

**Teaching Reading Skills with a Holocaust Memoir:  
*Four Perfect Pebbles* by Lila Perl and Marion Blumenthal Lazan**

**An Instructional Unit Created by  
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for The Midwest Center for Holocaust Education**

Introduction

My name is Laura Patton. I am a secondary-certified language arts teacher and reading specialist. I've taught 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the Shawnee Mission School District for the past 20 years. I taught this unit as I was writing it during the 2004-2005 school year. It was impossible for me to write in formal, 3<sup>rd</sup> person language. Therefore, I have written the materials in my natural voice – informal and 1<sup>st</sup> person. I would not begin to think that this unit is the best way to teach either a Holocaust memoir or reading skills. It's just one way I tried to help my students become better readers during one particular school year. For me, teaching has always been an act of continuous improvement. I am always looking for new and better ways to help my students learn. I intended this unit to be used primarily by language arts teachers who had never taught the Holocaust before. I wanted it to be a way for teachers to dive in to this challenging subject matter and feel some degree of comfort. I encourage any teacher who uses these materials to adapt them as they see fit.

Intended Audience

This unit was designed for use in an 8<sup>th</sup> grade remedial reading class; therefore, the objectives have a heavy focus on reading skills. It could easily be used in English, Communications, or Communication Arts classes for 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Although I do not personally recommend teaching the Holocaust below 7<sup>th</sup> grade, *Four Perfect Pebbles* is one of the few Holocaust books that I would even consider teaching to 6<sup>th</sup> graders.

Time

My class periods are 45 minutes long. It took me 48 class periods to teach the entire unit. I have tried to indicate on the overview chart and in the lesson plans which lessons are optional. In a few cases, I added lessons as I taught the unit in order to address the specific needs of my students. I have tried to indicate on the overview chart and in the lesson plans which lessons are optional or intended to be taught as needed. At a bare minimum, I believe it would take 36 class periods to teach this unit.

One of the reasons it is so effective to teach the Holocaust in a language arts class is that we can spend more time on the content than our social studies colleagues. Even though it took me an entire quarter to teach the unit, I accomplished eight of the objectives in my curriculum and gave the students opportunities for repeated practice of many important skills.

### Resources Needed

All of the books and videos needed to teach this unit are available from the resource center of the Midwest Center for Holocaust Education. Please call MCHE at (913) 327-8190 for information about the hours during which the resource center is open and the procedure for checking out materials. I would also advise you to check on the availability of resources within your school district. Except for a classroom set of *Tell Them We Remember*, everything else I needed was available within the Shawnee Mission School District.

I did not specifically use USHMM's guide, *Teaching About the Holocaust: A Resource Book for Educators*, in my lesson plans. However, I would highly recommend that you read pages 1-8, page 14, and pages 17-43 before you begin – especially if you are teaching the Holocaust for the first time. This guide also has information about services that USHMM provides and a wonderful bibliography and videography.

One bit of advice - I have discovered that the competition for resources increases dramatically in the spring of each school year. History teachers are more likely to teach the Holocaust in the spring because that is when they get to the mid-1900's in chronological order. As a language arts teacher, I am not limited to a time sequence for instruction. The Holocaust is interesting enough to students that teaching it mid-year really makes the long, dreary days of winter fly by.

- A classroom set of *Four Perfect Pebbles* by Lila Perl and Marion Blumenthal Lazan
- A classroom set of *Tell Them We Remember* by Susan D. Bachrach
- One copy of *The World Must Know* by Michael Berenbaum (for teacher reference)
- One copy of *Teaching About the Holocaust: A Resource Book for Educators*
- VHS or DVD: *Marion's Triumph*
- VHS or DVD: *The Camera of My Family*
- VHS or DVD: *Heil Hitler – Confessions of a Hitler Youth*
- VHS or DVD: *One Survivor Remembers*
- VHS or DVD: *The Courage to Care*

### Organization of the Binder

This unit is comprised of 27 lessons, each requiring 1 or 2 class periods. Each lesson plan and the instructional materials that accompany it are located behind the numbered tabs. The lesson plans, answer keys, and transparencies are all color-coded in green. Blue was used for reference materials that may be helpful to the teacher. Worksheets that need to be copied for student use are printed on white paper and located in plastic sleeves. PLEASE make sure that you put the materials away in good order for the next teacher to use. Each page is marked with a footer, which includes the lesson number to make it easier to keep the pages in order. A CD-ROM is provided for your use. This disk contains all of the files created for this unit. You will need to save the files to your own computer and then edit them as you wish.

### Proficient Reader Research

Throughout the unit, I have referred to reading skills that proficient readers use to comprehend text. Because I work with students specifically because their reading skills are weak, teaching the behaviors and skills of proficient readers is the primary focus of the unit. However, ALL teachers – no matter their subject area – need to take part in helping students become good readers. I would recommend that you familiarize yourself with the body of research about these skills. To this end, may I suggest the following books?

#### *7 Keys to Comprehension* by Susan Zimmermann and Chryse Hutchins

This book is extraordinarily easy to read. It is intended for parents as well as teachers and avoids the use of educational jargon. It contains clear examples of the seven skills and recommends books that can be read at home and in the classroom to practice each skill. Read Chapter 1 for a quick overview of the seven keys.

#### *I Read It, But I Don't Get It* by Cris Tovani

This book was written by a high school teacher and has very practical suggestions about teaching comprehension skills to older readers. It is also an easy and enjoyable read.

#### *Mosaic of Thought* by Ellin Oliver Keene and Susan Zimmermann

This text is a bit more challenging to read, but it is a foundational work. The previous two books were published after this one and built upon the body of knowledge conveyed in this text. I would recommend starting with the other two books, and then, if you like what you read in those texts, read this one next.

### Feedback Forms

I have never written my lesson plans for such a wide audience. I am curious to know what worked for you and your students and what did not. I'm curious to know how you adapted the lessons for your own needs and what you added or deleted. I would appreciate any suggestions you might have about how to improve this unit – either to make it stronger instructionally or more user-friendly. When you are finished with the unit, I would appreciate it if you would fill out a feedback form and mail it or return it with the binder to MCHE.