



Teaching Twentieth-Century Global Conflict in the Literature Class: A Bibliographic Essay

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Although America has recently been involved in the Gulf War, students of this generation are virtually unexposed to the horrible reality of global conflict. The most efficient way of educating students on this topic is by having them read novels that relay accurate accounts of living in a world in which peace is shattered. Also, by reading literature that deals with issues of war, students gain a better understanding of humanity and of the society we live in. As Larry R. Johannessen, author of Illumination Rounds, claims, "The very nature of war has a way of revealing not only the worst but also the best of what humankind is capable of. This literature reveals the power of art and the human spirit to give meaning to the senselessness and ambiguity of war" (Johannessen 8).

In beginning a unit that addresses Twentieth Century Global Conflict, a teacher should engage the class in an activity that induces students to think about war. At Odds, a publication assembled by various teaching professionals, suggests that students discuss what causes a conflict by analyzing the conflicts they encounter in their lives. The publication provides a diagram that models this activity. First, a student chooses

a conflict, for instance an argument with a sibling. This conflict is centered on the page and circled. Branching from this central point will be the possible causes of this conflict (Alvermann 10). Students can then generate possible solutions to settle the conflict. Thus, students will better understand how conflicts occur and how they can be resolved.

Another activity is to discuss how conflicts affect people's lives. This can be organized into a chart that lists war's physical, emotional, political, geographical, and economical effects (Figure 1, Alvermann 11). These ideas will be generated from the students' prior knowledge of war. Students should analyze this chart after the unit is over to discover how much more they have learned about the effects of war. In another activity, students discuss how conflicts could be resolved more peacefully (Alvermann 11). This activity should be incorporated at the end of the unit when students have had more exposure to the issues.

It is extremely beneficial for students studying this subject in an English class to be exposed to it simultaneously in other areas of curriculum. For example, if students are learning about World War II in history it would be beneficial for them to be reading

Physical	Emotional	Political	Geographical	Economic
<i>death</i>	<i>fear</i>	<i>new government</i>	<i>new borders</i>	<i>high cost of food</i>

Figure 1. Effects of War on People's Lives

novels like Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl in English. The history curriculum would provide the student with factual knowledge about the war which would aid in the understanding of the novel, and vice-versa.

In a unit on Twentieth Century Global Conflict, the wars should be studied in chronological order. Therefore, the unit would begin with literature based on experiences in World War I. Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms and Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front offer an inside perspective on the first "Great War." A Farewell to Arms exposes students to what it was like to be at the scene of battle. Since the main character is an ambulance driver, students get the chance to understand how emotionally disturbing it was to witness the horrid scenes of battle. Students also get a civilian's perspective on the war since, early in the story, the main character is injured and eventually leaves the battle scene.

All Quiet on the Western Front is an extremely valuable novel to teach as it portrays the opposing viewpoint of the same war. This novel depicts the war from various German soldiers' perspectives. Furthermore, students will be able to identify with the characters since the story follows several German school boys who go together into the unknown and unfamiliar depths of war.

Both A Farewell to Arms and All Quiet on the Western Front are available on video cassette. Also, plays are available that relay the experiences of World War I. One such play, Journey's End by R. C. Sherriff,

captures the experiences of trench warfare on European territory.

There are also books that feature poetry that WWI inspired. Poetry of the Great War: An Anthology (edited by Dominic Hibberd and John Onions) and Men Who March Away: Poems of the First World War (edited by I. M. Parsons) depict wartime and express the mixed feelings that stir in people whose nation is in battle. Wilfred Owen, in particular, wrote several poems dedicated to World War I battle experiences (The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen, edited by C. Day Lewis). Women's Poetry of the First World War (edited by Khan Nosheen) offers students a female perspective of this war.

It is important for the teacher to provide background information on this war before the class studies the literature. For example, since the war is fought on European territory, the geographical locations cited in these novels can be confusing. It would be productive for students to research the battle sites of the war and locate them on a map. Students could also research issues such as the allies and enemies in the war and America's role in the war.

In the study of World War II, many complex issues can be explored, such as violence, racism and the Holocaust, Nazism and dictatorship, and nuclear war. For students, the Holocaust hardly seems real because it is hard to believe that such a terrible thing occurred. One way of making students aware of this reality is by exposing them to speakers who lived to tell about their

experiences. At a Holocaust Commemoration at the University of Minnesota Duluth, Henry Oertelt shared his experiences at three different concentration camps, and emphasized that young people need to be educated especially about the Holocaust because it is "important for them to know what can happen when prejudice and hatred is uncontrolled." Students could also view films such as Night and Fog and Schindler's List which portray the Holocaust, in addition to reading novels like Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl and Upon the Head of the Goat: A Childhood in Hungary, 1945-1948, by Aranka Seigal. Other books to be considered are Night and Dawn, by Elie Wiesel.

An effective way of helping students understand how the Holocaust happened is by generating a class discussion about whether or not a holocaust could occur again (Chartock, "Holocaust" 284). It is likely that students will deny that such a thing is possible, as it is hard for them to conceive of such an occurrence happening in the first place. Here it would be valuable for students to view the film The Eye of the Storm (Chartock, "Holocaust" 282). This film demonstrates how people can so easily become prejudiced towards others. In this video a third grade teacher, Jane Eliot, singles out all the blue-eyed children and openly favors and praises them over the brown-eyed students. Eventually the blue-eyed students treat the brown eyed students very harshly. The teacher then favors the brown-eyed children, and, interestingly, the brown-eyed children, who were formerly treated so poorly, behaved just as badly to the blue-eyed children. This video can be compared to the ways Hitler influenced the German people to hate Jewish citizens.

Another interesting activity is to have students organize a news program that features the Holocaust. Two students could be anchorpersons and interview survivors of

the concentration camps, civilians, and Nazi soldiers. These roles would be distributed among students who would then research their characters' roles in the war before the news program is taped (Chartock, "Teaching" 36).

Students should read about the war from other perspectives, as well. Novels that are appropriate are Summer of My German Soldier, by Betty Greene, Slaughterhouse Five, by Kurt Vonnegut, and Catch 22, by Joseph Heller, as each displays a soldier's view of the war. It is also important to address the bombing of Hiroshima which is compellingly portrayed in Hiroshima by Jim Hersey. Poetry that features WWII can be found in Poets of the 1939-1945 War (edited by R. N. Currey) and Chaos of the Night: Women's Poetry and Verse of the Second World War (edited by Catherine W. Reilly).

Plays that depict WWII experiences are also available to teachers. The Wookey, by Frederick Hazlitt Brennan, captures the experience of being a civilian in London during the battles of WWII. There is also a dramatic version of Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl, titled simply, The Diary of Anne Frank, by Francis Goodrich and Albert Hackett, and of Catch-22.

Other wars that can be covered in this unit are the Korean Conflict and the Vietnam War, and students will, again, need background information. In addition to reading novels such as James A. Michener's The Bridges at Toko-Ri and James Hickey's Chrysanthemum in the Snow, students will need to conduct research to understand the relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the years of the Cold War and how this tension came about. Especially to understand our country's bitterness toward the Soviet Union at this period of time, students could view the film Red Dawn.

Topics of research for the Vietnam war should include 1) causes of the war, 2) the draft, 3) the public's reaction to the war

focusing on protests, riots, speeches and music, 4) battle conditions for soldiers, 5) the climate and atmosphere of Vietnam, 6) resolution of the conflict, 7) prisoners of war, 8) and the United States' present relationship with Vietnam.

In studying the Vietnam war, students could read the novel In Country, by Bobbie Ann Mason. In this novel, a young girl tries to understand the war that killed her father and emotionally damaged her uncle. All of the veterans that she comes into contact with rarely discuss the war and the community treats the veterans disrespectfully, which intensifies her curiosity. Other novels are Travelers, by Larry Bograd, Fallen Angels, by Walter Dean Myers, and Home Before Morning: The Story of an Army Nurse in Vietnam by Linda Van Devanter. These novels portray the war through the eyes of a fatherless son, an African-American soldier, and a female nurse. Also, in "Young-Adult Literature and the Vietnam War," Larry R. Johannessen recommends for adolescent reading: Tim O' Brien's If I Die in Combat Zone, Cynthia Rylant's A Blue-Eyed Daisy, Bob Green's Homecoming: When the Soldiers Returned from Vietnam, and Kathryn Marshall's In the Combat Zone: An Oral History of American Women in Vietnam, 1966-1975.

Poetry that relays the Vietnam experience can be found in Demilitarized Zones (edited by Jan Barry and W. D. Ehrhart), A Soldier's Time: Vietnam War Poems (edited by Robert Barth), and in Out of the Vietnam Vortex: A Study of Poets and Poetry Against the Vietnam War (edited by James F. Mersmann). Also, The Cry of Vietnam, by Thich Nhat Hanh, portrays a Vietnamese outlook on the war. Short stories can be found in Enemy Country (edited by Emilio DeGrazia), and Writing Under Fire: Stories of the Vietnam War (edited by Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer). Plays include

Coming to Terms: American Plays and the Vietnam War.

According to W. D. Erhart, young people today have an image of warfare that is distorted by Hollywood (Johanssen, "Young Adult" 48). Their vision of the Vietnam War largely resembles the images seen in the films First Blood and Rambo: First Blood Part Two. At the end of this unit, students can view films that portray a more realistic image of the war, such as Platoon, Apocalypse Now, Born on the Fourth of July and In Country which better justify the realities of the war and the United States' state of affairs after the war. Also, a film that is ideal for the classroom is Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam. Dear America is a very emotionally moving film in which famous actors and actresses read real letters written by Vietnam soldiers as home-made war videos are displayed. Viewing the film is an especially appropriate way to conclude a lesson on the Vietnam War.

A way to conclude the entire unit on Twentieth Century Global Conflict is to have students interact with war veterans in their community as suggested in At Odds (Alvermann 114). An activity recommended in At Odds is to have the class construct a memorial dedicated to all veterans in the community. A booklet consisting of poems and sketches could be created by the students and then presented to the community's veteran organization, such as the local VFW (Alvermann 115). It is also recommended that students interview a veteran or research about a local war hero (Alvermann 114-115). With so many activities, a teacher can assign a variety of writing assignments to the students which will demonstrate how much the students have learned. Indeed, by having students study novels that address the issues of Twentieth Century Global Conflict and incorporating the recommended activities, teachers will discover that students will have learned a great deal about our world.

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Coping With the Death of a Parent

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Rev. of Holding Steady by Stephen Schwandt. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, reissue 1996. 176 pages. Paper. \$5.95. and rev. of A Teacher's Guide to Holding Steady by Stephen Schwandt. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 1996. 28 pages. Paper. \$10.95.

Young adults respond to books in which teen characters deal with problems which do not have simple solutions. They also like books in which characters act and talk like the people in their own lives. Finally, teenagers appreciate well-plotted books which contain adventure and an element of danger for the major characters. Stephen Schwandt's YA novel Holding Steady (reissued by Free Spirit Publishing,

1996) holds up well when measured against these three YA litmus tests. In fact, Judith Beckman and Elizabeth Belden, in their English Journal review of the book when it was first published in hardcover, contended "the book illustrates the high quality possible in adolescent literature."

Brendon Turner, a 17-year-old haunted by the sudden death of his father in an auto accident, experiences feelings of guilt, anger, and frustration as he works through his reactions to his father's death. Complicating the situation is the difference he sees in the relationship his brother Ross had with their father, a closeness Brendon attributes in part to Ross's basketball ability, and the apparent ease with which Ross had been able to deal with their father's death.