

# LEARNING ABOUT GENOCIDE THROUGH LITERATURE

## Teacher's Guide

### Subjects targeted by this pathway:

#### Cycle One

- // History and Citizenship Education: Denial of rights and freedoms of Jews during the Second World War

#### Cycle Two

- // English Language Arts or English as a Second Language: Literature
- // French, language of instruction or as a second language: Literature
- // Culture and Québec Citizenship: Cycle Two themes
- // History of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Social phenomena
- // Contemporary World: Tensions and conflicts

## EDUCATIONAL AIM

The educational aim of this pathway is to help students understand the genocide process through the story and quest of various fictional characters or witnesses to history.

Young readers are invited to discover a story, then to explore certain passages in greater depth, weaving together the *historical context* and the *journeys of different characters*. In so doing, they develop their thinking on the manifestations and effects of the genocide process on an individual, and then on a community. This reflection encourages students to express empathy. This stance is underpinned by an analysis of the acts of resistance and ways of preventing this type of crime.

## CHOOSING A WORK

This pathway can be used to study any genocide. However, it's important to choose a story that can serve as a solid foundation for this study. To see the criteria for selecting a work, please see Appendix 1.

## SUPPORTING MATERIAL

This pathway includes an inquiry booklet (Student's Booklet), in which young readers are invited to record their thoughts, feelings and ideas. These writings provide evidence of the progress in their knowledge and conceptions.



# OVERALL APPROACH

This pathway is divided into three steps: 1) preparatory activities to contextualize the story being studied and formulate a reading–discovery intention in the form of an initial question; 2) a more analytical exploration of the story using the Genocide Process Grid; 3) a large-group debriefing session to formalize what has been learned (summary).

## 1.

### GETTING READY (before reading)

#### A. Information Sheet on a Work

Ask your students to observe the cover page, title, publication information and back cover of the book, and to come up with some hypotheses about its content.

Have students work in small or large groups to identify and record the story’s characteristics<sup>1</sup> on the information sheet<sup>2</sup> in their inquiry booklets: 1) author and intention; 2) nature of the story; 3) production or publication context; 4) target audience.

Introduce the theme being studied: depiction of a genocide through literature. To help you, refer to Appendices 1 and 2.

<sup>1</sup> [https://memoirs.azrielifoundation.org/uploads/education/programs/Tableau\\_styles\\_littéraire.pdf](https://memoirs.azrielifoundation.org/uploads/education/programs/Tableau_styles_littéraire.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Information sheet inspired by the “identity card” proposed by Jadouille (2015) and adapted by Bélanger (2018).

### NOTE:

These preparatory activities will help reduce the risk of students taking fictional facts as “true” without questioning or comparing them, for example, to those conveyed in documentary or historical accounts. Their observations about surface clues (e.g. title, illustration, summary) can also prompt them to consider how a work of fiction, for example, addresses genocide.

These questions can lead to a class discussion on what a literary work reveals, in its own way, about a sensitive part of history.

An example of an information sheet is provided in Appendix 2.

## B. Where I Stand

Invite students to answer the questions in their inquiry booklets (student booklets) about their interest in this theme and the chosen work.

## C. Story Context

The following questions will help students better understand the historical context of the story. Use the first pages of highlights from the background document on the chosen genocide. These questions will help students formulate a more informed and nuanced judgment about the experiences of the various characters. Their answers to these questions can be used to generate discussion during exploration (phase 2 of the proposed approach).

- // In your opinion, where did these events take place?
- // In your opinion, when did these events take place?
- // Who were the protagonists involved in the genocide (e.g. perpetrators, victims, witnesses, collaborators, allies, resisters)? For each group, describe their characteristics (culture, language, religion, history, etc.).
- // In what context did this genocide take place (e.g. war, political crisis, religious rivalry)?

### NOTE:

It's important to place the event being studied in its proper historical context. A misinterpretation of the historical context can distract students from the meaning of the narrative. It can also hinder their understanding of the story being told or experienced by the various characters.

#### D. Reading–Discovery Intention or Initial Question

The preceding steps help to set a reading intention, which may take the form of a question. This serves as a starting point for a more independent reading and discovery of the story.

For example, after carefully examining the “book” object and using the information sheet provided (Appendix 2), students could answer the following questions:

- // Who do you think the characters on the cover are? Do they evoke a particular historical context? If so, please explain.
- // How do you interpret the way in which the characters see things?
- // How does the story refer to the genocide in question? Is it clear and obvious? Explain your answer in a few words.
- // How, in the context of war, can aspects that define a person (e.g. name, temperament, physical features, function, status) fuel racism and be a source of danger?

#### Note:

The initial question, formulated in such a way as to stimulate students' interest in first reading and discovering the story independently, will encourage a more analytical reading using the Genocide Process Grid. The way the question is framed can also serve to study genocide through literature while tackling subject-specific notions with students, such as narrative, genres and characters (their construction and reception).

## 2. EXPLORATION (during reading)

### A. Exploring the Story with a Critical Eye

This step allows you to discuss the treatment of a genocide in literature. Sample questions are provided in the students' inquiry booklet. These questions are intended not only to help them dig deeper in their reading of the story being studied, but also to awaken their sensitivity to a past reality that still resonates in the news today. It is also important to get students thinking about the effects of this story on their emotions and ideas. To do this, have them select key excerpts and justify their choices.

To help them analyze the acts of resistance depicted in the story, ask students to consider how the stages of the genocide process can be recognized in the story, particularly through the experiences of the various characters. What are the effects of these stages on the characters?



## B. Questions on the Genocide Being Studied

Using the Genocide Process Grid, help students make connections between what happens to the characters and the ideological and political context portrayed in the work.

You can divide the class into teams of “specialists” according to the stages of genocide identified in the preliminary analysis of the literary work. More than one team can work on a same stage. Make sure that all the stages are studied, as well as the issues of justice, which can be conveyed by characters or parts of the story. Have students carry out the following tasks:

1. Read the background document on the genocide being studied.
2. Notice how each stage of the genocide process is presented.
3. Fill out the table on the genocide process as it is presented or evoked in the work being studied.
4. Discuss the similarities and differences. How does the background document on the genocide complete, clarify or nuance the story being studied, and vice versa?

Explain to the students that multiple answers are possible, but that they must be supported by details from the story (e.g. excerpts). Depending on the literary work being studied, some stages may be implicit or missing.

### Note:

If the chosen work allows, students can rename the story’s chapters so as to establish links with the genocide process, how it unfolded and the effects it produced, for example, on the characters.

This more analytical exploration can be used to approach the genocide process by focusing on the fate of the characters. It can make the causes and consequences of genocide—which are sometimes implicit—more visible, and open up a discussion on the event’s impact on the lives of individuals.

It is important to explain to students that the genocide process grid is a way of organizing the information gathered according to the stages of genocide. Beware of the danger of oversimplifying. To this end, please see the document on best practices for studying genocide in the classroom.

A preliminary analysis of the literary work (see Appendix 1) can help guide you in this respect: it’s possible that not all of the stages are mentioned in the story. Questioning the more implicit or absent stages in a literary work can also be an avenue to explore with students. A team of specialists could take charge of this reflection, and be invited to formulate hypotheses based on the material in the story’s information sheet (see Appendix 2).

# 3.

## DEBRIEFING (after reading the story)

### Sharing My Observations and What I've Learned

Ask students to answer the questions in their inquiry booklet. Then, invite them to share the information they have found with their classmates to create a group summary. The information recorded in their reading booklets can serve as a basis for discussion and exchange.

### Creative Synthesis

Have students choose between the two options proposed in the inquiry booklet, so that they can express how they feel. The idea is to get them to share, in a more personal way (e.g. an image, drawing, quotation, poem, music, diagram), what they have read and experienced: What did you learn from this story (e.g. about the genocide, relevance to current issues or debates on this topic)?

### Going Further

At this stage, other stories or resources could be suggested to students wishing to delve deeper into a sensitive part of history. You can also continue studying genocides by examining contemporary situations where stages of the genocide process can be seen (e.g. Burundi, China, Sudan, Myanmar). An interdisciplinary project is another effective option for a more in-depth exploration, using the story as the starting point for a learning situation (e.g. collaborative project involving the subjects of English and history).

# APPENDIX 1

## PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF A LITERARY WORK

Ideas for planning a learning pathway through literature

Title	Author	Year of publication	Publisher	
Genre	Genocide depicted	Production/publication context	Audio format available	
			yes	no
	<b>Stages of the genocide process addressed</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> To classify</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> To dehumanize</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> To polarize</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> To organize</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> To persecute and murder</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> To deny</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Justice</li> </ul>			

### Student-related questions:

- // What aspects of the book (e.g. title, text divisions, book shape, font size, lack of illustrations) might appeal or not appeal to students?
- // How is the literary work adapted to students' reading profile (e.g. identity markers, reading level, skills and challenges, stage of development)?
- // Will young readers empathize with the characters? Will they care about what happens to them? Why or why not?

**Story-related questions (adapt according to the subject being taught):**

- // Is the story set in an authentic time and place? What historical events (facts) are accurately presented (e.g. names, dates, places)?
- // How does the historical context influence the actions of the various characters? Their quests, their actions or inaction, their relationships, what they feel?
- // Does the story refer to other stories (intertextuality) or other tragedies (e.g. genocides)? If so, which ones? Can connections be made with these other tragedies?
- // Does the story complement the perspective of other resources? Does the story describe a perspective on the historical context not found in other media, such as the course textbook?
- // Who are the characters in the story? How do the characters bring to mind comparisons with other stories about the same historical reality?
- // Does the story make a difficult situation visible (e.g. the Holocaust)? How does it do this?
- // Can this story be studied along with other documents, stories or resources? If so, which ones? What does such a network contribute to student learning?
- // How will studying this story enable students to mobilize analysis criteria linked to temporal, spatial and societal dimensions?
- // What elements seem relevant to work on with students in terms of the writing, narrative and universe (e.g. themes, characters)?
- // Does the story offer any bright spots (e.g. solidarity, friendship, kindness, justice)—that is, ways of responding to cruelty or ways of resisting that bring hope and humanity?
- // Does the story pose realistic reading challenges for students?

**Context-related questions:****Ministerial orientations**

- // How can this story (e.g. a novel) be used to work on subject-specific content and competencies?

**Addressing a sensitive topic**

- // What is my personal position with regard to this topic (e.g. bias, emotions, experience, training)?
- // How might teaching this topic to my students be a challenge?
- // What is my purpose in choosing to work with my students on this topic using a literary work?
- // How might the story spark discussions and exchanges that can contribute to students' civic education and critical thinking?

## APPENDIX 2

Example of an information sheet: [*Title of book or work*]

<p><b>Author and intention</b></p> <p>Who wrote this story (identity)?</p> <p>Why did they write this story (intention)?</p>	
<p><b>Nature of the story</b></p> <p>Where does the document come from?</p> <p>What makes it a literary work?</p> <p>Is it a translation?</p> <p>Is it an excerpt or a complete work?</p>	
<p><b>Production/publication context</b></p> <p>What is the story's publication date?</p> <p>What do you think was the time difference between the date of publication and the historical event depicted in the story?</p> <p>What is the time difference with today?</p> <p>What do we know about the historical event in question?</p> <p>What do we know about the period in which the work was published?</p>	
<p><b>Target audience</b></p> <p>Who is the intended audience for this story?</p> <p>How does this choice of audience affect how the story is told (e.g. word choice, level of language)?</p>	