

TEACHING IDEAS
for the novel,
THE ASSIGNMENT:

**SCROLL down for pre-reading, reading,
and post reading ideas**

- **The link below contains a complete curriculum guide developed by Emily Hoang, English teacher and Puente Team Member at James Logan High School, Union City, California. Shared with permission for your use:**

Material included: timeline to teach the book, questions, activities, writing projects, and so much more!

To access all of Ms. Hoang's curriculum:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1fN0mzUFORmoxwj1nfM9kUVZm2JzORk5c?usp=sharing>

Topics included in the novel for possible addition research:

The Wannsee Conference, Germany's Final Solution of the Jewish Question, Nuremberg Laws, Germany's Lebensborn program, the false concept of inferior and superior races, eugenics, ghettos, concentration camps, Nuremberg Trials, Eichmann and his trial, Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Center, World War II immigration laws and antisemitism, MS *St. Louis*, Kristallnacht, World War II POWs, Holocaust by bullets, propaganda, the spread of propaganda and hatred found on the internet, refugees during World War II and today.

For teachers: A list of antisemitic tropes and stereotypes people should be aware of:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1mQwXWVY_ZbnZkR8oAvFyafP

[gmQ3TsYWQzs4_hi-fimA/edit?usp=sharing](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmQ3TsYWQzs4_hi-fimA/edit?usp=sharing)

Video interviews of Holocaust Survivor, Jack Dygola - he was the inspiration for Grandpa in the novel

<https://youtu.be/zRjYoDYf3Bw?si=i5O6A-rNGOc34Tsl>

<https://youtu.be/vXwNWQjyYHA?si=i6Chfti6veH3JFMv>

Pre-reading activities:

Background Knowledge:

We have found that students may not have a solid understanding of the Holocaust or The Final Solution when starting this book.

What was the Holocaust?

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/introduction-to-the-holocaust>

What was the Final Solution of the Jewish Question?

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/final-solution-overview>

Antisemitic stereotypes and tropes: Did you know all of these?

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1mQwXWVY_ZbnZkR8oAvFyafPgmQ3TsYWQzs4_hi-fimA/edit?usp=sharing

So powerful!!! Message from Arnold Schwarzenegger on hate:

<https://youtu.be/jsETTn7Dehl>

Pre-reading survey on Upstanders: Feel free to use this template:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScFhbf-dFksEHmKOIA__DrTOVOwBpVIXlvWFiUugge6gtvNwg/viewform?usp=sf_link

Additional ideas:

- 1. Pre-reading ally, upstander, and bystander survey - recommend using Google forms if your students have access to it. (This can be done anonymously) - adapted from seventh grade teacher, Tara Daniels**

Q: How would you define DISCRIMINATION? (this could be multiple choice)

Q: How would you define ANTISEMITISM? (this could be multiple choice)

Q: Do you think it's important to be an upstander? Yes? No? Explain.

Q: Do you consider yourself an upstander or a bystander?

Q: If you witness someone being bullied or see any kind of hatred, bigotry, and injustice, including antisemitism and racism, would you take action? If yes, what would you do or what have you done in the past?

Q. Have you ever been in a situation where you experienced an act of bullying or discrimination and wished someone had spoken up for you? Explain.

Additional pre-reading questions for a survey:

Q. What was the Holocaust?

1. The systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of 6,000,000 European Jews by Nazi Germany and its allies and collaborators, which evolved from 1933 to 1945—throughout WWII.
2. Any state-sponsored murder
3. The attack on Pearl Harbor during WWII, which brought America into the war.

Q: What was the Final Solution of the Jewish Question?

1. It's the final answer on how society can stop antisemitism—hatred toward Jewish people.
2. The deliberate plan on how to implement Nazi Germany's plan to exterminate Europe's 11,000,000 Jews, which was discussed in great detail during the Wannsee Conference on January 20, 1942
3. The attack on Pearl Harbor during WWII, which brought America into the war.

Additional Upstander pre-reading survey created on Google doc:

Q: Have you ever been bullied?

Yes

No

Q. If yes, were you bullied...

Online

In person

Both

Q. If yes, did you or someone else speak up or do something to stop the bullying?

Yes

No

Q. If you're comfortable, describe what happened. (paragraph for students to answer)

Q. Do you see yourself as an upstander, one who speaks up against hatred, bigotry and injustice that's either directed toward you, your peers, or a particular group? This includes people with physical, mental, or learning disabilities, people of different religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, etc.

Yes, most of the time or almost always

No

Sometimes

Rarely

Q. Have you heard anyone say, "Snitches get stitches" or "Stitches for snitches"?

Yes

No

Q. If yes, do you think that statement prevented you or someone else from speaking up?

Yes

No

Probably

Not sure

Q. Why do you think it's so challenging for people to speak up against any form of hatred, bigotry, or injustice? (paragraph to answer)

NOTE FROM LIZA WIEMER, author: Regarding "Snitches get stitches." I always ask students if they have heard this phrase. Almost every time, all students' hands go up. It's a phrase used across the United States as well as Australia and New Zealand.

I explain to students that this is a cowardly thing to say. Why? Because people who say this know they did something wrong and don't have the courage to own up to their mistake(s) or misdeed(s). It's courageous to speak up and it's cowardly to use intimidation to silence other people. This shift in perception empowers upstanders. We want to encourage students to take responsibility for their actions.

2. Strings: How we are connected

Suggested by Nicolet High School English teacher, Michelle Walny, Dr. Deborah Greenblatt Assistant Professor Medgar Evers College, CUNY, and Liza Wiemer

Supplies:

A large ball of string

Scissors

Goal: To show how we are all interconnected and that we're stronger when we care for one another.

Before starting this novel, discuss how every person who lived before us and who is alive today, is a thread, woven together to create the fabric of humanity. We have the ability to help strengthen that fabric through kindness and compassion or we can tear at that fabric and cause harm.

Have the students stand in a circle. Start by having one student hold an end of the string and the ball.

- Each student can share an act of kindness that impacted their lives - either something they did for someone else or something someone else did for them
- Share something that happened at school that impacted you, even if it happened a long time ago.
- Share a historical event (can even be recent history) that impacts society today.

Then throw the ball of string to the next person. Once everyone has had a turn, you can decide whether or not to do a second round. If they get another turn, they can't throw the ball to the same person. Each one has to hold onto a piece of the string, then throw it on to another person who hasn't had a chance to speak/share.

After you have a nice web, have one student drop their thread or threads and discuss that impact. Finally, have the students create a string bracelet using the string they'd tossed to one another as a way of showing solidarity for one another. Let these strings be a reminder that each student is interconnected to one another.

3. Page 22, Lebensborn - Spring of Life program to create the Master Race of "pure-bred," blond-haired, blue-eyed people.

- <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/lebensborn-program>
- "Stolen Children: The Kidnapping Campaign of Nazi Germany" a documentary: <https://youtu.be/2GLsM169izM>
- Discuss the impact of this program.
- What did it mean to be Germanized?
- How did you connect this history to what we see today?

4. Poetry reading - Child Survivors by Holocaust survivor, Marguerite Lederman Mishkin

Background information on Marguerite and her sister Annette:
<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn512787>

Suggested by *The Assignment* author Liza Wiemer

- Ask for nine volunteers to come to the front of the room to read a stanza, lining up and reading their section in order.
- Questions for students: 1. What did you learn about the Holocaust from this poem? Describe these children's lives. What did they endure? 2. The opening line is, "You say we are not survivors." Why do you think some people questioned their survival status and how does this poem refute that statement? (Feel free to reread the first stanza out loud.) 3. What emotions does the poem evoke? 4. How did these sisters cope with their circumstances? 5. Do you think the author felt "lucky?" 6. Almost every stanza ends with a "Yet..." statement. Why do you think the author wrote those lines? Who is she speaking to? 7. In what ways does this poem reflect society today? 8. How can we take this poem to heart and transform what we see today in order to make a positive difference as allies and upstanders?

Child Survivors, by Marguerite Lederman Mishkin

You say we are not survivors
We were not in a concentration camp
We were too young
We did not suffer
We did not understand
We don't remember
We were not affected
We were the lucky ones.

We hid in homes
We hid in covenants
We hid in orphanages
We hid in basements
We hid in cellars

We hid in haystacks
We hid in barns
We hid in cabinets
We hid in fields
We hid in holes
We hid in sewers
Yet we were not in concentration camps.

We saw what no child should see
Our eyes betraying us
We saw people wearing yellow stars
We saw people being killed
We saw people being humiliated
We saw people being beaten
We saw people being forced onto trains
We saw our parents being taken away
We sought to be invisible
We learned not to look and not to see
Yet we were too young.

We heard what no child should hear
Our ears betraying us
We heard screams in the middle of the night
We heard screams of pain
We heard harsh words flung at us
We heard words of hatred
We heard words of disdain
We learned not to hear
We learned to scream in silence
Yet we did not suffer.

We learned to answer to foreign-sounding names

We unlearned our religion
We learned new customs
We learned to tolerate unknown food
We learned to pretend
We learned to deceive
We learned to be charlatans
We learned different ways of praying
We learned to call strangers by names reserved for family
We learned new languages
Yet we did not understand.

We felt abandoned
We felt unloved
We felt deserted
We felt unwanted
We felt we deserved what happened to us
We felt stupid
We felt ugly
We felt dirty
We felt scared
We felt like damaged merchandise
We felt unready
We felt undeserving
We felt powerless
Yet we don't remember.

We lost our parents
We lost our relatives
We lost our religion
We lost our identity
We lost our innocence
We lost our childhood

We lost our security
We lost our trust
We lost our country
We lost our language
We lost our confidence
We lost our sense of self
Yet we were not affected.

In hunger we tasted our favorite food once again
In thirst we drank cool spring water
In rags we dressed in our finery
In cold we covered up with the feather bed that our mother had made
In loneliness we invented imaginary friends
In church we heard the Hebrew prayers
In boredom we read our most beloved books
In sadness we remembered joy
In drabness we envisioned beauty
In silence we heard music
In the air we wrote our life stories
In the depth of winter we planted spring flowers
In fear we felt our parents' love
In our time of need we learned to comfort ourselves
Yet we are the lucky ones.

We may not have been in a concentration camp
But we were not too young
To understand
To remember
To suffer
To grieve
To imagine
To be changed into strangers to our former selves

Lucky perhaps but
Transformed in the crucible
Of survival.

Activities while reading:

Questions to have students ask each other: (Adapted from Mrs. Doyle,
Benton Central Jr./Sr. High School)

Name: _____

Write down 2 or 3 open-ended questions you can ask for each category below.

Three questions about the novel's plot/ characters/ rising action/ climax/ resolution

Example: Who do you think was the anonymous student letter from?

Three questions about the author's writing style/ choices.

Example: Why are there multiple perspectives?

Three questions about the theme(s) of the novel.

Example: If you could pick only one lesson from the novel would it be?

Three questions you have about the characters.

Example: Why do you think Cade's grandparents opened an inn?

Any other questions that you might have that don't quite fit into the categories listed.

From Sue Beaty, University School:

Comprehension check:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1RjwM4AjEXgPraRkzUuQwJubqKX03ZgQb1kQ_QLku904/edit?usp=sharing

From Terri Carnell, Arrowhead High School

Here are my directions.

1. Personification:

- Personify the assignment given by Mr. Bartley or Principal McNeil and Mr. Bartley's decision: give it a voice, a body, a persona.
- Based on what we learn in these chapters, bring the assignment/decision to life, focusing on its feelings, concerns, hopes, dreams, friends, fears, thoughts, actions, quotes, etc.
- Use specific details from the reading in your piece.
- Use strong verbs.
- Describe clearly with powerful adjectives.
- Use stylistic devices to bring our piece to life.
 - This should be one page double-spaced.

Sample Personifications written by students:

The Alternative Assignment:

I am the outcast. No student dares to pick me. No one dares to advocate for why I was brought and presented to the class.

When Mr. Bartley presented me to the class as the alternative assignment, I thought that there were going to be more students that would choose me. Especially because the other assignment is advocating for the murder of millions of Jews during WWII! However, many students teased at the idea of actually getting up and choosing me. Some asked to go to the bathroom, others researched for the original assignment. One student had the audacity to hand it in right in front of me.

I only want what is right. I stand for Logan and Cade's beliefs. Furthermore, if I were them, I would continue to fight. I would continue to be courageous and march on no matter who thinks differently of them.

Jenna Emons

To many, I am nothing out of the ordinary. A blue-eyed, blonde haired Assignment, just another paper for students to complete. My abysmal agenda is hidden under a top-secret stamp. I slip through the cracks, many turn cheek and let me pass. I shake hands with the few that push me through, leaving sticky residue on their palms. They are tainted from me, my evil excretion lingering with them.

The students that comply are my prey. I force their hands to write my story, one of hate, injustice, and murder. I whisper my incantations for their inspiration; "*dirty Jews*", "*tainted blood*," "*greedy inferiors*". Students regurgitate my words without consideration. I turn to Mr. Bartley, my creator, whose intention was to

inspire deeper thinking. But now I've grown into something greater, I sow the seeds of prejudice in student's heads & cultivate a culture of compliance. My kind of evil can be found from the Nazis I am kin to, to generations later in students who mimic their salute.

Two students stop and stare at me. They see through me; they see the depravity running through my veins. They stand out from their compliant classmates, and I fear my disguise has fallen through. They protest to Mr. Bartley, who defends my righteousness.

Under my disguise, I am a curse. I am a dybbuk to anyone naive enough to obey my objectives. I am evil created and curated found through history, bound to be repeated again.

2. Poems:

From Terri Carnell, Arrowhead High School
Here are my directions.

- Read Chapter 2.
- In an eight to ten-line poem, show the emotion Liza Wiemer has already created in these two chapters.
- You don't have to think literally about the storyline (but you can).
- Be creative and prepared to share your poem with a partner next class.
- Consider stylistic devices.
- Consider capitalization and end punctuation.
- Consider structure.
- Have you created an image with your poem?
- Have you inspired thinking with your poem?

Read Ch. 8-11.

- Jot down your thoughts as you watch these clips and read the chapters.
- Milgram's Experiment
- The Experimenter
- Compose a poem with your thoughts from the novel and videos (15-25 lines).
 - Consider capitalization and end punctuation.
 - Have you developed an image?
 - Have you inspired thinking?
 - Share your poems with a peer and revise.
 - Give your poem a title.

Sample Poems written by students:

Tense by Alyse Allen

Sour acid churns, mixing in my stomach.
A golf ball wedged in my throat.
Cold shivers shock my body
each time Mr. Bartley cuts me off.
My muscles tense and I don't realize
how tightly my jaw is clenched,
stopping tears from welling in my eyes.
I look to Cade for comfort,
but he's staring at his palms,
slouched uncomfortably in his seat.

Duck Duck Goose by Calandra Diorio

Ducks in a row,
Sitting up straight.
No one out of touch,
No one out of place.
I stick my head up,
To look for a feathered friend;
For someone,
Anyone,

To match my uneasy disposition
To match my hint of fear
But they continue to sit
Like ducks in a row
As they unravel what I stand for,
What we have worked so hard to stand for.
I do not wish to doubt my peers ,
Of something so elementary.

3. Utilize ADL's Pyramid of Hate:

Suggested by Dr. Deborah Greenblatt Assistant Professor Medgar
Evers College, CUNY

https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pyramid-of-hate-web-english_1.pdf

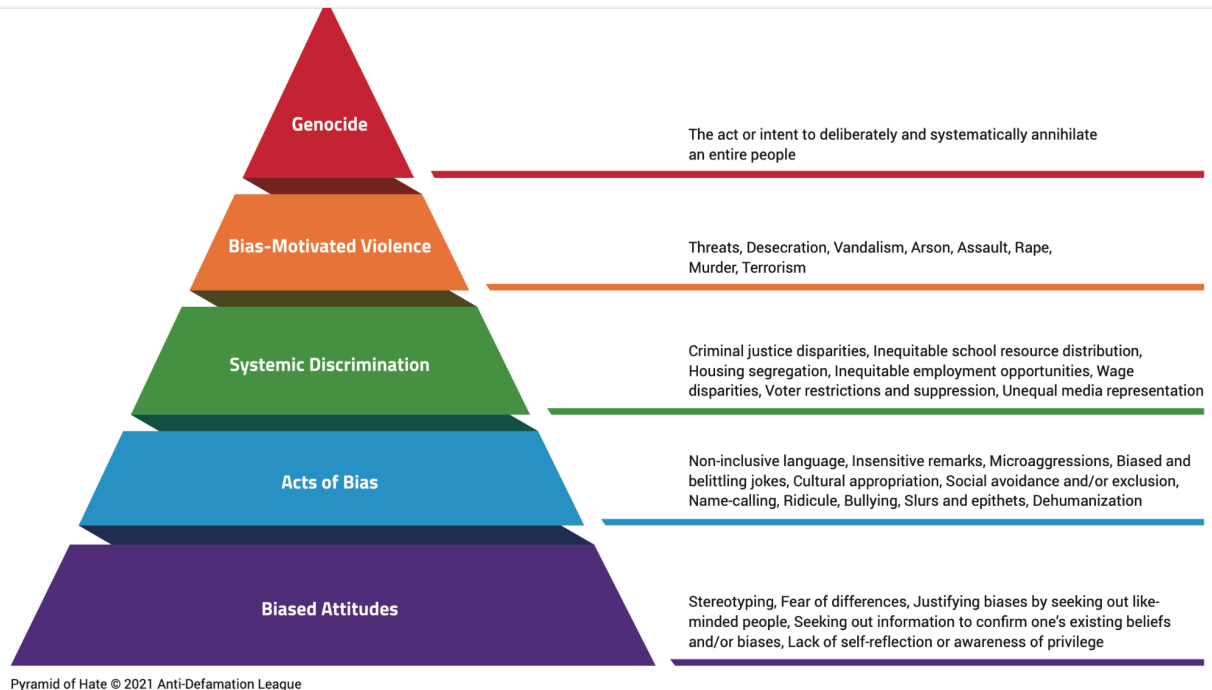
See images below.

Instructions to students:

- As students read, have them look for evidence in the text that represents each level of hate.
- What actions do Cade, Logan, Heather, Daniel, Mason, and Blair take to make a positive difference to counteract the actions that represent each level? How are they impactful or helpful?
- Of these examples, what actions would you take if you saw an act of any form of hatred, bigotry, or injustice - please SCROLL TO NEXT PAGE

ADL PYRAMID OF HATE

The **Pyramid of Hate** illustrates the prevalence of bias, hate and oppression in our society. It is organized in escalating levels of attitudes and behavior that grow in complexity from bottom to top. Like a pyramid, the upper levels are supported by the lower levels; unlike a pyramid, the levels are not built consecutively or to demonstrate a ranking of each level. Bias at each level reflects a system of oppression that negatively impacts individuals, institutions and society. Unchecked bias can become “normalized” and contribute to a pattern of accepting discrimination, violence and injustice in society. While every biased attitude or act does not lead to genocide, genocide takes place within a system of oppression in which the attitudes and actions described at the lower levels of the pyramid are accepted. When we challenge those biased attitudes and behaviors in ourselves, others and institutions, we can interrupt the escalation of bias and make it more difficult for discrimination and hate to flourish.



4. How to analyze propaganda:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EMNcd4Ymy35POOZhJqNXFuc40iqDkV9cwb514nl-UQ/edit?usp=sharing>

Note: NEVER HAVE YOUR STUDENTS MAKE PROPAGANDA POSTERS

5. Lebensborn program: The Nazis wanted to create a superior race (Info provided by Liza Wiemer)

- Have students look around the room. Everyone is different, but that's not what the Nazis were striving for. Their ideal race was

blond-haired, blue-eyed people. They thought they could breed this ideal race.

- This is an outstanding video: <https://youtu.be/2GLsM169izM>
It's all powerful, but feel free to show the first few minutes and 13:15 to 14:30, which talks about the plan to steal children.

Post-reading activities:

- 1. Post-reading ally and upstander survey - recommend using Google forms if your students have access to it. (This can be done anonymously) - adapted from seventh grade teacher, Tara Daniels**

Q: After reading *The Assignment*, how has your perspective changed on being an ally and an upstander?

Q: Now that you've read the novel, why do you think it's important to speak up against hatred, bigotry and injustice, including antisemitism and racism?

Q: Cade, Logan, Mason, Daniel, and Heather were upstanders in different ways. Which one could you relate to the most?

- 2. HumanKIND Welcome Here Posters or posters that promote kindness...**
- 3. INTERVIEWS with community leaders changing the world.**

- a. In class, create a list of issues concerning the students. Ideas: climate change, women's rights, equal pay, bullying, racism, antisemitism, book banning, food insecurity, recycling, legal issues etc.
- b. Have students identify people who are experts in the area they want to learn more about.
- c. Students should write 10 open-ended questions they will ask the experts.
- d. How can the students utilize the lessons learned from the novel to be advocates for an issue they're passionate about?

4. KINDNESS ROCKS

- a. Bring in flat rocks and have students create positive anonymous messages using paint pens to share throughout the community.



We're people too

TO GROW PEACE SEEDS OF LOVE

My Ethnicity Should Not define who I am.

KINDNESS HATE

PEACE

HATE will never win HATE will never win

CONTEMP

