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 Reading/Writing Unit  
 Teaching Literature in Secondary Schools  
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**Unit Title** "My Grandfather's War"  
**Focus** World War II Literature

### **Touchstone Texts**

Wiesel, E. (2006). Night. New York: Hill and Wang.  
 Selections of Poetry

### **Synergistic/Companion Texts**

Freedman, R. (1990). Franklin Delano Roosevelt. New York: Clarion Books.  
 Clips from Schindler's List.  
 Clips from Flyboys.  
 Wartime advertisements and political cartoons (see Appendix A)

### **Essential Questions**

1. How does war change the dynamics of cultures, both within and among them?
2. What does the word "survivor" really mean?
3. What roles did the government and media play during the World War II?

### **Unit Rationale**

Currently, there are only a few remaining survivors of the Holocaust and only a few remaining American soldiers as well. Many students' grandparents lived through the Second World War and can provide a firsthand viewpoint of the war and the state of American society during that time. Once the survivors and people who lived through World War II pass on, history dies with them. In order to keep history alive, we must read about their experiences and write about them, gathering them firsthand when we can. There is a plethora of literature, both fiction and nonfiction, available on World War II, much of it geared toward young adults.

Also, adolescents are typically enthralled with the notion of violence and survival. World War II presents both, but in a myriad of perspectives (Japanese-American internment camps, the Jewish during the Holocaust, American and other Allied soldiers, Nazi soldiers, and Germans and other Europeans who were not Jewish). As such, students can learn to analyze and view information from different perspectives by reading texts about the war and writing about their reactions, etc.

### **Unit Overview**

#### ▪ **Instructional Contexts**

<i>Grade Level</i>	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade English
<i>Planned Duration</i>	4 weeks
<i>Time of Year</i>	After winter break (middle of January)

### *Preceding Lessons*

Prior to winter break, students will have completed a unit on poetry. This will assist them in understanding the components that will be found in “Can You Take It?” as they approach the poem from the perspective of a war prisoner. Students will also have the opportunity to respond in their free-writes and journals in poetry.

### *Following Lessons*

After the unit on World War II is complete, students will move into a unit on storytelling and mythology. They will be able to revisit their interviews of elderly relatives and neighbors about World War II during this unit, developing it into a news story or fictional yet realistic account of their experiences during the war (in essence, telling their stories). The unit will continue on to discuss different perspectives and methods of storytelling and how mythology relates to the concept of storytelling, involving actual mythological accounts, from Roman and Greek mythology to modern urban legends.

### *Skills, Frames of Mind*

Students will need to be fresh of mind to tackle the issue of war, particularly with such in depth amounts of literature to confront and analyze. The skill of relating to a perspective other than one’s own will need to be developed either prior to or during this unit. Also, students will need to understand the concepts of a research “paper” before they can create one at the end of the unit.

- **Reading Structures**

The touchstone texts will be read primarily in class throughout the entire unit. However, each student will participate in literature circles during the third week of the unit. The literature circles will present on a regular basis throughout that week so that all students can explore the idea of survivorship in each text together.

- **Writing Structures**

Students will engage in regular in-class free-writes/journals, allowing for their reactions, questions, analysis of the texts they are confronting. Their journals will also allow them to examine World War II from a multitude of perspectives based on writing prompts, engaging them in writing from different perspectives. These will be combined as a culminating project of a series of fictional vignettes about the war.

There will also be a second culminating project where students will each select a figure from World War II to investigate and research. Students will put together either a research paper or some sort of presentation (PhotoStory, Podcast, Powerpoint, etc.) to organize and present the information they have collected.

- **“Moving Into” Text Activities**

1. Free-write/Journal → What does the word “survivor” mean?
2. KWL chart about World War II as individuals, then students will partake in a class discussion about World War II.
3. Soldier’s Dilemma Activity (See Appendix B)
4. Class reading and discussion of “Can You Take It?” a poem found on the wall of a solitary confinement cell at Dulag Luft, a German interrogation center for POW’s who were shot down. (See Appendix C)
5. Interview of elderly relative, neighbor, etc. about experiences during war (preferably World War II)

- **“Moving Through” Text Activities**

1. Reader response logs through continued perspective writing during the reading of “Night.”
2. During literature circle time, students will engage in reciprocal teaching and also an informal method of book talks.

- **“Moving Beyond” Text Activities**

1. Plus/minus timeline for “Night”
2. Collection of perspective writings and free-writes (artistic creation of perspective book)
3. Research Project → selection of integral figure in World War II and presentation of information

- **Cautions**

Students may struggle to confront a past war when they may know someone who has been directly affected by the war currently going on in Iraq/Afghanistan. There may be emotional moments when discussing incidents of survival or lack of survival. If this occurs and only one student is emotional, I will direct the other students to continue working and quietly pull the emotional student aside to speak with him/her. If they remain uncomfortable, I will offer them an alternative task for the remainder of the class. If the entire class appears to be emotional or disturbed, we will have a class discussion to confront the issue and work through it together, using the situation as a “teachable” moment.

Students may also struggle to work with different perspectives, particularly if they have biases of which they are unaware, or even if they are aware of them. If this occurs, the student(s) who is/are struggling will be asked to confront their biases or the perspective and to work through. If they continue to struggle, the student(s) will be asked to look at the text from their own perspective first and then return to the text at a later time.

### **NYS Standards/Performance Indicators**

1. Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.  
Culminating research project.  
*Performance Indicator:* Students will be able to search out information and examine World War II as it relates to a particular figure/person.
2. \*Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.  
Collection of journals and free-writes developed into a perspective book with a student’s artistically designed cover.  
*Performance Indicator:* Students will learn how to respond to texts from different perspectives related to a similar event (World War II).
3. Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation.  
Examination of political cartoons and wartime advertisements.  
*Performance Indicator:* Students will analyze and formulate ideas about some of the political propaganda of World War II.
4. Students will read, write, listen, and speak for social interaction.  
Participation in literature circles and class presentations of text examined in literature circle.  
*Performance Indicator:* Students will present a clear and concise explanation and examination of a text to their fellow peers who have not experienced that particular text. In turn, they will listen and understand the text that is presented to them.

### **Use of Technology**

In developing the KWL chart as a class, the teacher could use a Smartboard, computer or overhead projector to present the information as opposed to the blackboard. Students can also record their interviews into a podcast format in order to “broadcast” the interview to their classmates.

The final project will lend the most opportunities for the utilization of technology. Students can select from a variety of tools to create their research projects. Even if students choose to do a paper as their presentation, it will be required to be typed. Therefore, students will be using some form of technology within the unit.

### **Use of Nonprint Media/Media Literacy**

One of the introductory activities of this unit is having students examine and analyze World War II political cartoons and wartime advertisements. By doing this, students will begin to formulate ideas about how the government and media contribute to wartime thoughts and beliefs.

In addition, students will view clips from the movies “Schindler’s List” and “FlyBoys.” These clips will help them to begin thinking about the concept of survivorship. In particular, there is a clip from the movie “FlyBoys” where a Nazi soldier is given the opportunity to shoot down an American soldier. However, because the American had saved his life in a previous flight, the Nazi soldier let the American pass by with no shots fired. It is an interesting moment in the film, because the surrounding sound is of gunfire and shouts and falling planes, but for that moment, the visual connection between the American and Nazi is palpable. In this clip, students will be able to examine the notion of survivorship and the idea that war changes cultures, but in varying degrees.

The movie clips will also introduce media into the unit. As students view the clips, they will observe and analyze how the perspective of war changes when it is depicted on film and perhaps why it changes.

### **Interdisciplinary Connections**

This unit could certainly be combined with the 10<sup>th</sup> grade Global Studies classes. In their literature studies, students could be working on the texts, but the culminating project could be something that examines the historical aspects of the war in both literary and geographical contexts. If students happen to be studying Franklin Delano Roosevelt, they could delve more deeply into that aspect of the war and how World War II impacted his presidency and American society.

### **Heterogeneity & Diversity**

Students all participate in reading the same touchstone texts, which provides a foundation for class discussions about World War II. However, their free-writes and research project will allow them choice. Several prompts will be given to students for each journal entry they have to make, so they can select the one they relate to most. The research project is on a World War II figure of each student’s choosing. In addition, the culminating project allows students a choice in their form of presentation. If they are not comfortable utilizing technology or developing a creative research project, they can do a standard research paper. Each day presents the unit in a slightly different manner, allowing the unit to reach out to students of varying learning styles. Activities range from interactive opportunities (literature circles and class read-alouds/discussions) to reading and writing based opportunities (DWI – **D**rop and **W**rite Something Interesting) to independent activities (silent reading and independent research projects).

**Aligning with Literary Theorists**

In Olson, Appleman also states that giving students the opportunity to create meaning within a text allows them to create their own learning, giving them control over and confidence in their work. Reader-response criticism suggests that literature is subjective, not objective as New Critics would suggest. Thus, giving students the opportunity to freely write about their experiences with literature provides them with ample time to reflect upon the text and formulate their own analyses and thoughts about the writing.

This unit utilizes a lot of free-writing and perspective writing. Rosenblatt (2005) discusses the idea of reading as a “choosing activity.” Since no two students comes away from a particular text with the exact same constructed meaning, allowing students to free-write gives teachers the opportunity to see how students’ prior knowledge and experiences fit into their construction of meaning in the text and how they understand the details of the text.

Olson, C.B. (2007). *The reading/writing connection: Strategies for teaching and learning in the secondary classroom*. New York: Pearson.

Rosenblatt, L. (2005). The transactional theory of reading and writing. In *Making meaning with texts*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.