

## **In-class Activities for *The Holocaust Through Literature* Course**

As you read the various types of literature about the Holocaust you will need to react and respond to it. This packet is a list of possible activities that will help you better appreciate what you are reading. At times I may assign you a particular assignment from this packet to do with a particular reading. At other times I will allow you to choose which activity you would like to do. You will record your responses (feelings) in your personal writing journal.

1. Looking at the situation the character(s) faced, what *might* you have done? Why is it hard for you to even think of an answer?
2. Why do you think it is important to study the Holocaust? Write down some questions you would like answered in this course.
3. Explain the quote, “The Holocaust is a watershed event, a defining moment in history.”
4. What lessons have you learned about the piece of literature you read?

### **Questions to Consider for Examining Reports, Directives, Petitions**

- ◆ What type of document is this?
- ◆ What is the date of issue, if any, of the document?
- ◆ What information in the report places it in a particular time period?
- ◆ Who created the document? What is the evidence for that?
- ◆ Who was the audience for the document? What is your evidence for that?
- ◆ What factual information is in the report?
- ◆ What are the key factors / points in the document? How did you make that determination?
- ◆ What is the purpose of the document? Cite your evidence.
- ◆ What inferences, generalizations, and conclusions might be drawn from the document?
- ◆ What is the tone of the document? Is the tone important? Why or why not?
- ◆ What is not clear to you in the document?
- ◆ What else do you need to know about the “document” in order to be clear as to its purpose and or significance (importance)?

### **Questions for Examining Letters**

- ◆ What type of document is this?
- ◆ Who created it?
- ◆ How is the author important in the study of the Holocaust?
- ◆ What is the date it was written? What significant events were taking place at this time in regard to the history we are studying? (Hint- Check a Holocaust Chronology or Timeline)
- ◆ What is the tone of the letter?

- ◆ Why was the letter written? What evidence in the letter helped you to know why it was written?
- ◆ Is the letter an official letter or a personal letter? How can you tell?
- ◆ Are there any unique physical qualities of the letter such as a letterhead, seals, or other markings? If so, what is their significance?
- ◆ Does the author expect an answer? What is the evidence?
- ◆ What new information about the subject matter / historical period did you learn from this letter?
- ◆ Do you consider this new knowledge as being valuable in helping you better understand the Holocaust? If so how so? If not, why not?
- ◆ Is there anything you do not understand in this document? If so, what?

### Questions for Examining Political Cartoons

- ◆ In order to understand political cartoons you must understand certain techniques that are used in them. Research and write down the definitions to the following terms "...*symbolism, ridicule, caricature, satire, metaphors, and puns*". Now see if you can cite examples of these in the cartoon you are studying. Now...
- ◆ List the objects or people in the cartoon.
- ◆ Be prepared to discuss what is the symbol or metaphor in it.
- ◆ Describe the action taking place in it...describe it in your own words.
- ◆ From whose point of view is the cartoon drawn? What evidence do you see of the cartoonist's viewpoint?
- ◆ What traits make you feel sympathetic or unsympathetic to the cartoon's point of view?
- ◆ Write a brief statement regarding the meaning of the cartoon.
- ◆ What emotions does the cartoon create in you?

### Questions for Examining Photographs

- ◆ Use the Photo Analysis question sheet.

**\* Examining First-Person Accounts (any written, oral, or videotaped account by survivors and other individuals (with the exception of perpetrators) who witnessed any aspect of the Holocaust. These can be in the form of letters, diaries, interviews, testimony at trials and other official and unofficial hearings; memoirs, autobiographies, and oral histories; and statements (of any length) in texts, journals, and other publications.**

- ◆ Do you have any questions, concerns, misconceptions, or any confusion from this account that you would like to discuss and clear up?
- ◆ Why do you think this person wanted to share their experiences of what is a traumatic event?
- ◆ What did you learn from this account that you did not know before?
- ◆ Did any of the information / insights you gained contradict or challenge previous information and ideas that you had about the Holocaust? What were they, and why did they have that effect?
- ◆ How did this account(s) change your understanding of the Holocaust / or the people

involved?

- ◆ What lessons did you learn from these accounts?
- ◆ What lessons can others learn?
- ◆ Make a list of the key ideas, concerns and / or issues you find in this account.
- ◆ Find a passage or quote in the account and record it in your journal that stands out. Copy it and write down why it stood out to you.
- ◆ Does the person giving the account seem to change as they tell it? How? Why?
- ◆ Why is the person telling their account? What is your evidence?
- ◆ What do you see as the most significant aspect of the speaker's story, and why?
- ◆ Examine one particular topic from the Holocaust, and note how different sources—contemporary accounts or documents, court testimony, oral history, or video accounts treat that same episode.

### **Examining Fiction and Poetry on the Holocaust**

- ◆ How does the text affect you emotionally? Intellectually?
- ◆ What meaning does this piece have for you? What new insights about the Holocaust have you gained from reading it?
- ◆ Is this a literary work that you will remember? Why or why not?

### **Examining Films on the Holocaust**

- ◆ After viewing the film in class, write down images from the film that stayed with you. Describe what the general impression was that it left you with. Then tell some of the specific(s) of the film that left the greatest impression on you. Why did you choose those parts? What were your thoughts as you viewed the film? Did the background music (if there was any) affect the way you felt about the situation? Why?
- ◆ After viewing the film in class, take a major character in the film who is a crucial (important) link to the historical content. Describe how that character thought, felt, and behaved in the film. (This activity works best with documentary films.)
- ◆ In the film you viewed, were there any key historical dates? Write a reflective paper about the movie.

### **Examining Music on the Holocaust**

- ◆ Find on the World Wide Web (page 287 Totten Book) the German National Anthem during the Holocaust... "Deutschland Uber Alles" ("Germany Over All"). Study the words. What are the implications (hidden messages) for Germans *and* non-Germans? Respond to the question in writing. What feelings do you think it gave the Hitler Youth? How do you think it contributed towards the Holocaust? What was your overall feeling when you studied it (knowing what you now know about the Holocaust).
- ◆ Find the song, *The Ring*, (by Richard Wagner). See if you can find the English translation of the lyrics. What emotional appeal might the song have had? Wagner was antisemitic.

- ◆ Find the song, “You (Our) Dear Fuhrer” that was published in a songbook for children in Germany in 1933) (page 289, Totten Book). Read the translation and write a response telling how you would feel about singing such a song. Explain your answer in detail. Tell how the song could have been used to inspire loyalty to Hitler and / or patriotism. You might consider drawing a picture that shows what the song describes.
- ◆ Discuss the following quote made by Miriam Harel, survivor of the Lodz Ghetto in Poland) **“The song was the only truth. The Nazis could take everything away from us, but they could not take singing from us. This remained our only human expression.”**
- ◆ Read the words to the song, *“On the Hearth”* (Page 290-291- Totten Book) This is a lullaby. The song conveys an important message for the Jewish people about the importance of education and their religious laws in the Torah. Discuss the message the song gives. Why would someone write such a song?
- ◆ After examining the words to the song, *“Peat Bog Soldiers,”* tell other examples in history when a crisis such as war or persecution when the victims created music out of pain. (page 291-292 Totten Book). Possibly locate some of those songs to share with the group.
- ◆ Study the words to the song, *“Mein Vater Wird Gesucht” (My Father Was Sought Out)* (Page 292- Totten Book) and then create a piece of artwork about the song (drawing, mobile, miniature sculpture, etc...) and then write a short piece about the connection your artwork has to the song.
- ◆ Create your own song about the parts of the Holocaust that expresses your feeling about it. You may write the song in response to a film we viewed, or a book that you read.
- ◆ Examine the song, *“Zog Nit Keinmol” (Never Say)* (Page 295- Totten Book) and find the metaphors and / or symbols used in the song. Example- “sun” stands for (victory), “leaden skies” (despair) and so on. Now go to the World Wide Web and locate some other songs on the resistance movement. Tell what role these songs played in the resistance movement.
- ◆ After studying and researching the incident known as **“Babi Yar,”** locate the song (one the Web) “Babi Yar,” written in 1951 by the Russian Jewish poet Shike Driz and the musician Rivka Boyarski. What do you think of the lyrics? Explain your feelings and reactions. Be ready to discuss with the rest of the class your reactions to the song. Now, read a historical account about the event and draw or write about what you “see” as you listen to the music.
- ◆ Listen to the songs from the tape “Remember the Children, Songs for and By the Children of the Holocaust” (see Professor. Gair) and write down how you felt about the

song(s).

◆ Listen to music from the CD *“Holocaust Requiem, Kaddish for Terezin,”* (see Professor. Gair). These songs are based upon poems and diaries of children who died at Theresienstadt. Describe your feelings, emotions, reactions.