans Robert Jauss, a German critic, emphasizes that readers from one historical period to the next create their own standards for how texts will be judged. This practice is best known as reception theory, a specific type of Reader-Response Criticism. This theory postulates that, “readers from any given historical period establish for themselves [...] what they value in a text. A text then, does not have one and only one correct interpretation because its supposed meaning changes from one historical period to another” (Bressler 2011, p. 78). Jauss is not saying that the historical events have changed, but he is arguing that the way readers interpret these events can change. An example of Jauss’s theory in light of Holocaust literature would be that, when Holocaust literature was first published, it might have been used solely for teaching historical events. In current day classrooms, teachers might choose to use this genre of literature to teach students about the events of the Holocaust, but also reach further to teach and give students a perspective on social injustice and antisemitism. While the events have not changed, doors are open for students to learn more about a given topic so they can explore it in relation to present-day concerns with which they themselves are dealing. One obstacle that adolescents are dealing with is the formation of identity and trying on different aspects of who they want to be (McLean, 2005, p.

683). Due to the fact that identity formation plays such a large role in the lives of adolescents, this is the theme that will be analyzed in Nolan and Wiesel's works in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Identity Analysis in Nolan and Wiesel's Literature

In the previous chapter, I discussed Reader-Response Criticism and how the incorporation of this theory is relevant and helpful for students in secondary English classrooms. This chapter will go more in-depth and discuss how this theory can be applied to two works of Holocaust literature. For both works, I will be analyzing the theme of identity development through the adolescent characters in each of the chosen texts. In each text, the author makes the rhetorical move to explore identity through the use of semiotics. In *If I Should Die Before I Wake*, Nolan expresses adolescent identity through the violin. In Wiesel's *Night* identity is expressed through a religious book, the Torah.

If I Should Die Before I Wake

If I Should Die Before I Wake tells the story of a teenage girl Hilary Burke. The protagonist is a 16-year-old who is not happy with her past and has feelings of angst and anger. When she was a child, her mother was absent and her father died. Hilary blamed her father's death on his Jewish boss and her hatred for this group of people grew stronger from this point. To combat her anger for the Jewish people, Hilary joins a group of Neo-Nazis until she finds herself in a Jewish hospital because of a motorcycle accident that was caused by her boyfriend Brad, a fellow Neo-Nazi. In the hospital, Hilary begins to have memories of the Holocaust and the people around her begin calling her Chana. However, she never actually lived the life of Chana. Hilary is now Chana, a young Jewish girl. During the Holocaust, Chana and her family are forced to leave their home and they are sent to the Lodz Ghetto and eventually to Auschwitz, where they struggle for their lives. This young adult novel juxtaposes two differing perspectives:

that of a young Neo-Nazi activist and a young Jewish girl living through the horrors of the Holocaust.

At the beginning of the book, Hilary struggles to define who she is based on her own terms. She relies heavily on her boyfriend Brad to create a sense of identity for her through the beliefs he has and the people that he surrounds himself with. Hilary finds her identity so strongly in Brad that she appears to lack individuality and the need to be self-aware. She admits to herself, "I don't care about him [Simon, her Jewish neighbor] or anyone except Brad. Brad, now he knows me inside and out. He's the only one" (Nolan, 1994, p. 5). This glimpse into Hilary's mind portrays that she does not have a sense of who she is and that her boyfriend is the only person who knows and understands every fiber of her being. She outwardly admits to the reader that she does not know herself apart from Brad. However, earlier in the text, Nolan gives Hilary the chance to define herself in her own thoughts and voice, "You want to know who I am? I'm the worst possible thing that could happen to someone like you" (1994, p. 2). When Hilary does attempt to convey her own identity, it comes out as a threat to those around her. Instead of telling the reader about who she believes she is, she chooses to hide her real identity behind a façade that has been created for her by Brad. Researcher in Adolescent Development, W. Andrew Collins, reports that, "Whether or not adolescent romantic relationships play a distinctive role in identity formation during adolescence is not known, although considerable speculation and some theoretical contentions imply a link" (2003, p. 5). This implied link is what may cause some adolescent readers to identify with Hilary. Due to Hilary's tendency to find her worth and identity in her boyfriend, she might be a character that adolescent females particularly identify with.

The essence of not knowing her personal identity paves a way for Nolan to develop Hilary's identity in the remaining pages of the text. Nolan does this by writing Hilary to embody Chana and take on her identity as a teenage Jewish girl. While this does not directly change who Hilary is and how she identifies herself instantly, this embodiment begins a life change in Nolan's protagonist and helps her begin the search for her own personal identity. It is only through Chana's experiences that Hilary is able to see that she truly matters in the world and that she can make a difference. In order to understand Hilary's identity development, it is essential to look at the main source of identity for Chana. The most significant tie to Chana's identity is her love of music, her ability to play the violin, and the reasons she is tied to this musical instrument.

Chana first talks about the violin by saying, "While I played, I could imagine us together again. He [Chana's father] would be at the piano, his long fingers stretching like wings across the keys, and I would stand beside him with my violin. Together we would play music from our favorite composers: Bach and Mozart" (Nolan, 1994, p. 39). Chana finds a sense of purpose in playing the violin and she sees it as something that gives her an identity after her father's death. Not only does this object play a big role in forming Chana's identity, but the violin is also an object that ties her to her father even after he is gone. Typically, fathers are thought to be comforting in difficult times and the person who will make everything right in the world. Now that Chana's strong comforter has passed, she clings to the object that reminds her of him in search for a peace that she cannot understand. Chana's identity in music and her need to cling to the violin for protection is a theme written throughout the remainder of the text and plays a major role in her ability to fight for her life.

After understanding what her family's deportation to a ghetto means, Chana cannot focus on her studies because she is so concerned with where her next meal will come from, if one will

come at all. Despite her inability to focus on school, Chana finds the strength she needs to escape to Krawiecka Street and visit the House of Culture. The House of Culture gives Chana a glimpse of something that once meant so much to her, and in the moments of her time spent there, she is able to feel alive again. All of her other worries seem to wash away. Chana explains her visits to the House of Culture by saying:

Once there, I waited, sometimes hours, but it was always worth it. From my perch on the ceiling I could hear the violins, the cellos, the basses, and the violas playing Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*. I could pretend I, too, was there rehearsing and performing for Mr.

Theodore Ryder, the conductor. I could dream about the days before the war, before the ghetto... (Nolan, 1994, p. 102).

Chana's visits to the House of Culture provide an avenue through which she could remember a better time in her life, a time that was free of imprisonment and constant worry. Even though she is not immersed in the music and playing it herself, the act of being around music is freeing for Chana. Sitting on the ceiling gives her an outside perspective on what is going on because she is not directly engaging with the music, conductor, or the other musicians. However, the limited outside perspective that she has still allows her to feel known and launches her into memories of a happier time. Unfortunately, these visits to Krawiecka Street do not last much longer as Chana and her grandmother, Bubbe, are moved yet again to live with a family who has offered to hide them from the Nazi soldiers.

After another move and some time spent with a caring family, Chana and Bubbe, with the help of Chana's brother Jakub, decide that they must leave their place of hiding to look for Chana's mother and sister. Part of this journey requires both Bubbe and Chana to change their names so they will not be identified as Jewish. Before leaving, Chana must decide which

belongings she will take with her for their trip. Chana reveals, “All I brought was my violin. It wasn’t practical, as Jakub had pointed out to me several times, but it was all I wanted” (Nolan, 1994, p. 159). Chana does not want to take food, a change of clothing, or pictures of her family. As she tells the reader, the only physical object she wanted was her violin. For Chana, however, the violin and its power to create is life-giving. As an object that makes her feel secure because it relates to her father, this makes sense. Not only is Chana grasping at her identity, but she is also reaching for the only object that can make her feel safe. At this point in the story, the reader can observe that Chana still has some control over the more significant part of her identity. However, Chana’s violin and possession of her identity and security are quickly taken from her after their journey takes a turn for the worse and she and Bubbe find themselves in the hands of the SS soldiers due to an act of betrayal by one of Chana’s former schoolmates.

Upon being taken from the train toward their destination, Chana loses everything she owns including her clothes, coat, and violin. Despite the fact that she and her grandmother are in trouble with the “authorities,” she worries only about her violin and her ability to get it back. Chana thinks, “My violin! Would I ever see it again? Would I ever play it again?” (Nolan, 1994, p. 163). In moments where it would be understandable for Chana to fear for her life due to the circumstances that she is in, like the one quoted above, her thoughts wander to her violin, to her only source of identity and protection now that her family has been separated from her. Since Chana is so young and the thoughts of her own death and the death of her beloved family and friends are simply too much to process, Chana looks to the violin for reassurance and protection. The violin serves as a safe place for Chana and an escape that she so desperately is trying to get back. The violin is also the first item she looks for when being transported from one room to the next with the guards. Nolan (1994) writes from Chana’s perspective, “I followed the wardress

down to the end of the hall, up a short set of stairs and into a large room. The first thing I saw upon entering the room was my violin case” (p. 163). Chana grabs for the violin and this clues the guards into Chana’s love and need for it. Her innocent gesture toward getting her violin opens the door for the guards to use it as a tool to get Chana to talk and tell the truth about her name. One of German soldiers asked:

‘You want your violin?’ he asked me in German. ‘*Jawohl*,’ I replied. Of course I did.

‘Good we can arrange that for you. If you tell us your name and where you got these papers’ [...] ‘then you will get your violin back and everyone will be happy (Nolan, 1994, p. 164).

The German soldiers turn Chana’s only source of identity into collateral for her freedom. In order to get back the only object that she knows to be familiar to her identity, she is forced to lie to the guards. This incident and loss of identity for Chana causes a downward spiral that forces Chana to question why she is even alive and what contributions she is making to the world.

Just after Chana’s seventeenth birthday, she has an identity crisis of sorts after imagining where her mother was in her life at the same age. Nolan (1994) writes from Chana’s perspective:

‘And where am I, at seventeen?’ I asked the fat bowl I was scrubbing one day. ‘I’m in prison, that’s where. My life, my dreams, are nothing now. I have spent my years starving, wasting my mind, wasting my talents. I will never be a famous violinist. Think of all I have missed’ (p. 177).

Now that her identity has been stripped from her, she can no longer cope with the atrocities around her in any way. The small ways in which Chana could squeeze bits of her identity out of before have been completely taken from her and she does not see that she has any value left. The absence of the violin and its tragic loss force Chana to face death head on. The quotation above

shows Chana cannot imagine a life after the Holocaust because she no longer believes that she is protected by the violin and the representation of her father's strong presence. For Chana, the only way to find herself again is to find her violin and rekindle her love and passion for music so she will feel protected and empowered again. After being moved around Auschwitz and seeing people she has come to love be killed, Chana is moved one last time. The last move that Chana makes before being liberated from the camp is to live in the block that houses the orchestra. When arriving, Chana describes her experience, "Stepping into the music hut was like stepping into a dream where fairy-tale images intertwined with the macabre" (Nolan, 1994, p. 261). Going into a place where music is created and where instruments, musicians, and a conductor are present is life-giving for Chana. When one talks about their dreams and fairy-tales coming true, they are referencing something that is a one in a million chance. Being moved to the orchestra block is Chana's one in a million shot. She now has the opportunity to regain her identity within music and violin playing even in the darkest place that she has ever been. Here, Nolan is arguing that a strong sense of identity can conquer any obstacle that is presented. This is evident through Chana's recovery of identity and gumption to fight for her life once she has been moved to the orchestra block.

After arriving though, she finds herself playing the violin for the soldiers even though she has an extreme hatred for them. She knows that this is the only way to keep herself alive and feel the protection from her beloved violin. After being in this block for a short period of time, Chana is asked to play for one of the guards in particular, Taube. She refuses at first, but then agrees so she can keep her life. Taube, a German guard, forces Chana to play by pressing a rifle to the back of her skull. In this moment, Chana finds herself asking God to be with her, "I closed my eyes and I played my violin. I played Bach's "Chaconne," and when I was through everyone

stood up and applauded. They rushed toward me and formed a line; they all wanted to shake my hand” (Nolan, 1994, p. 274). Chana mustered up the strength to save her own life through the one and only object from her past that could save her—her identity through the violin.

Interestingly, the line of people waiting to shake Chana’s hand at the end of her performance are all those that had gone before her, mainly her loved ones. The act of playing for the guards, a supreme act of courage, represents Chana’s choice to have life and love over death. In this decision to play, Chana honors the line of loved ones before her with her playing. As Chana is shaking hands with those who have gone before her, the reader is spiraled back to Hilary in the Jewish hospital. As one character, Chana, is on the brink of death, another character, Hilary, is finding new life.

As Hilary is spiraling back into consciousness, Chana reveals to her one last important message. Chana tells Hilary that she has the power to change the world based on the knowledge she has now and the change of heart that she has had because of those experiences. Through seeing Chana’s fight for life, Hilary is able to have life, a new life in which she learns to appreciate people who are different from herself. Hilary, once so bitter and full of angst, learns to love. After coming back to the life that she knows and making sense of what happened to her, she thinks, “I pray for courage. I pray that when the time comes for me speak, for me to tell the story, I’ll know what to say” (Nolan, 1994, p. 289). The change in Hilary’s character is distinct, and she now has a sense of identity of her own through Chana’s story. Hilary wants to be able to tell Chana’s story and tell it well. Hilary’s heart of love proves that she has found a place in the world in which she is living and that she has changed and is developing a sense of identity. While Hilary has formed a sense of identity, Nolan does not do it in a way that incorporates notable symbols or objects as is the case for the character of Chana. Instead, Nolan places

Hilary's identity in something that is not tangible. Hilary finds her identity in the ability to tell Chana's story and her chance to make a difference for people who are experiencing grief and heartache.

The change in Hilary that takes shape throughout the novel allows Nolan to argue that one's life experiences shape their identity. Hilary's journey to finding her identity occurs in a unique way that does not happen to adolescents realistically, but her journey shows that seeking identity is a process. Han Nolan uses her position as a writer to be cognizant to what adolescents are facing in terms of identity and then authors stories that can help them make sense of the ever-changing identities that they are forming and trying on for size. In an interview, Han Nolan recognizes the necessity to write toward the adolescent reader experience. The interviewer posed a question as to why she writes characters that often only have one parent present. In response, Nolan states, "Every reader comes to a book with their own history and will respond to the book according to that history. I would want my readers to take away from this exploration whatever they need" (p. 298). Nolan's statement points to the necessity of Reader-Response criticism and allowing students to create meaning of the text from their own personal histories and ever-shaping identities. This same theme of identity can also be analyzed through the lens of Reader-Response Criticism in Elie Wiesel's *Night*.

Night

Night, a memoir written by Elie Wiesel, is narrated by Eliezer who is a teenage Jewish boy at the story's opening. Eliezer's hometown is located in Sighet, Transylvania where he studies the Torah with his Jewish mentor, Moishe the Beadle. Eliezer's instruction under Moishe the Beadle is cut short, however, when he is deported. After some time, Moishe returns to Sighet to tell of the horrific acts the Gestapo are committing, but unfortunately, the other people in the

community do not believe him and write him off as crazy. Shortly after learning about Moishe's experience, in the spring of 1944, Eliezer and the rest of his community are put into small ghettos that were created in their small Transylvanian town. This change does not last long and soon the community, Eliezer and his family included, are sent to Birkenau on cattle cars and endure a horrific journey plagued with starvation and exhaustion. After arriving at Birkenau, Eliezer and his father are separated from the rest of their family: Eliezer's mother and sister. Almost immediately upon arriving, Eliezer and his father are exposed to the atrocities occurring at Birkenau. After passing selection, they are both sent to the main camp of Auschwitz and then eventually end up in Buna, a work camp where Eliezer works in an electrical factory. The conditions in the camp continue to worsen as the prisoners become more malnourished which causes them to turn their backs on the people that they once loved and trusted. Eliezer even begins to question his faith in God and the people around him. Eliezer tells of his family's journey out of Auschwitz and his eventual liberation from Buchenwald. While Eliezer survives, his father does not and is taken from dysentery and the deterioration from abuse. Eliezer is liberated by the Americans in April of 1945. It is important to note that a translated version of *Night* is being used for this analysis and contains quotations from the English translated version of the text.

At the beginning of *Night*, Eliezer is an innocent teenage boy who spends time studying the Kabbalah with his mentor, Moishe. He finds his identity within a religious text; the Jewish Torah which forms the basis of their conversations. The reader learns early on that Eliezer and Moishe speak often about the Kabbalah. Eliezer reveals, "We spoke that way almost every evening, remaining in the synagogue long after all the faithful had gone..." (Wiesel, 1958, p. 5). For Eliezer, the act of studying the Kabbalah and Torah each day was not a religious act for the

sake of making him a more faithful person or to prove to God that he deserved His attention. Instead, it is a way he was working toward forming his identity and understanding his faith in a deeper way. Wiesel writes, “Together we would read, over and over again, the same page of the Zohar. Not to learn it by heart but to discover within the very essence of divinity” (1985, p. 5). Again, Eliezer is not interested in these sacred Jewish texts because he feels obligated to do so. Instead, he is interested because he wishes to discover something more. Eliezer’s drive to study Jewish faith practices and the written word are conveyed through Wiesel’s ability to use strong words and phrases as the author that allows the audience to see how important these beliefs are to Eliezer. However, Wiesel soon changes the tone of his writing when Eliezer is speaking about religious ceremonies, ideals, and objects. He continues to use the power of language to convey the change in Eliezer’s religious beliefs.

When Eliezer and his family are forced to leave their home, he looks back and thinks, “I looked at my house in which I had spent years seeking my God, fasting to hasten the coming of the Messiah, imagining what my life would be like later. Yet I felt sadness” (Wiesel 1985, p. 19). Although Eliezer has not lost his faith in God, he is beginning to question his faith and who God is. Instead of feeling joy when looking back at his time spent seeking God in his home, Eliezer is sad and afraid of what is to come. Wiesel uses this change in Eliezer’s emotion toward his home and the place he spent learning about God to clue the reader into an identity change within Eliezer that is to come later in the text after he and his family have been deported to Auschwitz.

After leaving their home, but before arriving at Auschwitz, Eliezer is portrayed as an innocent teenager as mentioned above. However, his anger begins to grow toward God more and more each day and he is stripped of his innocence due to the atrocities that he sees around him on a daily basis. Being in Auschwitz requires Eliezer to cope with feelings and circumstances that

he has not been asked to cope with before as a young teenager and these situations demand him to have faith in a place that is almost impossible to do so. Sanford Sternlicht, a professor in the English department at Syracuse University writes, “Taken from a sheltering world, the boy is thrust into the night of Nazi powers and values. He has no way to handle the presence of evil. Prayers are of no avail. He does not even have the comfort and guidance of his holy books” (2003, p. 36). Like Chana in *If I Should Die Before I Wake*, Eliezer is struggling to cope with the circumstances around him because they are simply too big to deal with on his own. While Chana cannot have her violin and the protection and comfort it offers her because it is constantly taken away from her, Eliezer struggles to keep his source of identity and protection because he is forced into an environment that has the potential to diminish his faith. Chana and Eliezer are both struggling to hold onto their biggest sources of identity and protection.

Without his biggest source of identity flooding his life, Eliezer feels alone and as if he does not belong. Eliezer reveals to the reader, “In the midst of these men assembled for prayer, I felt like an observer, a stranger” (Wiesel, 1985, p. 68). Not only does Eliezer feel distant from his faith, but now the idea of prayer feels strange. The one belief that allowed Eliezer make sense of life has now become a strange idea to him and a place that he no longer feels safe and known. This parallels Chana’s experience when she feels that she can no longer be defined by her ability to play the violin and cannot see what direction her life will go in because she no longer has her violin. Eliezer’s ability to articulate this argues, like Nolan in *If I Should Die Before I Wake*, that one’s identity changes based on one’s circumstances. Each author is articulating that identity is fluid and can be changed easily. This does not mean that it is easy to go through the circumstances that change identity, but it does mean that events have the power to change identity.

At the end of Wiesel's memoir, the reader is left with some uncertainty about whether Eliezer's faith in God is absolved or relinquished. The final sentences of the book read, "From the depths of the mirror, a corpse was contemplating me. The look in his eyes as he gazed at me has never left me" (Wiesel, 1958, p. 115). Eliezer does not recognize himself when looking in the mirror and instead is haunted by an almost dead version of himself. Instead of leaving the reader with a firm sense of Eliezer's identity, Wiesel leaves the reader questioning how Eliezer resolved the feelings that he had toward God during the time he spent in Auschwitz. However, the above quotation gives the reader a sense that Eliezer cannot know who God is if he does not even recognize himself. This differs from Chana in Nolan's book because Nolan ends the novel with her protagonist holding her protection and identity in her hands. Chana has clearly reclaimed the physical object that represents her identity, but, the reader cannot necessarily conclude this by reading the end of Wiesel's memoir. The ending of Nolan's novel also points to a more positive ending in which one person gets to live a life of knowledge after seeing the horrors of the Holocaust through another's experience. Wiesel's ending, however, does not have the same positive connotation. Instead, the ending of *Night* is written in a manner that is more realistic. The end causes the protagonist to stare death in the face instead of watching life blossom. These two aspects touch upon the differences that exist between a work of fiction and a memoir.

This inconclusive ending points to the need for Reader-Response Criticism in reading the end of the memoir and how that fits into the rest of the story. In order to make sense of the end of *Night*, the reader needs more than the text to interpret how Eliezer's faith transforms or dies away. Reader-Response Criticism would allow the reader to make inferences based on their

experiences with faith or identity and then integrate those experiences into the story to make a prediction about what could happen in Wiesel's subsequent memoirs *Dawn* and *Day*.

The reader can also make a connection between the end of each work of literature in terms of semiotics. Nolan and Wiesel both choose to leave behind this rhetorical strategy to describe their character's identity in the final pages of each book. As discussed earlier, Hilary's newly formed identity is found in something that is not tangible. Her identity is found in something that cannot be touched, but only felt and experienced. The same is true of Wiesel's character Eliezer. Unlike Chana, Eliezer is never able to reclaim the tangible object that defines his identity, his beloved Torah. In this, Eliezer is more like Hilary in the sense that he has to work to find his identity in something that cannot be physically held or felt.

While there are many other themes to explore in both of these texts and multiple other avenues in which to analyze them, Reader-Response Criticism is secondary-education friendly and allows students to analyze and discuss a topic that they are dealing with each and every day. In the following chapter, I present lesson plans that can be used to foster critical thinking and dialogue about identity through the lens of Reader-Response Criticism.

Chapter 5

Application: The Reader Toolbox and Lessons

This section will include lesson plans that correspond to the research and analyses above. Only the lesson plans that pull out the themes of identity and analyze the works through Reader-Response Criticism are included in this paper. It is important to note that other lessons can be added to this unit to enhance student understanding of the events of the Holocaust and the basis of the texts. The lessons presented below have been written based on general Common Core Standards for 9th and 10th grade students and each lesson provides a few standards that serve as the justification for the lesson. When a worksheet or extra prompts are required, the information is presented and included following the written lesson plan. For the purposes of this thesis, I will present a fictional classroom in which the lesson plans are written so the questions asked in the lessons are more meaningful and directed toward a specific audience. The classroom presented below is fictitious and does not represent the population that needs to be present for the lessons to flow smoothly.

The class that will be participating in these lessons is a 10th grade English/Language Arts class that takes place in a rural school district. There are twenty-three students in this classroom total. Making up the twenty-three students are six New American students (two from Nepal, three from Syria, and one from Iraq), three African American students, and the remaining fourteen Caucasian students. Besides the New American students, the surrounding area has deep generational roots with the majority of students in the class being the third or fourth generation to pass through the school district. The socio-economic status of the surrounding area is middle to lower class in which most students live on family farms. In terms of technology within the school, there are limited resources available in the classroom directly. The teacher has a

computer that connects to a SmartBoard for classroom use and there are six laptops and three iPads that can be utilized by students when necessary. However, if the whole classroom is to use technology, the teacher must reserve the computer center down the hall. Being in 10th grade, these students have some background knowledge on the Holocaust. This group of 10th graders touched upon the topic in their World History course during 9th grade, but they have never read literature about the Holocaust. This classroom will be the basis in which the following lessons are written. As mentioned in chapter 3, identity formation plays a large part in adolescent development. These students, being in 10th grade, will be experiencing identity formation and trying on different versions of who they wish to be. Before providing the lesson plans for the unit, I would like to briefly touch upon why critically analyzing themes that are relevant to the adolescent experience are so crucial to their literary experience in the secondary classroom.

For students to break literature apart and understand it in the context of what they are dealing with in their own lives, they must be motivated by experiences in the literature that are relevant to their own. Joan Knickbocker and James Rycik argue, “Motivation for reading literature depends on continual experiences in which students see that literature is relevant to their lives and that they can use their own skills, strategies, and experiences to construct a valid interpretation” (2002, p. 200). These skills, strategies, and experiences that are referenced in the research above can be fostered through the practice of Reader-Response Criticism. Since this theory gives students the opportunity to make meaning from the text based on their own experiences and point of view, it also forces students, by its very nature, to create a toolbox of skills from which they can draw on to interpret the text. Knickbocker and Rycik emphasize that these are the skills, strategies, and experiences that belong to the student and not the educator. Under this model, the educator can provide the content, but it is up to students to make sense of

the literature in a way that is unique to their own experiences. The toolbox that students create based on this experience will aid in their ability to read and interpret literature as they continue to take English courses.

The hope of implementing these strategies is that students will be able to see more clearly why studying literature is important to them and that they can relate to the works that they are assigned to read in one way or another. However, it is suggested that students will need instruction that uses a scaffolding approach if they are to effectively create a toolbox on their own that they can use when analyzing literature in future classes. One way that a scaffolded approach to instruction can be implemented is by providing students with two works of literature that expose and discuss the same topic. The young adult novel serves as a good starting point for supporting students as they grow in their literary understanding. This creates a springboard for educators to then move into a more complex text on the same topic (Knickerbocker & Rycik, 2002, p. 201). In this research, the young adult novel that the lessons begin with is *If I Should Die Before I Wake* and the more complex text is *Night*. Knickerbocker and Rycik claim that these books pair well together because, “Not only does this young adult novel [*If I Should Die Before I Wake*] develop a context for trying to understand life in the ghetto, Auschwitz, and other horrific occurrences but it also connects today’s adolescents to these events in startling ways” (2002, p.202).

Using Reader-Response Criticism and providing the scaffolding method for instruction during this unit will establish an environment where students can express their own opinions, learn from the opinions of others, and learn how to interpret more complex works of literature through their own experiences and opinions. This theory makes sense for emerging readers because it gives the text the ability to meet readers where they are in terms of their ability to

analyze literature and then grow from that point, teaching them that reading is an active process and not a passive one. What was once in black and white for students is now in vivid color.

With limited time in schools today, educators might be tempted to use only one of these works for teaching Holocaust literature. However, one is simply not enough. Stover argues, “One piece of literature or one chapter in American History cannot counter the negative social perceptions that children of minority subcultures have of themselves of that society has of them” (2000, p. 103). To push against the grain and have an impact on how students view minority cultures, it is imperative to teach these literary works in conjunction with one another.

The following lessons aim to explore ways in which adolescent readers can engage with Reader-Response Criticism and pull out the theme of identity within the two chosen works of Holocaust literature and create a toolbox for reading that will enhance their future literary studies.

I. Lesson Title: Discuss Deeply, Think Critically

Lesson Standards: [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2](#) Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6](#) Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

Goal: Students will be able to critically analyze a section of literature that deals with the theme of identity.

Objective: Students will investigate the theme of identity in Han Nolan's *If I Should Die Before I Wake* and Elie Wiesel's *Night* during an in-class discussion when given a passage from each text by the teacher.

Materials: Students will be required to have Nolan's novel and Wiesel's memoir. The teacher will provide the passages for in-class discussion. Possible passages for analysis can be found at the end of this lesson plan in Table 5.1.

Students already know: Students already know that themes exist within literature and that can these themes can be applied to their own lives.

Students will learn: Students will learn to read critically, analyzing the authors' word choices and other rhetorical strategies within the text that contribute to the theme.

Students will learn this by: Students will learn this by engaging in an in-class discussion about two particular passages about identity in *If I Should Die Before I Wake* and *Night*.

I will check for understanding by: I will check for understanding by assigning students to critically analyze a passage of their choice that deals with the theme of identity. This passage of

choice will be in addition to the ones assigned by the teacher. Students will be able to quote the passage and analyze the author's rhetorical moves that contribute to the text.

Lesson Resource 5.1: Passages for Analyzing Identity in *If I Should Die Before I Wake* and *Night*

If I Should Die Before I Wake:

1. "While I played, I could imagine us together again. He would be at the piano, his long fingers stretching like wings across the keys, and I would stand beside him with my violin. Together we would play music from our favorite composers: Bach and Mozart" (Nolan, 1994, p. 39).
2. "Once there, I waited, sometimes hours, but it was always worth it. From my perch on the ceiling I could hear the violins, the cellos, the basses, and the violas playing Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*. I could pretend I, too, was there rehearsing and performing for Mr. Theodore Ryder, the conductor. I could dream about the days before the war, before the ghetto..." (Nolan, 1994, p. 102).
3. "'And where am I, at seventeen?' I asked the fat bowl I was scrubbing one day. 'I'm in prison, that's where. My life, my dreams, are nothing now. I have spent my years starving, wasting my mind, wasting my talents. I will never be a famous violinist. Think of all I have missed'" (Nolan, 1994, p. 177).

Night:

1. "We spoke that way almost every evening, remaining in the synagogue long after all the faithful had gone..." (Wiesel, 1958, p. 5).
2. "I looked at my house in which I had spent years seeking my God, fasting to hasten the coming of the Messiah, imagining what my life would be like later. Yet I felt sadness" (Wiesel 1985, p. 19).
3. "From the depths of the mirror, a corpse was contemplating me. The look in his eyes as he gazed at me has never left me" (Wiesel, 1958, p. 115).

II. Lesson Title: Journal Your Thoughts

Standards:

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4](#) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9](#) Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.10](#) Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Goal: Students will be able to reflect on what they have read and implement Reader-Response Criticism by formulating a written response in their personal academic journals and then engaging in a peer-share.

Objective: After completing the journal entries for this entire unit, students will present one of their journal entries to the entire class and the teacher. In these presentations, students will be asked to articulate what they have learned about themselves and the subject matter through their journal writings.

Materials: The teacher will provide a journal prompt for the students. Example journal prompts for *If I Should Die Before I Wake* and *Night* are provided on the next page in Tables 5.2 and 5.3. Students will also need the text that corresponds with the assigned journal prompt. These readings vary based on the pages assigned to the class, which is at the teacher's discretion.

Students already know: Students already know that they can become good readers through multiple avenues. One avenue is to dig deeper and create meaning of the text through their personal experiences.

Students will learn: Students will learn how to formulate the meaning of the text through their experiences in written and verbal forms of communication.

Students will learn this by: Students will learn this by writing concise answers to journal prompts and engaging in conversation with same-aged peers during class time.

I will check for understanding by: I will check for understanding by reading through student responses to the given journal prompt and looking for students to engage with the text in response to their own lived experiences. I will also listen to conversations in the classroom.

Lesson Resource 5.2: Example Journal Prompts for Han Nolan's *If I Should Die Before I Wake*

After reading chapter 4:

- In chapter 4, Zayde says to Jakub, “You will see, evil always destroys itself” (Nolan, 1994, p.36). What does this statement mean to you? How have you seen this in your own life?

After reading chapter 19:

- In this chapter, Bubbe says, “Chana, what I give these people, what I try to give you, isn’t enough, can never be enough. So many of them die. No matter what I do, they still die. I cannot give them, or you, the will to live, and without that, there is not even a hope of surviving here” (Nolan, 1994, p. 211). What does this passage say about Bubbe’s identity and personality? Has anyone in your life been like Bubbe?

After reading the entire text:

- Which character’s identity changes the most? Where did they find their identity at the beginning the book? At the end? How do you relate or differ from this character? Use passages from the novel to justify your answer.

Lesson Resource 5.3: Example Journal Prompts for Elie Wiesel's *Night*

After reading the first three sections:

- If you were forced to leave home, what type of emotions would you face? What would you take with you and what would you miss most? Relate this to how Eliezer reacts to leaving by using quotations from the text.
- How has your home or your family’s beliefs shaped your identity? What makes you feel most known and protected? What makes Eliezer feel most loved and protected? Use at least one quotation from the text to support your response.

After reading the entire text:

- Do you ever feel like you need to hide your identity? If so, what circumstances make you feel this way and which parts of your identity are you most likely to hide? In *Night* which areas of Eliezer’s identity are repressed or hidden?

III. Lesson Title: Shaping Identity

Lesson Standards:

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2](#) Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6](#) Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

Goal: Students will develop an understanding of the theme of identity through analyzing their own identities in reference to the texts being read in class.

Objective: Using *If I Should Die Before I Wake*, students will create a puzzle diagram that links their experiences as adolescents to one of the characters in the novel.

Materials: Teachers are to provide puzzle pieces for students to use to begin their collage and a worksheet for reflection that is provided following this lesson for students to complete. Figure 5.1 is a template that can be used for the puzzle pieces and Figure 5.2 is an example of what the completed project would resemble. The students will also need Nolan's novel *If I Should Die Before I Wake*.

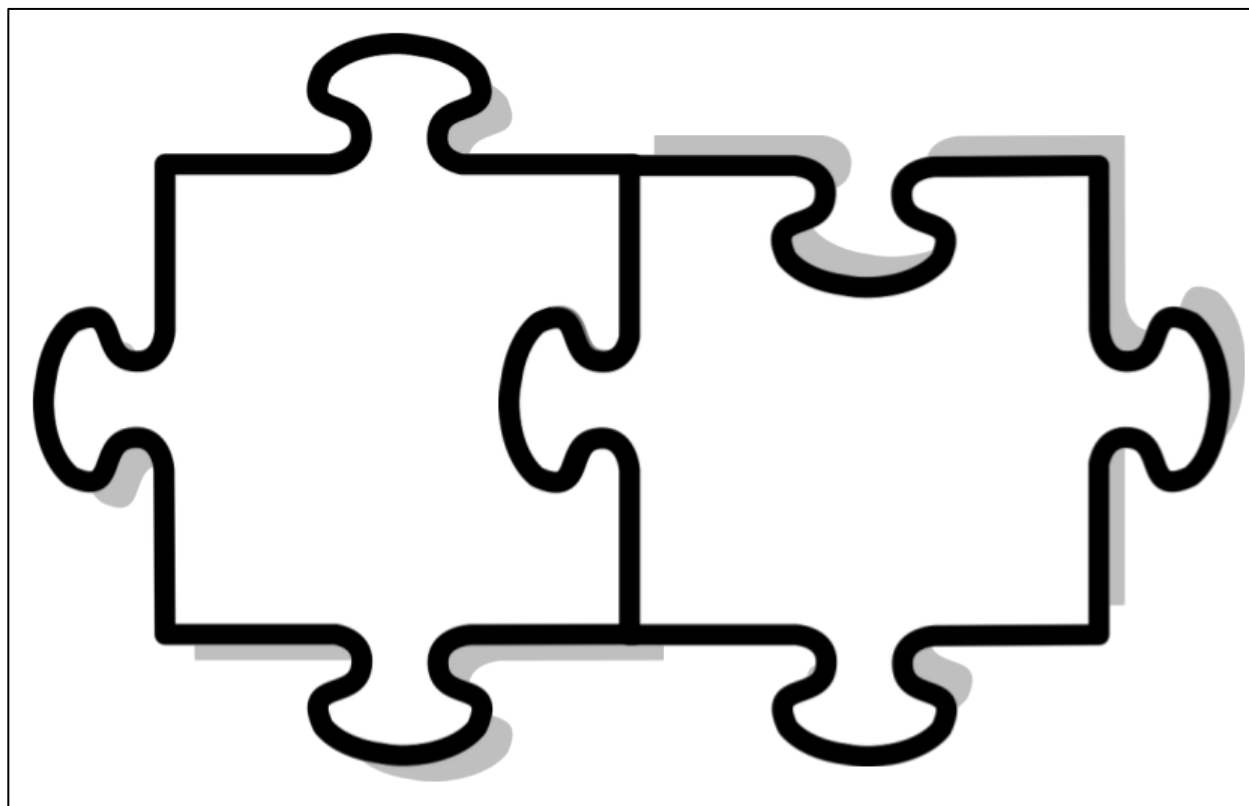
Students already know: Students already know that there are themes present in the literary texts and that these themes are deliberately incorporated by the author.

Students will learn: Students will learn that they can connect to the characters and themes in the books that they read in class.

Students will learn this by: Students will learn this by creating a web of their own life experiences that they feel shape their identity and then connecting those aspects to a character of their choice in Nolan's *If I Should Die Before I Wake*.

I will check for understanding by: I will check for understanding by requiring that students include page numbers in their analysis of character identity and asking students to complete reflection questions pertaining to the assignment. A rubric will be used to assess the completed project.

Lesson Resource 5.4: Example Puzzle Pieces for Project



Lesson Resource 5.5: Example Completed Puzzle Piece Organizer



Handout 5.1

Shaping Identity Puzzles: Reflection

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Directions: Now that you have completed the puzzle piece collage discussing your identity and the identity of one of Nolan's characters, you will reflect on this project using the following questions.

1. What was it like to define your own identity? How has this project helped you put your identity into words?

2. Why did you choose the character that you did? Do you see ways in which your chosen character's identity relates to your own? Explain.

3. For this project, we used puzzle pieces as a way to organize our identity in relation to a character's identity. What type of symbolism does this evoke? How does this help you understand your life through the lens of the characters and themes in the stories that we read?

IV. Lesson Title: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: Connecting the Past to the Present
through Literature and Current Events

Lesson Standards:

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6](#) Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1](#) Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Goal: Students will connect what they are reading in the provided texts on the historical topic of the Holocaust with current global events and draw parallels between the two, describing how the current event is similar to and different from what they have read and learned about the Holocaust.

Objective: Using three to four excerpts from both *If I Should Die Before I Wake* and *Night*, students will relate the theme of identity in the works of literature to a current day topic that is presented in any reputable form of news media (i.e. on television, in the newspaper, or in an online format).

Materials: The teacher will provide the assignment sheet which can be found directly after this written lesson. The assignment sheet is to be used as an organizational tool for students as they are finding information. The students will be responsible for having the two books and finding one outside source to discuss their current event.

Students already know: Students already know background information on the Holocaust and facts about the historical event. They also know stories of those who endured the Holocaust.

Students will learn: Students will learn that history is not a separate entity from the world's present.

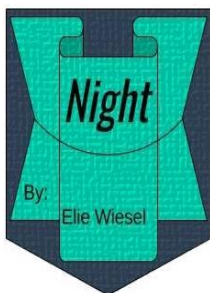
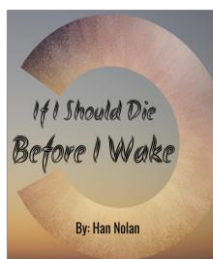
Students will learn this by: Students will learn this by using the two texts to draw parallels between the books read in class and the current event, incorporating quotations from the books and the current event description.

I will check for understanding by: I will check for student understanding by looking for students to use two to three quotations from the books that they have read in class. The students will be able to connect the quotations from the books and draw parallels from these quotations to the current event that they have chosen. Students will present their findings and conclusions through a short written essay that is 2-3 pages in length. A rubric will be used to assess the completed project.

Handout 5.2

Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: Linking the Past to the Present

Directions: After we finish reading *If I Should Die Before I Wake* and *Night*, you will be required to find a current event that allows you to draw parallels and make connections between the texts read in class and the current event. To stay on track and to be organized, use this worksheet to note any important quotes that you might want to use in your essay. You will be required to use at least two or three quotations from each book.



Chapter 6

Conclusion and Areas for Future Study

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the ways in which students in secondary English classrooms can critically read themes within a text that are relevant to their personal lives and then incorporate their own experiences into the texts that they are reading to create a richer and deeper understanding of the text. The research ties together Reader-Response Criticism, adolescent development, Holocaust literature, and identity formation in adolescent readers and the characters who are present in the books being read. From this project, I have learned the importance of looking beyond the surface for themes that are relevant to my future students, keeping in mind the critical part of life they are navigating through. I have also learned that stories of all kinds are a necessity for young and emerging readers as they develop their identity toolbox as well as their toolbox for reading critically.

Beyond the scope of this work, there are other possible elements that may be explored in future studies. As I continue in the world of academia, I want to keep the following questions at the forefront of my research:

1. *How would these lessons, or a unit on the Holocaust, affect students who have intellectual, physical, or emotional disabilities?* The sample classroom provided in Chapter 5 included minority students but failed to incorporate students with disabilities or differing ability levels. In further research, I want to examine how discussions on the theme of identity within oppressed populations resonate differently or similarly with students who have differing ability level in contrast to their non-disabled peers. It has been suggested that the Caldecott Award-Winning picture book, *Peppe the Lamplighter*,

would be a quality choice to use with this group of students because it parallels some of the aspects presented in the two books in a way that is more accessible.

2. *Can another theory, in conjunction with Reader-Response Criticism, be used effectively with these two texts?* Specifically, I would like to research how Feminist Theory could be applied to both of these works in juxtaposition with one another. Since Nolan's novel features a female protagonist and Wiesel's features a male protagonist, I am interested in how this character difference resonates with students and alters their reading.
3. *Does the genre of literature used to discuss the Holocaust affect how students view the events that took place and the people that were involved? Can a different genre, namely the graphic novel or poetry, be effective in teaching adolescent students about oppressive situations?*

While the above writing looks at two works of Holocaust literature, they are both written in the absence of graphics and in the style of prose. I am interested in how students would understand and interpret this unit differently if a graphic novel or poetry selections were incorporated.

While I cannot delve deeper into these specific topics in this thesis, I can say that it is imperative for adolescent readers to discuss and analyze themes in literature that are pertinent to the developmental period that they are navigating. I hope to explore this topic further and use these lesson plans in a classroom to help students begin the process of creating a reading toolbox that will launch them into a love for reading and analyzing literature.

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Minor in Psychological Science

May 2017

Teaching Experience:

Early Field Placement: Fort LeBoeuf High School

Spring 2015

- Completed 65 hours of time in the classroom
- Provided one-on-one aid for 20-25 students on writing assignments and research in an 11th grade English classroom
- Assisted mentor teacher with daily classroom activities
- Facilitated group work and classroom discussions

Presentations/Projects:

Shakespeare Group Performance Project

Fall 2016

- Paraphrased a scene from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and used a scholarly article to interpret this scene
- Performed an original rendition of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, memorizing the lines for our chosen scene

The 9th Annual Penn State Behrend Gender Conference

Spring 2016

- Presented concepts surrounding women in literature during a round-table discussion with seven other classmates from a 400-level Comparative Literature course
- Collaborated with classmates to create a sound presentation for other colleagues, faculty, and visiting scholars

"Like a Girl"

Fall 2014

- Researched the stigma and phrase "Like a Girl" as discussed in the *Proctor & Gamble Company's, Always* advertisement which perpetuates young females
- Discussed the meaning of this phrase and provided a related activity for 15-20 middle school females at Rice Avenue Middle School

- Gained experience in working with faculty from the Math Education Department

Volunteer Experience:

New Wilmington Mission Conference Junior High Counselor

Summer 2014-2016

- Managed groups of middle school students ranging from 11-71 students
- Learned to communicate with students on personal topics while maintaining a professional and unbiased persona
- Helped program coordinators with large group activities

Barber National Institute Expanding Social Opportunities Dance

April 2015-2016

- Volunteered with The Barber National Institute to provide recreational events to those with special needs
- Became more comfortable working with adults who have special needs
- Grew in communicating with those who are from minority and repressed populations

Recognitions and Awards:

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|--|------------------------------|
| • Dean's List 8 out of 8 semesters | Fall 2013-Spring 2017 |
| • Recipient of the Kochel Leadership Scholarship | Fall 2016-Spring 2017 |
| • Recipient of the Behrend Excellence Award | Fall 2016-Spring 2017 |
| • Penn State Behrend Honors Program | Fall 2014-Spring 2015 |

University Organizations:

- Penn State Behrend Cru, **Vice President and Women's Ministry Leader**
- Phi Kappa Phi National Honors Society, **Member**
- Gamma Sigma Sigma National Service Sorority, **Alumni**