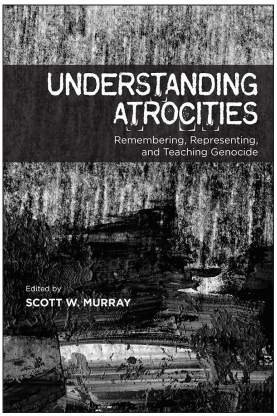
UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Press



UNDERSTANDING ATROCITIES: REMEMBERING, REPRESENTING, AND TEACHING GENOCIDE

Edited by Scott W. Murray

ISBN 978-1-55238-886-0

THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK. It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at ucpress@ucalgary.ca

Cover Art: The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this specific work without breaching the artist's copyright.

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Press
press.ucalgary.ca

Acknowledgement: *We acknowledge the wording around open access used by Australian publisher,* **re.press**, *and thank them for giving us permission to adapt their wording to our policy* http://www.re-press.org

8

Helping Children Understand Atrocities: Developing and Implementing an Undergraduate Course Titled War and Genocide in Children's Literature

Sarah Minslow

In fall 2012, I taught War and Genocide in Children's Literature for the first time. The course was offered as a third year cross-listed course at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, a large public university with majors in English, history, and international studies, and minors in children's literature and childhood studies, and the Holocaust, genocide, and human rights. Part of UNC Charlotte's mission is to "prepare students to become active citizens of the world," and this is a mission that underpins most of my pedagogy. While the desire I have for my students to become active citizens of the world is multifaceted, the population I focus most of my energy on is children in times and areas of conflict. More than a million children were murdered during the Holocaust. Today, one in every two displaced people is a person under the age of eighteen. According to Human Rights Watch, during the Rwandan genocide "countless thousands of children were slaughtered. … [A]t a mass grave in Kibuye province, some 44% [of the bodies] were of children under the age of fifteen."[1] Despite the glaring fact that children are heavily involved in and affected by war and genocide, people do not tend to combine war and genocide with children's literature. Partly, this is because when some people outside of literary circles hear the term "children's literature," they tend to think

of books that are happy, simple, apolitical, and unsophisticated. Rarely do they think about books that may broach the subjects of atrocity, genocide, death, destruction, or war. Whereas Romantic notions of childhood would have adults protect children from the unjust and often brutal aspects of life, many twenty-first-century authors of children's literature have found interesting ways to represent atrocities to children without traumatizing readers in the process of educating and socializing them. While Mavis Reimer states that "it is the literature of the last half of the nineteenth century that has set many of the narrative paradigms and practices of what we continue to recognize as children's texts,"[2] Zohar Shavit acknowledges shifts that have occurred in the past twenty years, writing in 2005 that "More than a decade ago, children's literature in the West was opened up to a number of subjects that had formerly been taboo and presented them in all their hardness—showing no mercy to young readers—in the belief that this is the pedagogically and psychologically correct way to prepare children to cope with the world."[3]

Children's "literature of atrocity" does "prepare children to cope with the world" when authors demonstrate great care and concern for their intended audiences.[4] They do not keep the darker realities of being a human in our world from child readers, but they present darker aspects of humanity in ways that allow child readers to gradually understand some reasons why conflict occurs—and most offer hope that the world can be a more peaceful place. In fact, children's literature has a long history of representing the darker sides of societies, often as a way to encourage children to change those societies. Kimberly Reynolds sees representations of social issues in writing for young people as potentially radical and transformative; she writes that "childhood is certainly a time for learning to negotiate and find a place in society, but it is also about developing individual potential suited to a future in which societies could be different in some significant ways."[5] This chapter is an examination of the classroom as a space for collectively arriving at criteria for children's "literature of atrocity" and understanding how social power can be wielded to change societies in significant ways. It is also an examination of strategies employed to move students from a misconception of children's literature as unsophisticated and apolitical to see its potential for changing attitudes, behaviours, and (potentially) the world.

In War and Genocide in Children's Literature, students read a variety of books intended for children and young adults that represent conflict, war, and genocide.[6] Texts include fiction, poetry, non-fiction, testimonies, textbooks, and memoirs. The books selected for the course are written by twenty-first-century authors from English-speaking countries, including Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In addition, the books chosen have won awards and are popular, widely available, and, thanks to high sales, still in print. Choosing books most students have not previously read allows the process of discovery to be mutual. This fosters a more cohesive sense of community and equality in the classroom, which is essential for an effective collaborative learning environment. The intended audiences of these texts range from roughly seven to seventeen years old.

The course begins with a discussion about how we will approach the books, and I model how to read for layers of ideological interpretations. This begins with the following questions: What is ideology? How do we identify ideologies in texts? And which ideologies are being challenged and which are being reinforced? Peter Hollindale describes the three main ways in which ideologies are represented in children's books: as either "surface ideology," the explicit and didactic purpose of the text; "passive ideology," the implicit beliefs of the author or narrator; or "underlying climate of belief," the surrounding social and cultural influences that give meaning to a word, action, label, or belief. He writes, "The first and most traceable is made up of the explicit social, political or moral beliefs of the individual writer, and his wish to recommend them to children through the story … its presence is conscious, deliberate, and in some measure 'pointed'. … It is at this level of intended surface ideology that fiction carries new ideas, non-conformist or revolutionary attitudes."[7] Passive ideology, Hollindale's second category, embraces those broader cultural attitudes, beliefs, and values that shape a text. The third level of ideology includes invisible (or underlying) ideologies: "the private, unrepeatable configurations which writers make at a subconscious level from the common stock of their experiences." Insofar as invisible ideologies often lead to "huge commonalities of an age," Hollindale argues that "a large part of any book is written not by its author but by the world its author lives in."[8] To elucidate the passive and underlying ideologies represented in a text, we need an approach to reading children's literature that ensures we remain attuned to multiple levels of ideological representation. Students are asked

to consider how authors represent the atrocities associated with war and genocide to a young audience and how these books may be used to socialize and educate children. Students also analyze the texts to determine whether they encourage positive or negative attitudes towards difference, war, and violence. They also consider how literature can function as a tool for promoting social change. The course addresses how these texts help child readers construct concepts of themselves as global citizens. However, at least half of the students are not English majors, and even those who are are not always used to close reading and critical engagement with children's literature. Borrowing from the disciplines of history, psychology, and political science, I begin by modelling how to read children's literature of atrocity while keeping in mind the multiple layers of ideology presented therein.[9] Modeling literary analysis gives students a better understanding of the expectations for future assignments and is a strategy for scaffolding their learning so that they are able to independently analyze texts through close reading. I also try to make them more aware of the thought processes involved in interpreting picture books. We review different elements of images, starting with a painting, and students discuss the body language, facial expressions, positioning, juxtaposition, colours, shadows and tones, and use of white space. These practice sessions prepare students to be more aware of the details in images in picture books they read for class.

By the end of this course, students are expected to be able to define the terms associated with genocide and xenophobia and thoughtfully discuss reasons for and the effects of xenophobia in society; discuss the circumstances of several different wars and genocides that have occurred (including who, what, where, and aspects of how), and how their effects have resonated in contemporary society; and analyze children's literature about war and genocide from critical positions in reference to concepts of the "child" and "childhood," and how those texts may shape children's attitudes.

Arguments regarding whether or not literature of atrocity should be written for young audiences are, unsurprisingly, numerous, and most students are unsure how "war and genocide" marries with "children's literature." So on the first day of class, students are asked to reconsider what a "child" is. In the first reading I assign, Susan Honeyman explains that "adults construct childhood based on biases that are personal, constantly changing, and often contradictory. There is no irrefutable or universal

meaning of 'child.' "[10] To proceed, students must understand not only how Western societies have constructed concepts of the child as innocent, apolitical, asexual, helpless, and dependent, but also how far this conception is from the realities of childhood for most real children. While it's true that there are millions of children who live in conflict zones and witness atrocities on a daily basis (the United Nations Children's Fund reported that 2014 was "a devastating year for children" because "as many as 15 million young people are caught in conflicts in the Central African Republic, Iraq, South Sudan, the Palestinian territories, Syria and Ukraine"), there are also many children who are much more resilient, hopeful, and capable of dealing with reality than adults often give them credit for.[11] Honeyman argues that "the obviousnesses of childhood have been: children are helpless; children should be protected; and if children do wrong, it is because they do not know any better. … [W]e view them as not having agency or consequence in ideology."[12] Yet this conception of childhood contradicts the evidence of memoirs from people who were children during times of war and genocide, such as Alfons Heck's *A Child of Hitler: Germany in the Days When God Wore a Swastika* or Dith Pran's *Children of Cambodia's Killing Fields: Memoirs by Survivors*. What students begin to realize is that children are powerful agents who continually reconfigure their identities in an attempt to survive within highly political, often traumatic contexts. What the students, in turn, begin to realize is that the Western conception of childhood is overgeneralized, essentialist, and ignores versions of childhood vastly different from middle-class, white, heterosexual ones.

Honeyman's concerns about essentializing the child have been expressed in various ways by multiple scholars of children's literature, since definitions of "children" influence which texts are labelled "children's literature." John Stephens writes that "writing for children is usually purposeful."[13] However, Perry Nodelman believes that "the differences [between adult literature and children's literature] are less significant than the similarities, that the pleasures of children's literature are essentially the pleasures of all literature."[14] For me, two of the most important "pleasures" of literature are its ability to offer alternative perspectives and inspire empathy. As reported in *Scientific American*, "Researchers at The New School in New York City have found evidence that literary fiction improves a reader's capacity to understand what others are thinking and feeling."[15] In the chapter "Benefits and Challenges of Genocide Education," Raffi Sarkissian

argues that genocide education "opens possibilities for empathetic forms of education to shift the barriers between societies where the concept of the Other is frequently raised and reinforced in harmful and destructive ways." As part of genocide education, children's literature also has the power to inspire social change. As Lindsay Myers writes, "If they are made with the right care and attention, books can be powerful agents of social change. Teaching children about war, however, is not so much about explaining the past as it is about inciting questions. … By actively involving the young reader in the history-making process, they convey in a very tangible way the importance of love, responsibility, peace, and truth."[16] So how do I get students from a simple awareness of children's literature of atrocity to the point where they are confident in their abilities to determine if a particular children's book about war or genocide is "good" or "bad"?

After defining the key terms for the course—including genocide, xenophobia, and war—and complicating students' conceptions of the "child" and "children's literature," we delve into categorizing people according to their action (or inaction) during genocide. Students are asked to consider specific conflicts from the perspectives of perpetrators, victims, bystanders, rescuers, and beneficiaries—terms discussed by Steven Baum and Christopher Browning. These categories function as a way to begin literary discussions about character, morality, ethics, idealism versus realism, and empathy. For instance, when reading Katherine Patterson's *The Day of the Pelican*, about a family from Kosovo that is forced to flee during the Bosnian genocide, readers are positioned to sympathize with the family, especially the narrator's older brother, Mehmet, who is kidnapped and beaten by Serbs. Later in the novel, when Mehmet expresses his hatred for Serbs and his pleasure in their destruction—"NATO is going to begin bombing the Serbs!"—readers are positioned to empathize with his feelings. However, in the next paragraph, Meli, the narrator, states "How could Mehmet be so happy. … Bombs don't know, when they fall, if you are a Serbian soldier or a Kosovar child. Bombs don't ask if you are guilty or innocent. They just fall, and if you are below, they kill you."[17] Forty pages later, Meli states that Baba took the family to America because it "was far from the threat of those Mehmet had learned so well how to hate. Hatred and the ancient thirst for revenge: that was what Baba feared most."[18] There is a general consensus among scholars of children's literature that literature of atrocity should always adopt an ethical position against war. Here,

The Day of the Pelican complicates the seeming simplicity of that ethical position because the book at once encourages empathy for someone who hates the people who have targeted him and his family for persecution, while simultaneously reinforcing the ideology that war is never victimless and that hate is dangerous and a learned behaviour. Most readers will understand why Mehmet is angry and has revenge fantasies against the Serbs, yet through the thoughts of Meli and Baba, readers are not allowed to ignore the damaging effects of war on humanity if Mehmet is to react with violence. Readers of *The Day of the Pelican* are positioned to consider whether Mehmet can have justice without risking the death of innocent civilians, and if not, what takes priority.

These ethical dilemmas provide space for young readers to consider the complexities of war. Even though writing literature of atrocity for children is complicated, "the subject cannot simply be avoided" because there is "a moral obligation upon adults to tell children what happened."[19] Claiming that literature of atrocity for young audiences "sets out to inform a new generation of readers about the horrors" of the past, Ruth Gilbert agrees: the reasons children need to be informed are to encourage empathy, to prevent future atrocities, and to prepare children for the real, often unjust, world.[20] Reynolds has acknowledged a more recent shift after the "issue" books of the 1960's became popular and portrayals of children shifted noticeably from those of the "innocent" child to those of the "knowing" child. Trying to protect children from history and reality is a form of censorship and while many people's knee-jerk reaction is to discourage an awareness of war and violence among young people, there are those who agree with Honeyman that "Denying any young person access to certain types of knowledge … is an infringement, not protection—it is robbing another person of their rightful agency—but we have morally twisted the imperative of protecting the innocence of childhood to the point that we usually fail to see it clearly, and even more rarely do we feel comfortable questioning it, lest we be accused of harshness toward those we should protect."[21] Therefore, the first hurdle to overcome for some students is understanding why children's literature of atrocity is important. To explain why, students respond to a few simple questions by raising their hands. The questions include: How many of you were taught in school that what settlers did to Native Americans was genocide? How many of you saw images in textbooks of the destruction caused in Japan by the dropping of

the atomic bombs? By revealing to students their own gaps in knowledge based on selective education and then showing them that there are children's books that fill these gaps, most students begin to wonder why they were not taught certain aspects of history as young people. One student said that a big part of becoming an adult is realizing you have been lied to most of your life.

Yet, the literature of atrocity must also provide special consideration for young people who at once need to be encouraged to learn history, prevent future wars, and feel some sense of control over or power to respond to or prevent atrocity. "Educating without overwhelming" requires a delicate balance.[22] At the beginning of the course, we do quite a lot of reading to develop a shared vocabulary with which to talk respectfully about genocide without creating hierarchies of suffering or victimization. Students have to read the first two chapters of Doris Bergen's *War and Genocide* to get a better understanding of the background to the Holocaust and other genocides in general. Students are asked to compose a list of criteria they may use to evaluate children's literature of atrocity before they read any scholarly articles. This list becomes a working document. After reading several critical articles, such as Lydia Williams's "We're All in the Dumps with Bakhtin: Humor and the Holocaust," Sarah Jordan's "Educating without Overwhelming," Elizabeth Baer's "A New Algorithm in Evil: Children's Literature in a Post-Holocaust World," and Ruth Gilbert's "Grasping the Unimaginable: Recent Holocaust Novels for Children by Morris Gleitzman and John Boyne," the students evaluate their individual lists based on the arguments they have read. Then, as a class, they defend their final list until we devise a list of criteria they see as essential do's and don'ts when writing literature of atrocity for young audiences, and as a way to begin establishing a method of evaluating the literature. This process demonstrates how they can use their informed opinions and voices to enter into scholarly discourse, which is an essential skill for undergraduate students to learn.

Writing specifically about the children's literature on the Holocaust, Elizabeth Baer explains the required balancing act in practice when she states that creating literature of atrocity for children "calls upon us to make judicious choices in sharing the horrors of the Shoah … it calls for a consciousness on our part of the crucial need to confront the evil, to contextualize it, to warn children, and to provide them with a framework for

consciousness, for making moral choices and taking personal responsibility."[23] While emphasizing the need to assist children with seeing the implications between what they are reading and their own personal lives and formation as global citizens, I ask students to consider Baer's call to "confront the evil." In class, we discuss the use of the word "evil" to describe the Holocaust. We will never fully understand the Holocaust, so authors of children's literature about the Holocaust or other genocides should not attempt to explain them simply. The use of the word evil implies a force that is beyond human; this abstraction negates the emphasis that authors or teachers should place on moral choices and personal responsibility when writing, reading, or teaching children's literature of atrocity. In his address at the "Understanding Atrocities" conference, James Waller explained that we protect ourselves by making the perpetrators into something incredibly different from us—evil—and he continued to delineate the processes that occur when "ordinary" people choose to commit acts of genocide.[24] Evil is human, and genocide depends on humans being willing to murder one another. Students must understand and be prepared to analyze how texts for young readers portray the inhumanity of war and the human aspect of violent perpetration.

In my experience teaching human rights, students are most engaged when they feel confident that they can meaningfully contribute to the course. Even though the course attracts students from political science, history, education, English, and international studies, I have found that most students know more about the Holocaust than they do about other wars and genocides, so one way I have been able to build their confidence and create a comfortable learning environment is to begin the course with the Holocaust. First, students read excerpts from several Holocaust memoirs, including Heda Kovaly's *Under a Cruel Star*, Mira Hamermesh's *River of Angry Dogs*, and Ruth Kluger's *Still Alive*, each from the Jewish child's perspective, and *A Child of Hitler* by Alfons Heck, from a Nazi child's perspective. While these are not intended for child audiences, they do provide insight into the lived experiences of actual children during the Holocaust. This also provides a framework for talking about tropes within children's literature of atrocity that include the effects of trauma and the role of memory in formulating testimony. This gives a frame of reference for the authenticity of fictional texts with child protagonists, which becomes increasingly important as the class progresses with a focus on historical

accuracy. While there is a plethora of books written for young people that address aspects of the Holocaust, I assign *Once* and *Then* by Australian author Morris Gleitzman because they best exemplify most of the strategies discussed in the articles assigned.

Adrienne Kertzer claims that "children's books about the Holocaust seem to function primarily to explain what adult texts often claim is ultimately inexplicable."[25] Because of this, Kertzer is critical of books that try to offer simple explanations of the Holocaust, specifically, but of war and genocide in general, too. Some children's literature about war and genocide is sophisticated, and books that are most worthy of inclusion in curricula, such as *Breaking Stalin's Nose* by Eugene Yelchin and *A Million Shades of Gray* by Cynthia Kadohata, are those that do not attempt to offer simple explanations for complex issues. There are several guidelines that scholars have offered to authors who choose to write literature of atrocity for young people. These guidelines can be used as evaluation criteria when analyzing children's literature of atrocity. In class, we interrogate these guidelines and then use them to create an evaluative framework. To interrogate the guidelines, I allow students to choose an article from a list then answer questions about the main points of the article. The student must summarize the article for the class, and identify what the writer is saying and what it means. Then the student must enter into the academic conversation by explaining how the article converses with other articles we have read and our class discussions. Thirdly, the student must offer extensions or challenges to the argument presented in the article to input their own voice into the conversation.

Lawrence Langer argues that authors of children's literature about the Holocaust should "create a framework for responding, rather than meaning."[26] By this, he means that authors can raise questions in the readers' minds about the events without "using—and perhaps abusing—its grim details." Langer also warns against creating books about the Holocaust designed to entertain or delight children. Although delight is usually a top priority for authors, when it applies to literature of atrocity, it is important that readers not lose focus on the underlying moral lessons in the narrative and that they are repeatedly reminded that while the story they are reading may be fictional, the victims of war and genocide are not. These concerns merit true consideration and are important in setting up a framework of limitations within which authors of children's literature of atrocity should

work. Writing specifically about Holocaust literature, Lydia Williams specifies these limitations in her article "We're All in the Dumps with Bakhtin: Humor and the Holocaust":

> The Holocaust should be represented, in its totality, as a unique event in history. Representations of the Holocaust should be as accurate and faithful as possible. No changes, even for artistic reasons, are acceptable. The Holocaust should be treated as a solemn, even sacred, event, with a seriousness admitting no response that might obscure its enormity or dishonor its dead. All writing about the Holocaust should adopt an ethical position that fosters resistance. And we must not forget.[27]

Students are asked to conceptualize what they should look for in children's literature of atrocity to determine if it is "good" or "appropriate" for educating and socializing young readers. Williams argues that "Holocaust stories immediately break some of the generally accepted norms of children's fiction. They introduce the child to a world in which parents are not in control, where evil is truly present and where survival does not depend on one's wits, but upon luck."[28] Because of this, students must reconsider their ideas about what is or is not "appropriate" material to include in children's books. Students reconsider their conceptions of children's literature and begin to understand how to analyze books written for young audiences according to authorial strategies used to depict graphic violence, provide a framework for understanding, and provide space for readers to explore their own ideas about discrimination, morality, and personal responsibility.

Gleitzman's texts are a good example of books that provide a frame of reference for young readers. He has a fantastic ability to write about tough subjects—war, death, cults, AIDS, bullying—for young people with honesty and without overwhelming them with a sense of impending doom or anxiety. Here I model analysis and point out how to pay attention to details, word choices, allusions, and the authorial strategies used to create distance between the reader and the events described. For example, the protagonist in *Once* and *Then* is nine-year-old Felix. Left in an orphanage, Felix isn't sure where his parents, Jewish booksellers, have gone, but when the Nazis come to the orphanage and burn books, he decides that he has to

escape to let his parents know that the Nazis hate books and they must save the bookstore. Not until seventy pages in does Felix admit: "Maybe it's not our books the Nazis hate. Maybe it's us."[29] These kinds of revelations of the more gruesome aspects of the Holocaust are gradually introduced to Felix and therefore to the child reader. As Felix continues his journey, he also encounters good people who assist him. This integration of decent human beings in the midst of war and genocide is another technique used to avoid horrifying young readers. However, such tales of heroics must be integrated carefully to avoid negating the reality that more than six million Jews were systematically murdered during the Holocaust and more than eleven million people in total perished. For instance, Barney and Genia rescue children in *Once*, but neither of them survives Nazi persecution despite their righteous acts. When writing about tough subjects, Gleitzman also creates a relatable protagonist with whom readers can sympathize, but the constant reminders that this boy lives in Poland in the 1940s and has been abandoned by his parents during a time of war makes his situation less threatening to contemporary young readers in Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, or Canada.

From reading responses, article summaries, and class discussions, students from the previous three years have compiled the following list of criteria against which they evaluate the books assigned in the course.

Authors should be historically accurate

This does not mean that they cannot omit specific details that may be too graphic; however, it does require that they not purposefully distort history or provide inaccurate details. One way that authors often provide accurate historical details without overwhelming readers is through the use of paratext. For instance, at the beginning of her picture book *Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust*, Eve Bunting provides the following author's note:

> In Europe, during World War II, many people looked the other way while terrible things happened. They pretended not to know their neighbors were being taken away and locked in concentration camps. They pretended not to hear their cries for help. The Nazis killed millions of Jews and others in the Holocaust. If

> everyone had stood together at the first sign of evil would this have happened? Standing up for what you know is right is not always easy. Especially if the one you face is bigger and stronger than you. It is easier to look the other way. But if you do, terrible things can happen.[30]

The paratext in this book is important because the "Terrible Things" are not clearly defined or recognizable, and those targeted for persecution by Nazis are portrayed as forest animals. Baer argues that the book "makes no overt reference to the Holocaust and provides no context for understanding."[31] While I agree with Baer that "it would fall to the adult reader to provide context," the book uses paratext to situate the narrative and makes an overt reference to the Holocaust in the title. Yet, Baer's article reminds students that literature of atrocity for young children is best shared with a knowledgeable adult who can answer questions such books may raise in young readers' minds. My students and I tend to agree that this book is highly effective in achieving its intended purpose, which is to introduce young people to the Holocaust, to encourage discussion, and to highlight that standing by when bad things happen often results in lasting negative effects. In this instance, standing by leads to the loss of friends, neighbours, and family. Even though the story has animal characters to make it less threatening and perhaps more appealing to young children, the title and the paratext ensure that readers make the connection between the story and the actual event. Because the "Terrible Things" are portrayed as large grey masses without faces or a distinct shape, this book provides an opportunity for educators (or other adults) to apply the lesson about standing by to threats children may face in their daily lives, such as bullying or discrimination. The trope of emphasizing personal responsibility and the importance of individual choices is represented in this book.

Authors should strive for emotional honesty as well as historical accuracy

In *Then*, another work that demonstrates the value of paratext, Gleitzman explains that he read a lot of books about people who "lived and struggled and loved and died and, just a few of them, survived," but he goes on to

say that he "also read about the generosity and bravery of the people who risked everything to shelter others … and by doing so sometimes saved them."[32] In the novel, Felix's Polish rescuer and his best friend, Zelda, are hanged in the town square, and Felix must find the courage and strength to rebuild his life after the devastation of losing those he loved most. While some may criticize Gleitzman for "killing off" two of the main characters who readers have been positioned to care about most, this allows the reader to experience the feelings of sadness and anger just as Felix does, and it allows readers the space to humanize the stories of the Holocaust. Reading fiction in a safe space acts as a means to make the Holocaust more, rather than less, real. The important criteria for children's literature of atrocity here is that authors must be honest about emotionally difficult materials. To omit that people lost those closest to them would be an injustice to the victims of war and genocide. As Lydia Kokkala writes, "Devices intended to spare the child can ultimately result in an evasion of the truth," and she concludes that "any device which limits the amount of truthfulness depicted would be acceptably responsible, but, that any device which distorts the truth is unethical."[33]

Felix is also an avid storyteller, and when times get scary, such as when he is locked into a cattle car heading for Auschwitz, he creates his own stories to distance himself from the violence around him, thus distancing the child reader as well. While the reader is aware something terrible may be about to happen, they do not have to confront graphic violence head on. This being said, young readers aren't completely shielded from violence either. The book is about the Holocaust, and the author embraces the need to be as historically accurate as possible. When scavenging for food, Felix finds a baby, still in its highchair, that has been shot in the face. He meets a small group of children with whom he hides in the sewers, and one of the children is shot while running from Nazis. When he's hiding with a Polish woman who claims he is her nephew, a German boy bullies him and nearly jerks his pants down to reveal his circumcision, but, in what quickly becomes a moment of comic relief for a lot of child readers, he defecates to deter the bullies and gets away.

Comic relief is also provided by Felix's sassy sidekick Zelda, whose parents were Nazis killed by the Polish resistance. Zelda is six, and she repeatedly chimes in with "Don't you know anything?" and we see the events as a child might—with a limited understanding of the magnitude of the danger

around her, but a clear understanding of its constant presence. Through the development of Zelda's friendship with Felix, and Felix's cheery conversations with a boy from the Hitler Youth with whom he shares a favourite author, child readers are encouraged to consider how these children could grow into adults who hate each other enough to kill each other. They see that Nazis and Jews are not natural enemies, that Nazis were real humans, and that even when we belong to different groups, we may still have a lot in common. Vahan, the protagonist, echoes this sentiment in Adam Bagdasarian's *Forgotten Fire* when he thinks, "I had thought servants were born servants and that they were different from me. Now I knew that they were no different at all."[34] While seemingly simple in their language and plot structure, these texts provide a starting point for discussing the more complex aspects of genocide and of children's literature. The main point is that hatred of the Other is learned; therefore, it can be unlearned and combated with lessons that encourage respect for and acceptance of the Other.

Authors should resist simple explanations

To encourage child readers to continue thinking about the important themes raised in the books, authors often give their stories an ambiguous ending. Such endings are popular in more radical or subversive children's literature, such as Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, a dystopian novel about a young boy choosing to flee from his safe community after realizing that the utopia depends on killing some people for no reason. Three books that we read for this course that have particularly ambiguous, thought-provoking endings are *The Butter Battle Book* by Dr. Seuss, *Enemy: A Book about Peace* by Davide Cali and Serge Bloch, and *The Rabbits* by John Marsden and Shaun Tan. In *The Butter Battle Book*, the Yooks and the Zooks engage in a race to build the most destructive weapon to wipe out their enemy because they do not butter their bread on the same side. As Tanya Jeffcoat explains, "Each group assumes the other is somehow inferior for having made a different cultural choice. … Once people decide that their way is the best way and that those who don't agree are somehow essentially inferior, it becomes all too easy to justify discrimination and persecution."[35] The means by which perpetrators dehumanize potential victims becomes a major focus of analysis and discussion for the course. However, the ending of *The Butter Battle Book* portrays a face off on top of the wall between an

old Zook and an old Yook. Both hold identical weapons, "the Bitsy Big-Boy Boomeroo," designed to blow the enemy to "small smithereens." As they eye each other and hold out their weapons, the texts reads, "Who's going to drop it? Will you … ? Or will he … ?"[36] Again the focus is on individual choice and personal responsibility emphasized by the use of the word "you," the question marks, and the ellipses to draw the reader in and more fully engage them in the tension of being faced with making this choice. The question really is: Reader, what would you do? We are encouraged by the text to think about the consequences of personal actions, and the absurdness of the texts, such as fighting over which side of the bread you butter, encourages readers to consider what might actually be a justifiable reason to engage in war given the destruction and devastation it causes.

Authors should resist closure and provoke thought

In *The Enemy: A Book about Peace*, the only characters are two soldiers sitting in their individual holes. One of the soldiers is the focalizing character, and readers get a firsthand account of his inner thought processes as he sits in a trench. He is hungry and tired and wants to go home and be with his family. Yet, he continues the war because he has been given a manual and a gun, and the manual informs him that the enemy is "a wild beast. … The enemy is not a human being."[37] While the soldier struggles with trying to find a way to end the war, his actions are mirrored by those of the other soldier, so readers can safely assume the other soldier's emotions also mirror those of the narrator. When the narrator makes his way to the other soldier's hole, he finds it empty and also discovers the enemy's manual and family photos. The narrator states, "I didn't expect him to have a family" and recognizes that he himself is portrayed as the "enemy" in the other soldier's manual. This picture book highlights how the "enemy" is constructed by those who benefit most from conflict, such as politicians and weapons manufacturers, in ways that fully seek to dehumanize the people who actually end up fighting the wars. Then it encourages readers to acknowledge the actual human toll of conflict by what I call "re-humanizing" the enemy. The family photos are real black-and-white photographs, so when juxtaposed to the simple scratch drawings on every other page, the reader is forced to connect the fictional story with real victims of real wars. On the last page, the narrator throws a peace request via a message

in a bottle to the "enemy" who is now in the narrator's hole. As he does, the "enemy" again mirrors his action, and the book ends with these hopeful messages of peace in the air. Upon turning the page, though, readers see a full-page spread of soldiers lined up; two spots are empty, representing the fact that the two characters in the book are no longer there. Students in my class interpret this in several different ways. Some say it means the soldiers are dead. Others say it portrays them as deserters, while still others say it represents the personal choice and complicity required to carry out war and genocide. If all of the soldiers on the page chose to not fight, there would not be a war. While all of these are supportable interpretations, they demonstrate that the ambiguous ending is a key strategy authors use to force readers to think more about the issues associated with war and genocide long after the book is closed.

Authors should inspire hope

This, however, does not mean that the book must have a happy ending. For instance, at the end of the picture book *Rose Blanche*, by Roberto Innocenti and Christophe Gallaz, the young protagonist is shot and killed by Russian soldiers on their way to liberate the concentration camps. Child readers do not witness her death; the text simply states, "There was a shot," and when they turn the page, Rose Blanche, who has been present on every spread, is no longer there. While this may sadden readers, the last spread is the natural landscape in spring. Whereas the prior spreads were mostly grey, dark reds, and browns, this spread shows green grass, flowers of all colours blooming, and the regeneration of the natural landscape. This regeneration is symbolic of the fact that even though people die during war, after the war, life continues and can be good. On the last page, in the same position where Rose Blanche last stood, there is a red poppy.[38]

Other criteria students have compiled include emphasizing how things happened, not just the outcome—focusing on what led to the event, not just the event itself; promoting understanding without offering conclusive resolutions; recognizing and adhering to the limits of representation of genocide through the use of silence, allusion, and shadows; and distancing young readers from the horrors through strategies such as using child focalizers who have a limited understanding of what is unfolding around them and allowing readers to gradually learn as the character does.

Students also acknowledge that there are certain things authors of children's literature of atrocity should not do. For instance, authors should not romanticize or glorify conflict; generalize too much or rely on stereotypes; or try to offer simple answers to complex questions simply to ease child readers' minds. Interestingly, most of my students agree that while graphic violence for its own sake should be excluded from children's literature of atrocity, child readers should be a bit shocked by the texts so that they are more likely to continue thinking about it after reading and to do something to try to prevent such atrocities in the future.

Other books we read include *My Hiroshima*, *So Far from the Sea*, *Yertle the Turtle*, *Breaking Stalin's Nose*, *Persepolis*, *Maus I*, *Deogratias*, *A Million Shades of Gray*, *The Bosnia List*, *Fallen Angels*, *A Long Walk to Water*, and *Forgotten Fire*. To provide context I give some details on each war or conflict and use resources not necessarily intended for child audiences. These include excerpts from *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, *Schindler's List*, *In the Land of Blood and Honey*, *The Killing Fields*, *Hotel Rwanda*, and *War Witch*. Another important aspect of the course is that I have students read a popular work of fiction that is not as clearly about war and genocide as most texts for the class. This is important because it helps students see how conflict is ingrained in our society as something that is inevitable and that children are exposed to concepts associated with war and genocide from early ages with little context. The texts used so far are *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins and *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card. The film versions were released during the semester in which the class read them, and students were more engaged with the texts given the surrounding hype. In 2014, the class read Suzanne Collins's newly published picture book *A Year in the Jungle*, about her personal struggles being a six-year-old whose dad fought in the Vietnam War and returned with post-traumatic stress disorder.

To assess student learning and provide opportunities for students to develop their reading, writing, research, group work, and presentation skills, I assign reading responses for each academic article required for the course. Most students are juniors or seniors, so I review for them how to read academic texts closely as researchers. This involves multiple readings, looking for key ideas, identifying claims and evidence, determining their own opinions in response, justifying those opinions, and articulating their responses. In this way, students become more prepared for further research

in the humanities or social sciences, and potentially for graduate school. A common weakness among students is their inability to form their own responses to the readings, or to interject their own voices into the ongoing academic dialogue related to the topics we study. These reading responses give each student two chances per semester to practice. After the first, formative feedback is provided so student responses are more developed the second time. This is designed according to the "seven principles of good feedback practice," which state that formative feedback should "help clarify what good performance is … provide opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance … and provide information to teachers that can be used to help shape the teaching."[39]

Another assignment is a small group project where I allow students to choose from a list I provide a book that they would like to analyze and present to the class based on the framework we have established. Students are given a loosely detailed assignment sheet so that they have a lot of choice in determining how they prefer to demonstrate their learning. For instance, the minimum requirements are that they provide background information and statistics related to the conflict represented in the book and that they thoroughly summarize and offer an analysis of the book. Groups have addressed these requirements in various ways, including standard class presentations using Prezi or PowerPoint, making a video, and constructing a website. The group members evaluate one another, every student evaluates each group according to a provided rubric, and each student completes a reflective writing on what they learned from the project about the topic, themselves, and working as a group. While initially, most students cringe at group work, particularly on a campus that is made up mostly of commuters, I attempt to motivate them by explaining that knowledge construction occurs in dialogue with others, and that learning is communal; that students need the professional skills of being able to manage their time, to work with others whose opinions, visions, and working styles may differ from their own, and to produce something meaningful with other people. All of this contributes to the emphasis placed on working together to improve society as a whole. Students also have to complete a literary analysis research essay to demonstrate their ability to analyze children's literature of atrocity with close consideration of the criteria established during the course.

War is not inevitable, and if people see it is as such, it removes any personal responsibility we have to try to prevent it. As a professor, I want my students to leave the course empowered to make the world a more peaceful place. This is one reason each class completes a Promoting Peace Project. Students have to work together to organize a campus- or community-wide event that promotes a more peaceful society. This idea was inspired by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum's "From Memory to Action" exhibition. This exhibit exists, in part, to get people to think about what they can do to prevent atrocities. For this project, the entire class works together to organize an event aimed at promoting peace on our campus, in our community, or around the globe. They begin with a budget of zero and have four months to complete the project. Grades are derived from peer evaluations, my observations, each person's willingness to cooperate and collaborate, the overall evaluation of the event, and bi-weekly blogs by each student throughout the process detailing how the project unfolds and what they contribute. Students also complete a reflection on the project and explain how it relates to what they have learned in class and about the whole group-work process. The first year of the course, students organized a bone-making event for the national art installation, One Million Bones. Students on UNC Charlotte's campus created more than 600 bones that were then shipped to the National Mall for an installation designed to "create a powerful visual petition against ongoing genocide and mass atrocities."[40] In fall 2013, students organized a peace rock painting event on campus and created a peace garden behind Atkins Library. When people passed by, students asked them to write on a whiteboard what peace means to them and then took their picture and posted it to the event's Facebook and Instagram pages. The peace garden full of painted rocks is still on campus. In fall 2015, the class organized "Pinwheels for Peace" through the organizations Students Rebuild. Their goal was to have people make at least 300 pinwheels, and for each pinwheel the Bezos Foundation donated $2 to children's education programs for Syrian refugees. The class surpassed their goal, making 581 pinwheels and raising over $1,100. At all events, students had children's books on display and talked to their fellow students about what they were learning in class while the students made a bone, folded a pinwheel, or painted a rock. People are usually surprised to learn that there is so much children's literature about war and genocide, and it serves to remind them of the millions of children affected by conflict every day.

Ultimately, my goal as a professor is to do what I can to educate my students and empower them to do what they can, where they are, with what they have. The War and Genocide in Children's Literature course allows students to gain a deeper awareness and appreciation of children's literature in general because it challenges any misconceptions that children's literature is unsophisticated, apolitical, or unworthy of academic study. In addition, they develop the necessary skills for evaluating books for young audiences that tackle tough issues, and they gain the ability to decide how to best present conflict to young audiences and to talk to children about atrocities, such as the events of 9/11, and the ongoing genocide in South Sudan. Mostly, I aim to remind students of our common humanity, to teach them that every human life is valuable, that genocide and war are preventable, and that we all have a personal responsibility to take action to prevent it. One of the students in my course in 2013 summed it up best in the personal mantra she was asked to devise after reading Linda Sue Park's novel *A Long Walk to Water*. She wrote, "The probability that what you do will not make a positive difference does not negate your responsibility to try."

NOTES

1 "Children Targeted in the Genocide," Human Rights Watch, http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/rwanda0403/rwanda0403-03.htm (accessed 10 January 2013).

2 Mavis Reimer, "Making Princesses, Re-making a Little Princess," in *Voices of the Other: Children's Literature in the Postcolonial Context*, ed. Rod McGillis (New York: Routledge, 2012), 112.

3 Zohar Shavit, *A Past Without Shadow: Constructing the Past in German Books for Children* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 294.

4 Lawrence Langer, *The Holocaust and Literary Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975).

5 Kimberley Reynolds, *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 10.

6 This course was developed after attending the Silberman Seminar for Faculty Development at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. I am indebted to the generosity of that institution, to the instructors, and to my fellow participants.

7 Peter Hollindale, "Ideology and the Children's Book," in *Literature for Children: Contemporary Criticism,* ed. Peter Hunt (London: Routledge, 1992), 27.

8 Ibid., 32.

9 The main readings that inform the framework for the course are Doris Bergen's *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (London: Rowman & Littlefield,

2003), Steven K. Baum's *The Psychology of Genocide: Perpetrators, Bystanders, and Rescuers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Adam Jones's *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2010), Christopher R. Browning's *Ordinary Men* (New York: Harper Collins, 2013), and Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press, 2010).

10 Susan Honeyman, *Elusive Childhood: Impossible Representations in Modern Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005), 2.

11 Michele Kelemen, "2014 A Year of 'Unspeakable Brutality' for Children in Conflict Zones," National Public Radio, 8 December 2014.

12 Honeyman, *Elusive Childhood*, 2.

13 John Stephens, *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* (London: Longman, 1992), 3.

14 Perry Nodelman, *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (New York: Longman, 1992), 20.

15 Julianne Chiaet, "Novel Finding: Reading Literary Fiction Improves Empathy," *Scientific American*, 4 October 4 2013.

16 Lindsay Myers, "What Do We Tell the Children? War in the Works of Roberto Innocenti," *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 47, no. 4 (October 2009): 46.

17 Katherine Patterson, *The Day of the Pelican* (Boston: Clarion Books, 2009), 50.

18 Ibid., 90.

19 Lydia Williams, "We Are All in the Dumps with Bakhtin: Humor and the Holocaust," in *Children's Literature and the Fin de Siecle*, ed. Roderick McGillis (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 130.

20 Ruth Gilbert, "Grasping the Unimaginable: Recent Holocaust Novels for Children by Morris Gleitzman and John Boyne," *Children's Literature in Education* 41, no. 4 (2010): 355.

21 Honeyman, *Elusive Childhood*, 145.

22 Sarah Jordan, "Educating without Overwhelming: Authorial Strategies in Children's Holocaust Literature," *Children's Literature in Education* 35, no. 3 (2004): 200.

23 Elizabeth R. Baer, "A New Algorithm in Evil: Children's Literature in a post-Holocaust World," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 24, no. 3 (Sept 2000): 391.

24 James Waller, "The Dead End of Demonization," paper presented at "Understanding Atrocities: Remembering, Representing, and Teaching Genocide," Mount Royal University, Calgary AB, 19–21 February 2014.

25 Adrienne Kertzer, " 'Do You Know What "Auschwitz" Means?' Children's Literature and the Holocaust," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 23, no. 2 (1999): 240.

26 Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, 12.

27 Lydia Williams, "We Are All in the Dumps," 129.

28 Ibid., 130.

29 Morris Gleitzman, *Once* and *Then* (Victoria, AU: Penguin, 2005).

30 Eve Bunting, *Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust*, illus. Stephen Gammell (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1980).

31 Baer, "Children's Literature in a Post-Holocaust World," 387.

32 Gleitzman, *Then*, 339.

33 Lydia Kokkola, "Holocaust Narratives and the Ethics of Truthfulness," *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 45, no. 4 (2007): 9.

34 Adam Bagdasarian, *Forgotten Fire* (New York: Random House, 2000).

35 Tanya Jeffcoat, "From There to Here, from Here to There, Diversity is Everywhere," in *Dr. Seuss and Philosophy*, ed. Jacob M. Held (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 94.

36 Dr. Seuss, *The Butter Battle Book* (New York: Random House, 1984).

37 Davide Cali and Serge Bloch, *The Enemy: A Book about Peace (*New York: Schwartz & Wade, 2009).

38 Christophe Gallaz and Roberto Innocenti, *Rose Blanche* (Mankato, MN: Creative Paperbacks, 1985).

39 Charles Juwah, et al., "Enhancing student learning through effective formative feedback," 2.

40 http://studentsrebuild.org/find-challenge/one-million-bones-challenge/why-challenge (accessed 23 September 2015).