

A black and white photograph showing a view of a rocky coastline and the ocean through a dark, irregular opening, likely a cave or a narrow passage in a rock formation. The opening is framed by dark, silhouetted rock walls. The ocean is visible in the foreground and middle ground, with white foam from breaking waves. In the background, a line of dark, rocky land is visible under a bright, overexposed sky. The word "Organization" is superimposed in a serif font across the lower portion of the image.

# Organization

## Teacher Talk

*I teach Literary Arts (creative writing) to one group of high school juniors in a full-year, seminar-format course, for about 2 1/2 hours a day, five days a week. My teaching partner, John Colburn, then works with the same group on the same schedule when they are seniors. We have the good fortune to be able to provide such intensive writing instruction because we teach at the Arts High School, within the Perpich Center for Arts Education. Our high school, a state agency, is a selective, competitive public school providing innovative education centered in the arts for students from all over the state of Minnesota. Our school days are equally divided between academics and the arts, allowing students to dedicate a large portion of their junior and senior years to their "arts areas." Literary Arts juniors dedicate themselves to valuing and writing their own stories and to developing a writing community wherein they share and work on those stories cooperatively.*

*After six years of teaching autobiographical/memoir writing to sixteen and seventeen-year-olds, I began to yearn for writing from them with a larger purpose. While I still believe in and spend much time on encouraging my students to discover their own voices, I also have added a major project that helps them hear the voices of others. I call it my Research-based, Character-driven short story unit, and, in preparation for a story due in May, my students choose their research topics in early fall.*

*Last year, the year that Marie LeVoir's story was written, the overall topic was simply "War." Each student was required to choose a region of the world that is or has in modern times, been involved in an armed conflict. Alongside the work of completing day to day writing assignments that invoke the sharing of personal memories, etc., students also begin to look into the history, culture, and people of another part of the world. By January, after handing in four "research summaries" detailing their discoveries, students are to have located at least one actual person in a newspaper article or book who has captured their interest. This person or persons become the base for character(s) they will soon create.*

*In January we begin the task of creating a group of characters for this "character-driven" project. I ask students to come up with real people in (or near) their lives who evoke emotion when they begin a long, involved set of "backstory" assignments. ("Describe someone you have hurt" or "Describe someone you don't understand.") Once they have chosen people who fit these categories, they then "ask" their people a multitude of questions ("What is a book you've read more than once?"). The questions are so detailed that the "answers" inevitably become "guesses," or, as is the goal, "fiction." Step by step these real people are converted into fictional characters who can be "anonymously" used in a story, but who retain the emotional qualities that made them good subjects. The person from another country found in the student's research is backstoried too, a process that only works if the student has "done their research."*

*After gathering a group of 12-15 characters, I give my students several "jumping-off" exercises designed to provoke action between characters. They are simple prompts ("Pick your researched character and two other characters. After you've chosen them, put them in a room together. Write what happens."), and it may take a while for the action to build, but eventually it almost always does. Over the course of three months and many group critique sessions, students produce a series of five drafts that I respond to, resulting ultimately in the final copy suitable, hopefully, for submission.*

*I hope you enjoy reading Marie LeVoir's research-based, character-driven story. As you will discover, she has managed successfully to step well out of her own story and convincingly into that of another young woman's.*

Shannon Hannigan  
Perpich Center for Arts Education

## Midnight Oil

Marie LeVoir, Perpich Center for Arts Education, grade 11

### PROLOGUE

China was a country undergoing change in 1988 and 1989. In February '89 things reached a bursting point when Comrade Hu Yaobang died. He had advocated change and was considered too great a threat to Communism, so he had lost his government position the year before. Students had been annoyed by this at the time, but were too afraid to speak out. When he died and was given a second-rate funeral the students took to the streets to protest. Millions of students all over China demonstrated in favor of Comrade Yaobang's reforms (an end to corruption, a freer market and more openness to Western ideas) which had started to take hold. The Communist Party declared the students' protests illegal and told them to go back to class. This only provoked the students more and those from Beijing staged a sit-in in Tiananmen Square, a traditional gathering place for revolutionaries within sight of the Party officials' living quarters. Things erupted after Premier Gorbachov came to visit and couldn't be given the grand tour due to student protesters in mid-May. Party Chairman Deng Xiaoping wrote an editorial denouncing the students which was published all around China. Within two weeks the sit-in was over. June 4, 1989 will live forever as a red stain on China's great history. This story is written in honor of all the daughters of the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Mother? Have you ever seen anyone die?" Amy asks me. My six-year-old daughter, more like her American father than Chinese, demands the answer I can't bear to give. Her favorite stories are of mermaids (She loved the Disney movie.) so I saw no harm in reading her the original. In the traditional tale, Ariel turns to sea foam at the end. Ariel's prince imagines her part of the sunset. Had I known it would spawn such questions, I would have stuck to politically correct Sesame Street stories like "Elmo Goes to the Dentist" or "Ernie Makes a Friend."

"Hush little one. It's time to go to sleep," I whisper to her. It's long past her bedtime, and after a third story it's past mine too. When I was a girl in China, I

never would have gotten a bedtime story. A third daughter like me wasn't worth the attention. Amy looks at me quizzically, as if I was a puzzle for her to figure out. Then she smiles and kisses me goodnight.

I climb into bed beside my husband. This is still a novel thing for me after almost ten years—to be safe in my American home dozing next to my American husband, my little girl asleep at last in the room next door. I sneak into her room for one last glance and brush the black hair out of her face. She looks so innocent with her little girl haircut, bobbed just beneath her chin. She will never recite the quotes of Chairman Mao, never fear to speak her mind. She will never see the horrors I have seen.

I drift in and out of a restless sleep, and immediately I dream. Again and again I dream of that night so long ago. The visions of that night are still fresh and raw in my memory, the dreams so vivid they startle me awake. There has not been a night since then that I have not gone back to China.

I was a Chinese student at Beijing Normal University majoring in English. My goal was to become a journalist. We were on strike in protest of the government's corruption, staging a sit-in in Tiananmen Square. To get a good job or into the best schools, you needed connections. Students wanted a change from the corrupt old ways. The heat of the day barely subsided as darkness arrived. Tension was in the air so thick it made me gasp for breath. Something was going to happen. My school was camped out, second group in from the street. Our bedrolls made a perfect square, right in front of the Goddess of Freedom. She resembled the Statue of Liberty, but pure white and made out of plastic. Each school had banners with their school name and their concerns above their tents to mark their territory. We knew some change was about to take place. Rumors ignited our fears. Some said Deng Xiaoping would turn up in the Square to hold a dialogue with the elected student representatives. Others said the People's Army was going to surround the Square and force us to leave at gun-point. Others said Deng was on the verge of resigning as Party chair, and he would announce it over the loudspeakers just after midnight. I didn't know whom to believe, so I decided to try and get some rest.

I had the midnight watch, so I went to sleep at around nine o'clock. Just before midnight Xen woke me. I saluted him and made the V sign, for victory. He did the same, and I took up his patrol route. I knew it well. We had been on strike for over a month, and I had night watch duty every other night. Most times I composed classical poems, their rhythm matching my footfalls. This night I could not focus on writing. I haven't since.

First I walked toward the street to the edge of our group, met the night guard from the engineering school delegation, and turned left to walk alongside him or her. It was always hard to tell in the dim light of distant street lamps whether I walked beside a man or woman. Every student wore an identical uniform. We never spoke but turned again to the left as we reached the far side of our groups. Then came twenty-five paces toward the Goddess of Freedom and Mao's mausoleum. The giant portrait of Mao over its entrance loomed over the Goddess's shoulder. After twenty-five paces toward Mao came an about-face. On my second circuit, as I walked beside the engineering college guard, the floodlights suddenly came on all around the Square.

"Alarm! Alarm! Full alert! Wake up! Something is happening! Everyone awake! Alarm!" I screamed, just as we had always practiced. Voices around the Square echoed my words. I hadn't meant to scream out the alarm, but when the lights came up, I jumped into action without thinking. Years later I wondered if I had done the right thing. Maybe more would have lived if I hadn't awakened them so soon, thereby giving them time to prepare for what was coming. The soldiers, I later learned, had been told not to attack unless we made the first move.

The Square was eerily silent as the lights came up to full power. All around me people were rubbing the darkness out of their sleepy eyes, pulling on hats, and grabbing for any weapon in sight just in case. Then came the sound. It was almost thunder, but lower. I thought of all the stories of dragons' rumbling stomachs waking sleepy villages so the dragon could hunt them. The rolling growl became louder as the minutes ticked away. No one knew what to think. Hushed voices whispered the latest gossip around the Square. Then we saw. Thousands of troops marching in perfect time appeared out the dimness and blocked the entire street exit to Tiananmen. From the Hall of the People more soldiers poured into the Square to block all the exits. Every soldier carried a machine gun and a second strand of ammunition. All at once they stood at attention, waiting. We held our breath. Static came

over the loudspeakers.

"Testing. Testing. All illegal demonstrators must leave Tiananmen Square immediately. Those not cooperating will be removed by force. All illegal demonstrators must leave Tiananmen Square immediately. Those not cooperating will be removed by force."

Again and again the mechanical voice repeated the message. We told our people to remain calm and form files. There was no other option but to leave. The engineering college left first, and my school followed in the neat rows we had practiced since kindergarten. As we neared the street we saw what had rumbled. A column of tanks armed for battle was filling the street behind the foot soldiers. But this was the People's Army. No one truly thought they would open fire on us—we were the People too. I took one look back at the Goddess of Freedom, dangling between Mao's image and the Monument to the People's Martyrs. She looked a little less noble in the floodlights, more like the plastic she was made of and almost like a doll. A doll that could easily be crushed.

I wake with a start. At first it's hard to remember the dream was only just that. My past keeps trying to consume my reality. At times like this, I need a cup of tea to cleanse my mind so I can get back to sleep. In my kitchen I take out the teapot and prepare it just the way my grandmother taught me. While I wait for the water to heat, I slouch in a kitchen chair. My grandmother took pity on me. She too was a third daughter, and her mother considered her worthless. She had had to learn to cook the hard way—by sneaking around the feet of her mother and older sisters. Before every cooking lesson, Grandmother showed me the bald spot on her head from when she had tripped her sister who had been carrying the dumpling water.

"See this scar? This is what happens when you aren't careful in the kitchen! Mind me, little one. Some day you will tell your granddaughters about the scars you got from being careless with the dumplings," she lectured.

"Yes, Grandmother. I'll be careful from now on. I promise, Grandmother," I recited. Grandmother taught me how to make dumplings by pressing the dough flat in my hand and then adding just a smidgen of filling. Then she helped me pinch the edges shut, and she always dropped them into the dumpling water. She told me I was too little at first, then too careless, then too Western. Every time after the first time

she had let me drop in the dumplings, she made some excuse for her to do it. The first time I had been listening to her dumpling story so carefully that I didn't watch where my hand was. The dumpling story was a rare treat, one usually reserved for my older sisters, but because I was finally big enough to drop the dumplings into the water, she told it to me.

A dragon had been awakened from its slumber atop a mountain one day by a little boy laughing while flying his dragon kite down below in the valley. The dragon was not pleased to be awake, and he wanted to get even. This was no ordinary dragon, but a wily dragon who liked to hunt. In the middle of the night the dragon snuck into the little boy's village and crawled on his belly toward the little boy's house. But the dragon was so hungry his stomach growled and woke up everyone in the village. The dragon had no choice but to chase them out of town and hunt them down one by one. Once he captured the villagers, he took them back to the top of his mountain and trapped them all in a cave. Last, he caught the boy who had awakened him and took him back to his lair. The dragon told the boy if he made enough dumplings, he could see his mother again, so the boy began rolling dumplings. For days he rolled dumplings and put them into the dragon's great kettle. At last the boy finished all the meat the dragon had given him. He asked, "Now may I go home to my mother? I miss her very much!"

"Ha! Foolish boy! Take a look at that dumpling in your hand. That is the last you will ever see of your mother! You woke me from my thousand year sleep with your silly laughter. You rolled your entire village into dumplings! Foolish boy! Now I am going to eat you for desert!" cackled the dragon. The little boy dropped the dumpling and began to cry. But the dragon showed no remorse and ate him anyway because he had dropped a dumpling on the floor.

At this point in the story I was so scared of a dragon coming to get me that I put my hand closer and closer to the boiling water with each dumpling so I wouldn't drop one. The water splashed me and left red spots, but I didn't cry out for fear the dragon would get me. When the dumplings were all safely boiling, I looked at my hand. It was all red and sore. I showed my grandmother, and she sent me out of the kitchen for being a silly girl. My mother slapped my wrists for angering my grandmother, and then I couldn't keep back the tears. I ran to my pallet and cried myself to sleep.

A whistle shocks me back to my own kitchen in America. I must have nodded off waiting for my tea kettle to heat. Quickly I finish brewing the tea and return to the table to sip comfort from it. The clock blinks 2:07 as I climb back into bed. I stare at the ceiling only a moment before sleep devours me.

As we came close to the soldiers, the officers atop the tanks shouted a command to the men. I couldn't understand because they had a northern accent. These soldiers had never been to Beijing before, I realized. Their standard issue green uniforms were dirty and patched from use - they had seen combat unlike the other soldiers around Beijing. These were hardened mountain soldiers whose accents were so thick they couldn't have understood our shouts of terror moments later as they shouldered their guns to open fire. I had thought it was someone near me screaming "NO!" As the echoes died away, I realized it was my own voice.

Bodies fell and formed pools of blood at the soldiers' feet. I spun around to look for another exit, but the soldiers surrounded the square. Everywhere bodies were piling up. I saw a friend from my English class run forward to pull back a man still writhing in pain. A soldier shot her point blank in the head. I watched her brain splatter out onto the pavement. The light in her eyes died then. My mind reeled for a moment from the shock, but I couldn't stand still long. I then ran toward the center of the square, hoping to make it to the People's Monument. After the Great Communist Proletarian Revolution, Chairman Mao commissioned a black stone obelisk monument on top of a square base carved with a tribute to the People's Martyrs. From the top of its broad base I could have looked for a way out.

Within a few minutes that felt like hours, the hail of bullets stopped. The crowd had absorbed all the bullets and still people pressed forward, trying to escape. I could see the soldiers' generals atop their tanks shouting again but I heard no sound except the screams of the wounded and dying. I climbed up the People's Monument just in time to see the generals' lips move nearly in unison before they disappeared down hatches. Foot soldiers reached into their side pockets and pulled out knives. They then attached them to the ends of their guns and ran forward into the crowd. I watched as students I knew fought tooth and nail with the soldiers, but it was a losing battle. In the distance I heard the screams of ambulance sirens. They

couldn't get to the wounded—the tanks filled the street. All of a sudden I turned and saw a soldier had climbed up the Martyr's Monument as well. He shouted something as he ran at me. My first reaction was to put my hands over my face and brace myself for death. It never came. Instead he lunged at me with his bayonet. Reflected in its polished surface I could see the tanks begin to roll into the Square. The blade slit the skin along the underside of my left arm from just below the wrist all the way to my elbow. As I watched the blood begin to trickle down, I thought of my eldest sister's devotion to our mother. When Mother was sick, Sun Lin cut her arm to bleed into the healing broth. Blood was what saved our mother's life, tradition taught us. The blood pooled on the stone beside me just as my sister's had pooled in the earthen bowl. I glanced up into the soldier's face. His eyes were hard, as if I were an animal he had to kill to save his crops. Those eyes were the last thing I remember.

Then I jolt back to the dark bedroom in America. Night after night I wake with those eyes of stone still firmly in my mind, even after all these years. Tiananmen Square was nearly my literal Gate of Heavenly Peace. The English translation of Tiananmen Square's Chinese name seems to fit somehow. Over the years thousands have died in Tiananmen no matter what the government claims.

In the dark it is harder to remember the weeks I spent in a haze, hearing the foreign devil tongue I knew I should be able to understand but couldn't, the bandages on my arm, legs, and my eye swollen shut from the beating. Weeks later I was told by my savior that he had found me being kicked by three soldiers until I rolled off of the People's Monument and landed on the stone floor of the Square. I was lucky I was unconscious the entire time. I was lucky to be carried to a hotel room by an American journalist who took care of me overnight until he could get me to the American Embassy. I was lucky he had sweet-talked me onto an American air lift to a hospital in the Philippines. I was a very lucky girl indeed, my nurse told me in broken Mandarin. But I didn't feel very lucky those first weeks alone in what seemed like a whitewashed, sanitary jail cell. I had no news of my comrades, my family, nothing. Later when the pain subsided, I asked my nurse to bring the man who rescued me to my bed. Our meeting is a much more pleasant memory. I learned that the polite young American journalist who had interviewed me days before the tanks came had recognized me and

had come to my aid. He is easy to remember. He rests beside me this very moment, snoring softly to himself. His little noises comfort me, remind me that I am safe now.

"So what was it like, I mean really like, in Tiananmen Square? Was it scary? I bet it was scary. Did you get hurt? How did you get out? Tell me all about it!" Mrs. Brandt asked. Amy's school had an open house, where parents went to meet their children's teachers. She was so cheerful about it. I was shocked. What could I say? Luckily my husband stepped in.

"Jun is very sensitive about what happened back in China. If you're so interested, I suggest you read a book. If you'll excuse us, we need to go speak with Amy's art teacher," Bill replied tersely.

"Are you okay?" he shyly asked me when we were safely out of earshot. I didn't speak but reached for his hand after unclenching my fist. It was still shaking, whether from fear of the memories that woman brought back or from rage at myself for having lived to face such a situation. I made it out completely by chance. Bill could have saved anyone. He chose me. I suffer the guilt of being left with the memories of splintered bodies and a blood-bathed Gate of Heavenly Peace. How dare this woman presume to know anything at all about what that night was like. Does watching video footage on TV give her the right to imagine she was there? How dare the world assume I'm just another victim. I knew what might happen, but I stayed anyway. I wanted to change my homeland, I wanted to make China better for everyone. Instead I ended up in America, alone with my memories.

One day not long ago my daughter brought a friend home from school. They were baking cookies in the kitchen when I heard the scream. I ran to check on them and found the floor, walls, every surface in the entire room coated in liquid cookie dough. The electric mixer still spun wildly, and the two little girls hugged each other as they perched atop a kitchen chair. As I reached for the cord to unplug the spinning demon, my long sleeve slid up to my elbow, revealing the scar. It is now only a thin pink line, the lasting reminder of my last day in China.

"What's that big scar from, Mrs. Anderson?" my daughter's friend Mollie asked.

"Shh. We don't talk about that! It's from when my mom still lived in China!" Amy whispered in her ear,

but too loudly for the splattered walls. I said nothing but reached for some dish rags in the sink.

"Here, I'll help you clean this up." I handed them the rags and we cleaned. The kitchen had become silent as a tomb, although my daughter's words echoed in my mind.

"We don't talk about that ... when my mom lived in China ... shhh ... don't talk about ... my mom ... China ... " These echoes made me want to scream, smash things, take some revenge Where could I even begin to tell her about the night a bayonet lodged itself in my arm? Should I start by telling her about my other scars? Her grandma's cooking and the boiling dumpling water? Maybe I should start with how I met her father, and how I came to America? But every time I get the courage to start by just letting the words take their own course, the image of the tanks' crushing entry to the Square that night freezes me as it did that night. The image of tanks of The People's Army rolling over my friends and fellow students still drives me into a cold sweat. My legs get rigid, and I tense up all over as if bracing for that fateful attack. I don't think I can get past the sea of blood I still see every time I close my eyes, not even for my daughter.

It came to me, the way to tell Amy. Last night over tea I realized how to tell her. Even if the words would burn my lips beyond repair, I can still write. Writing is my gift to the world, and my history should be my gift to my daughter. My Amy loves stories. She craves them, as I must have when I was young. Chinese stories do not always have happy endings. Amy would like the adventure in them, though. My past has been too painful for me to tell even the stories of my grandmother. Although I am too weak a woman to tell her my story the way any good Chinese mother would, the least I can do is let her read it. Then she will know what really happened, not the lies the government devised months later about the 50 soldiers killed while enforcing martial law, not the hyped up reports foreign reporters tell to get good ratings every year on the anniversary. My daughter deserves to know the truth. I go into the kitchen to make tea, this time Lao Tzu's tea for wisdom. Notebook open and pen poised, I pray for the Old Wisdom to guide my hand as I write my story, our story.

## Reflection - Marie LeVair

*I never thought of myself as a writer until just last week. Before that, I told stories. Stories as if I were a thousand different people in a thousand different places, stories to keep me amused in class, stories to keep my teachers off my back about late homework. Last fall, in fact right around a year ago, Shannon gave us the assignment to research a war/conflict happening right now in some far away place. I have heard stories my whole life about my mother's travels in Ethiopia, so that's where my research began. During this time I was also taking Chinese literature, which heavily revolved around the cultures of China. Right before the first draft of our story was due, I was at my computer working on a backstory. It wasn't flowing. Every sentence was a headache, a scientifically calculated bit to add to this illusive character. Since I was stuck, I went on to work on my final project for Chinese lit. Midway through a short story by Lu Xun (a famous Chinese revolutionary author), it dawned on me that my story was set in the wrong country. The reason I wasn't able to get to know any of the people I had read about from Ethiopia was that my story belonged in China. Next afternoon, I asked Shannon if it would be ok to switch. She hesitatingly said yes, and I went to the library to get a whole new pile of books. My research took over my room. Stacks of books and drafts were everywhere. Even my laundry had to be moved under the bed to make room. My character had a voice of her own right from the beginning. Her story told itself. I just added a few things she wouldn't want to talk about for her. All the backstories we did of people we knew helped me to discover a new way for the traits I knew so well to combine into a character I had never met. For a month or more I would wake up with the urge to write. Luckily my roommate was a heavy sleeper. One night I couldn't stay awake to finish connecting the flashbacks, so I raided our soda. It was a surreal thing to write while barely awake, but the end product was pretty good. This short story has been quite a journey, and a wild ride at times, but I'm glad I met my main character, and I'm glad her story got told.*



*Teacher Talk* Pre-writing activities such as this comparison chart completed by Shaker M. Shaker, can give developing writers the scaffolding they need to organize analytical writing. Allowing students to choose one topic to develop into a short essay, as Shaker has done in his essay on the following page, can increase their level of confidence and success.

## Night

### • Before the Nazis Arrive:

Before the arrival of the Nazis, life was pretty normal for the Jews of Sight. They could go wherever they pleased and they could do pretty much whatever they wanted to do. It primarily focuses on Elie's life before the Nazis. It focuses on his preoccupation of teaming about his religion, the cabala, the Talmud, the Torah, and the mysticism of his religion. For his family, life goes on as usual every day until Moshe, Elie's friend, comes back and describes the horror of the camps to the people. Most of the people think that he is crazy and brush off his warnings. Most of the people then go one with their daily lives.

### • Father/Mother/Son Relation:

During the hard times at the camp, there is no relation between Elie and his mother since they were separated when they first arrived at the camp. However, Elie did have a relationship with his father. He really loved his father a lot and respected him a lot. He was really dependent on him for support and Elie really wanted for his father to care for him. They had a very close relationship and Elie consulted his father for advice many times. Elie took care of his father, even when he saw what others were doing to their fathers. This changed when Elie's father became dependent on Elie. Elie did not want himself to feel like his father was a burden, but he knew that it was what he truly felt inside. When his father died, Elie felt relieved and felt free

### • Conditions of the camps:

The camps that were mentioned seemed to be far more unsanitary and dirtier than the camps in *Life is Beautiful*. These camps were described as far worse since the smell was very horrible and that there was a larger amount there made them look even worse. They were extremely unsanitary, smelly, dirty, and were places of death. Since the ones visited were the worst of the camps, it's expected that they are in far worse condition than the others. There were one story high barracks with them lined up row by row and they were fenced in.

### • Strength of the Human Spirit:

The strength of the human spirit and hope seemed to be less in this book as there was more mention of God and how could He let this happen. With the loss of faith there was a loss of hope, and even though it was tried to be regained, it never fully returned. It was also disappointing since the dad died and so many more died that it felt like the human spirit was not present anymore.

## Life is Beautiful

### • Before the Nazis Arrive:

Before the arrival of the Nazis—it is Italy, 1939 and the town is pretty much normal and people go about their daily business, like the Jews of Sight. There is much business going on and there is no discrimination. A sign of foreshadowing is when the inspector comes to tell them about the superiority of the Aryan race. And another is when the soldier stands in attention with the "Hail Hitler" salute at the party. People have fun and are involved in their daily lives and even things such as romances, so basically nothing is unusual. Then there are minor incidents, such as when they attacked the house and when they painted the horse green with the writing about Jews on it. Anyway, there are still things like dances and parties present. People interact a lot and treat the Jews normally.

### • Father/Mother/Son Relation:

The boy had a good relationship with his mother and father, and he would do what they told him most of the time, like when his father asked him to watch the bookstore. When they go into the camps, they get to be closer than they were before, and the son starts to realize that he has to listen to his father to be a good boy and that he has to trust his father no matter what. There is more love between them and love grows, and there is no abandonment, like Elie. His father risks his own life but saves his son's. This shows how much his dad cared for him and that he really wanted the best for him. Love is also shown when Dora asks to go on the train repeatedly even though it is destined for death, and she loves her family too much so she risks it.

### • Conditions of the camps:

The camps in Italy are not as dirty, unsanitary and infested as the ones in *Night*. They seem to be a little more cleaner, even though they supposedly still smell. They are in a different format and are set up as cities and not as camps or prisons like they were elsewhere. There was less restrictions on the Jews and many could hide easily which was not attainable in the other concentration camps. They were also not evacuated as well and the selection process did not seem to be as such of an apparent procedure at the camps in Italy. The work was probably less, too.

### • Strength of the Human Spirit:

This one had more of a human spirit aspect involved since there was a young boy, and it seemed like since he was young, he was going to survive. It also seems like most of the time there was a willingness to survive and that helped in showing the rekindling of the human spirit. The disappointing part was when there was a loss of a human but not of his spirit, which lived on in his son.

## Comparison Essay: Relationships in *Night* and *Life is Beautiful*

Shaker M. Shaker, Champlin Park High School, grade 10

In *Night*, during the hard times at the camp, there is no relation between Elie and his mother since they were separated when they first arrived at the camp. However, Elie did have a relationship with his father. He really loved his father a lot and respected him a lot. He was really dependent on him for support and Elie really wanted for his father to care for him. They had a very close relationship and Elie consulted his father for advice many times. Elie took care of his father, even when he saw what others were doing to their fathers. This changed when Elie's father became dependent on Elie. Elie did not want himself to feel like his father was a burden but he knew that it was what he truly felt inside. When his father died, Elie felt relieved and felt free.

In *Life is Beautiful*, the boy had a good relationship with his mother and father, and he would do what they told him most of the time, like when his father asked him to watch the bookstore. When they go into the camps, they get to be closer than they were before, and the son starts to realize that he has to listen to his father to be a good boy and that he has to trust his father no matter what. There is more love between them, and love grows. There is no abandonment, like Elie. His father risks his own life but saves his son's. This shows how much his dad cared for him, and that he really wanted the best for him. Love is also shown when Dora asks to go on the train repeatedly even though it is destined for death; she loves her family too much so she risks it.

The differences between these two stories is that they are complete opposite relationships between the fathers and sons. In *Night*, the relationship gets further apart and in *Life is Beautiful*, the father and the son get into a closer relationships.

## Teacher Talk

*We can also provide support for developing writers by the kinds of writing tasks we create. The Role, Audience, Format, and Task (RAFT) framework is a way to consider writing tasks in a manner different from the traditional essay. By writing as a young Jewish girl (role) to herself (audience) but in the more distant format of a diary about the increasingly harsh anti-Semitic laws (task), Lauren is able to consider these laws in a more personal way as seen in this excerpt from her response.*

## Dear Journal,

Papa gave me this journal today. He said it would be a good way for me to keep my thoughts flowing during these hard times. I really don't know what hard times he is talking about but he and mother never tell me anything. I really like the idea of this journal, and I will try to keep it up to date! - Leah

I am sorry I haven't added to this in a while and I have so much to tell you. One day last week I attended school, like always and my friend Alla said her papa would not allow her to play with me anymore because I was a Jew. I came home to my mother and I cried. I noticed that my father was home. This alarmed me because he is never home until supper. He was fired from his position at the City Council. I also noticed that our car was not in our driveway. Now we have to walk everywhere and can never even take a bus. I really wish we weren't Jewish. - Leah

Today my jewelry was taken out of my box, and Mother's treasured fur coat was taken. It was very hard on my mother and me because those were some of our possessions. I

wish everything would go back to normal and that I wasn't a Jew. And Papa says it will only get worse. - Leah

We received our stars today, and I have vowed not to leave the house again. When I walk down the street, I am being stared at, and I am ashamed to be a Jew. Now we have the stars and Papa was right. . . it has just gotten worse. While walking down the streets, we see signs prohibiting us from movies, swimming pools, hair salons, and telephone booths. Even Papa is ashamed and doesn't like to get out of bed. - Leah

It is getting worse yet. Papa has planned to go into hiding and has met up with some people who will help fake our death. We only are able to have one ration book per week. Mother is so exhausted because now we are not allowed to get bread and meat, and it is really hard to find good vegetables or fruit. We are planning on leaving very soon and I have agreed to take only what I can carry. That will be only my clothes, a blanket, and you, journal. I do believe that going into hiding will be a lot easier than suffering out here. -Leah

We are moving out today. We are moving tonight to a house where a nice couple has agreed to hide us. - Leah

It is a very difficult transition. I am now living with 7 people, and food is becoming a problem. Why can't things be normal? I don't even have anyone to talk to. - Leah

*Leah and her family were discovered by the Nazis, and she was never able to write in this Journal again.*

Lauren Davis  
Becker Middle School, grade 8

Dear Jane Yolen,

Your book, *The Devil's Arithmetic*, was a very interesting read, to be sure. I can kind of relate to Hannah, with how she doesn't think about what happened to people before she was born. I like the spice it added by having her memories as Hannah start to fade away, and then kind of come back near the end. I was mystified with how, all of a sudden at the end, everything that had happened at the beginning started to make sense.

I found your description of the concentration camp and the ride there rather grotesque, yet still it was quite interesting. I was amazed when I read that Rivka was Aunt Eva, and I was never anywhere near expecting that. I was seriously touched when Chaya gave her life for Rivka; it was such a wonderful thing to do.

I have begun to think about putting up with family reunions, and given new thought to the fact that my parents and grandparents have already lived for so long. And even if none of them had any experiences as horrifying and frightening as being a Jew during the Holocaust, they still have interesting stories to tell. I have also begun to realize just how lucky I am, to have a nice house, loyal cat, clean clothes, books, and other things that so many hundreds of thousands of Jews were stripped of during that horrible and terrible time.

Tanya Kortz  
Becker Middle School, grade 8

Dear Anne Frank,

I read your diary and it didn't exactly inspire me, but it did make me think. It made me think about human nature and what it would be like not to have every day things, even small things that you never even think about, such as the sun shining on your face or the breeze lazily flowing by, or even a cold snowflake on your tongue. But what it really made me think about was how somebody could stay in the same place without any of your friends to talk to or confide in, in your change from girlhood to womanhood. Only the same people, day after day. For almost two years.

It also made me think about people, leaders, citizens, even people who pass you on the street every day. Even me. I thought about how people can be so cruel and selfish when they're starved, or bored, or lonely. How can they say and do things they don't even mean? Or maybe they do mean. It also made me think about other human natures like hope, and even though you were locked away in a small space, full of fear, you still had hope.

That's really all I have to say right now, but I must say before I end this letter that I was partially wrong at the start when I said that the book didn't inspire me; it inspired me to think.

Nicole Determan  
Becker Middle School, grade 8

## Waiting for Anya

Alysha Dicke

Hutchinson Middle School, grade 8

*Holocaust* is total destruction by fire. Genocide is the killing or extermination of a whole race of people or a nation. *Pogrom* is an organized killing of many people needlessly or cruelly. These are some of the terms associated with the Holocaust. The Holocaust involved the mass killing of six million Jews and other "undesirables".

Hitler wanted a dominant Aryan race. *Aryan* is a Caucasian non-Jew, especially of Nordic type. He hated the Jews, Gypsies, and the mentally handicapped and the physically disabled. Hitler's goal was to annihilate all the Jews. Jews were sent to concentration camps where some died of starvation or died in gas chambers. The infamous death camps were Auschwitz, Dachau, and Bergen-Belsen where Anne Frank died.

World War II began when the Nazis invaded Poland in September of 1939. When the allies won the war in May of 1945, they didn't know the true horror of Hitler's plan. More than six million Jews were killed. As dictator of Germany, Hitler had complete control over everything, and he rounded up and killed his "undesirables."

In *Waiting for Anya* by Michael Morpurgo, Leah and Benjamin died in Auschwitz after hiding and rescuing other children for years. Towards the end they had eleven children with them. Benjamin was waiting for his daughter Anya because they were split up when the Germans raided their village. They agreed to meet back at grandmother's house, Madame Horcada. He took children over the border of France to Spain where they would be safe. This didn't affect just that family; it affected the whole village of Lescun, France. Many people had to go into hiding or escape to Switzerland or Spain. Some people had to leave something very important behind, their families.

Since so many people were split up or died, it is important to remember that we are all created equal. Hitler believed that Aryans were superior and blamed the Jews for Germany's problems. A group of people such as the Jews cannot be blamed for all the problems in a country or the world. We are all at least partially at fault for these problems. We need to remember the Holocaust to help realize how precious lives really are. People are intertwined like a sweater or rug. The patterns have many different colors just like people. A difference is the colors in the cloth work together to form a pattern.

## Hide and Seek and Waiting for Anya

Hannah Conrad, Hutchinson Middle School, grade 8

During the Holocaust, six million Jews and "undesirables" were murdered. That's right, six million murdered. The Holocaust took place before and during World War II. Hitler was the leader of this, and the Nazis reinforced it. Despite everything that happened, Anne Frank, a Jew who hid for 25 months above her father's business, still believed that people were good at heart.

September 1, 1939 was an incredibly sad day in our history. On that day, Germany invaded Poland and World War II began. At that time, Adolf Hitler was the dictator of Germany. Hitler and his followers hated the Jewish people and other "undesirables." It was Hitler's goal to create the perfect race. He planned on doing this by annihilating the Jews and any other "undesirables" such as Gypsies and mentally challenged people. Annihilation is the total wiping out of existence of a whole race of people. The Holocaust actually began before World War II started. Hitler blamed the Jewish people for all of Germany's problems. Hitler and the Nazis began to take away peoples' houses, land and businesses. During the Holocaust, Jews and the other undesirables were put into concentration camps with only a little bit of food and horrendous living conditions. One of the concentration camps was Auschwitz, and this was the worst of all the concentration camps. Throughout World War II, six million Jews were killed in concentration camps.

The Holocaust touched the lives of millions of people in an awful way. In the book, *Hide and Seek* by Ida Vos, Rachel and her family were Jewish. Rachel's family was forced to do many things to try and keep their family together and alive. They moved from house to house looking for a hiding place. Once they found a hiding place, that didn't necessarily mean that they would be able to stay there until the war was over and be guaranteed that they would be safe. There were many people who helped hide Rachel and her family. Some of the people that helped them didn't have enough room in their house to hide the whole family, so they were sometimes split up. This story, unlike some, had a happy ending. At the end of the book Rachel and her family were reunited.

*Waiting For Anya* also described in great detail how people were affected by the Holocaust. Michael Morpurgo wrote this book. Jo, the main character, learned that a widow living in his town was hiding Jewish people in her barn. She and her son-in-law Benjamin, who was also a Jew, were waiting for Benjamin's daughter Anya to come to the widow's house so that they could escape over the border to freedom. While they were waiting for Anya, they tried to help the other Jewish children escape over the border to Spain. Before they were able to do this, the entire town was taken over by German soldiers who guarded the border between France and Spain day and night so that no Jews could escape. After a long wait, they finally got a chance to try and escape. Almost everything went as planned, but one of the children didn't want to leave Benjamin, and she and Benjamin ended up getting caught and sent to concentration camps where they eventually died. Although that wasn't the happiest ending, Benjamin's daughter Anya finally made it to the widow's house after the war was over. As you can see, a whole town was affected by the Holocaust.

Studying the Holocaust is very important, and I think that everyone should study it at one time or another. The Holocaust has taught me a great deal. What I have learned I know will stick with me forever. I have learned how bad hate is, and how much it can hurt people. It scares me to know that the Holocaust began with only a few people hating another race or religion of people, and that it turned into something this big and bad. People need to learn from this and to realize what an awful thing the Holocaust really was.

As you can see, September 1, 1939 was really an awful day in our history. Just because Hitler and the Nazis hated Jews, it should not have given them the right to do what they did. It was very wrong to kill six million Jews. Race or religion shouldn't have anything to do with what other people think about us. Our race or religion also shouldn't give people the right to kill us. I wish that everyone could feel the way that Anne Frank did: "In spite of everything, I still believe that people are good at heart."

# Grace in the Wilderness

Hannah Christensen, Hutchinson Middle School, grade 8

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“This youth shall grow up to be feared, to be violently active, dominating, indifferent to pain, without weaknesses, without tenderness, and should become beasts of prey.” It is hard to believe people followed this man we knew as Hitler for over ten years, writing one of the darkest chapters in world history known as the Holocaust. During his reign, Hitler tried to create his own world free of Jews, homosexuals, Gypsies, African-Germans, and the physically and mentally disabled. He organized concentration camps that included the infamous Auschwitz, Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, Treblinka, Sobibor, and Mauthausen. Over six million people fell victim to Hitler’s dream of an all Aryan race. But there is more than one side to this story. Everyone had a different opinion on what happened, how it happened and especially why it happened.

Nearly everyone who knows about the Holocaust knows the story of the Jews. Six million of them were killed during the period of the Third Reich under Hitler. The Jews were arrested, put in ghettos, deported to foreign countries, separated from their loved ones, sent to concentration camps, liquidated, starved and gassed. Even the famous Anne Frank did not know exactly why. She, like many of her peers, assumed the Jews must have done something terrible to deserve this fate. They were simply victims to blame because Hitler believed the Jews were the cause of the world’s problems. His belief spread and resulted in the genocide of the Jews. Everyone who entered a concentration camp was assigned a number instead of a name. Some prisoners even killed their own family for food; it was “survival of the fittest.” A few people came to accept this; however, many did not. People escaped and fought back trying to hold on to what little dignity they had left after being stripped of everything they had known. After the war the surviving Jews were left penniless, homeless and had nowhere to go. Many of them were helped by complete strangers from neutral countries like Sweden and Switzerland which were untouched by the war.

Piri, who was a girl in a book called *Grace in the Wilderness* by Aranka Siegal, had a similar experience. Having survived the concentration camps, she was sent to Sweden where she lived with a family

there. Several of her friends that she had made during the war and after it, returned to the Jewish homeland of Palestine, but she sailed to America with mixed emotions on where her loyalty was. Today wars are still being waged on the Jews in the Middle East as a rippled effect of one man’s crazed beliefs.

Survivors, witnesses, and the people of today tend to blame the Nazis and their supporters for the events that occurred. But many of them claim not to have really known what they were doing. Germans that worked in concentration camps have been known to say that they were following orders and did not think about the possibility of them being wrong until the fall of the Nazis in World War II. These people were also victims of the Holocaust though not quite in the same ways as the Jews, for most of them were young, grew up in the Hitler Youth and were raised to believe that the Jews were the cause of the world’s problems. Their punishment for their deeds is having to live everyday with the death of over six million people on their conscience.

Perhaps the people really to blame were the bystanders who watched this nightmare unfold before their eyes, knew it was wrong and did nothing to try to stop it. They, like many others, had their excuses for not getting involved. Large numbers of people were oblivious to what Hitler was really trying to do. The people that did know either resisted it or chose to except the Nazi’s laws without much thought. There really was no way to speak out against Hitler and the Nazi party openly without ending up in the ground, but people managed to do it subtly. Jews were hidden by Catholics and other people who did not support the German government, and it is those people who deserve credit. Most of them managed to stay alive and defy Hitler while saving the lives of innocent people at the same time.

The genocide of the Jews cannot simply be told by a single person or by one point of view. It affected millions and millions of people in all different ways. Our job as the future generation of the world is to not let history repeat itself. We still fight wars on racism and prejudice in every corner of the world, and every one of us plays a role in it. Let us hope it is a positive one from every perspective.