

Using Memoirs to Meet Content Standards

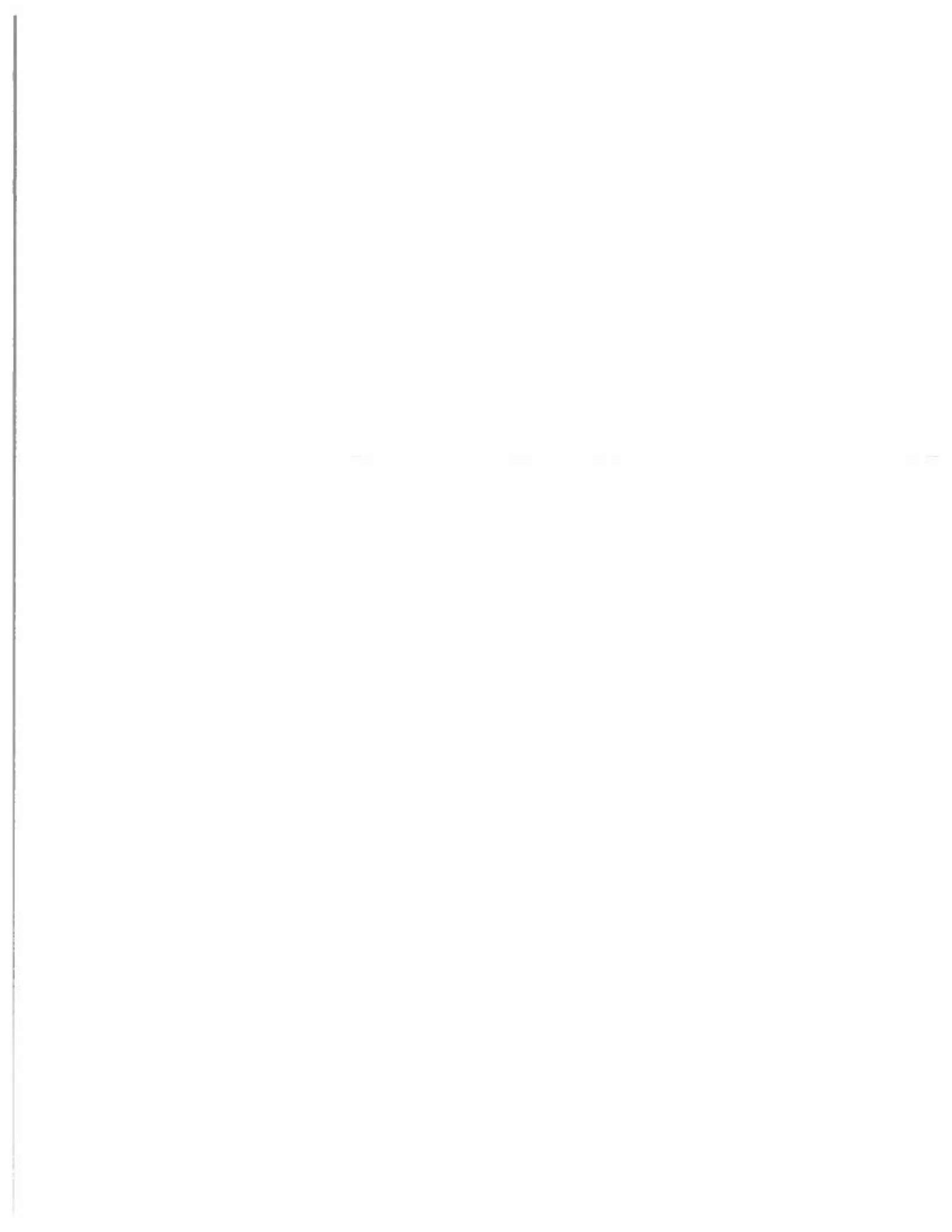


While Teaching the Human Tragedy of Genocide

A Curriculum Guide for Secondary Teachers

by

Ellin Glassband & Stacey Gasper





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Fall, 2008

Dear Educator:

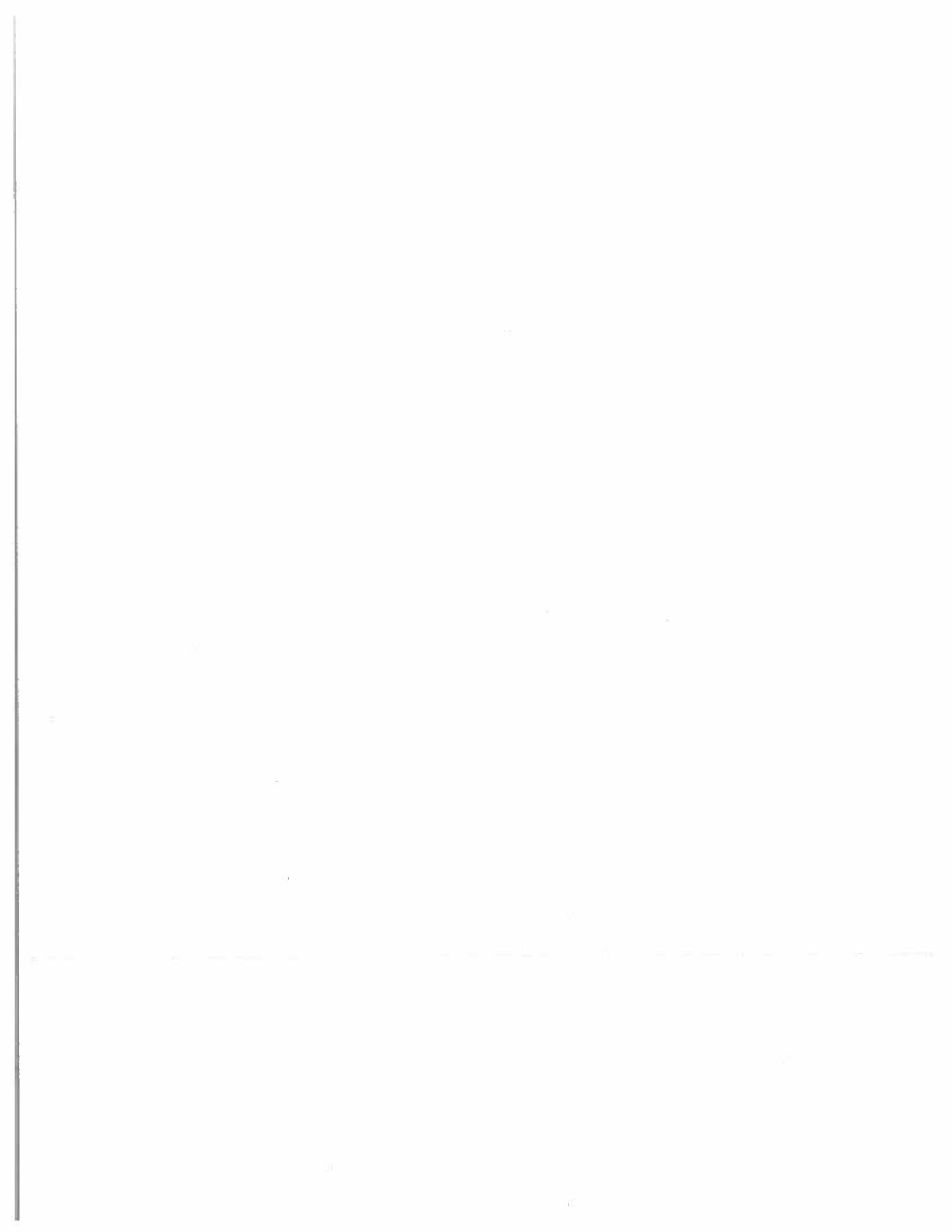
This teaching guide developed and utilized in the classroom by the West Windsor Plainsboro Public Schools is an excellent tool for instructing students about genocide and the evils of bias, prejudice and discrimination. A number of lesson plans are available to utilize in the classroom regarding this very important topic. Even though the plans are specifically related to the Cambodian genocide through the book "First They Killed My Father" by Loung Ung, the teacher will be able to use the same strategies regarding any story about other genocides including the current situation in Darfur or of the Holocaust. The Commission is very impressed by this work effort and recommends it be used by high schools to help meet the legal mandate that all students must learn about the Holocaust and genocide. Congratulations to Ellin Glassband and Stacey Gasper for this excellent guide which allows for infusion in major curriculum subjects and meets many of the New Jersey standards.

Sincerely,

Dr. Paul B. Winkler
Executive Director
New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education

Remember

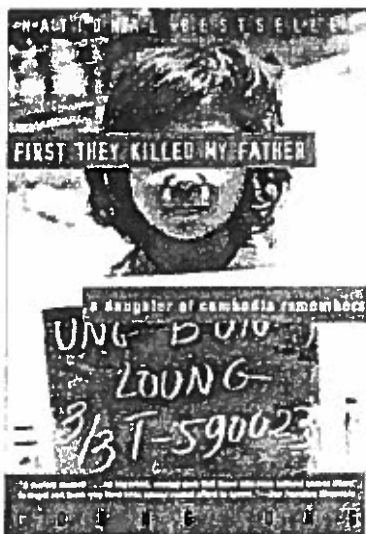
Remembrance is Continuing the Resistance
NEW JERSEY COMMISSION ON HOLOCAUST EDUCATION



When you teach high school students, you are constantly looking for literature that they will read not just because they have to, but because they want to. An amazing thing happens when we teach this book; even the most reluctant students become eager learners. Year after year, this memoir is an integral part of our most successful unit where we study the theme of innocence and experience. First They Killed My Father is a powerful piece about the atrocities of the Cambodian genocide. Loung Ung tells her story as she saw it, through her five-year-old eyes. The reader is brought to understanding only as she is, gradually coming to terms with the evils of genocide. This piece is ideal for classroom use. The subject matter is one that requires maturity and allows for important dialogue about a horrifying topic. In addition, the reading level makes the story accessible to students of varying abilities. As you work through the text with your class, you will notice that your students are opening their hearts as well as their minds.

While this is the piece that we use, the collection of material that follows can be adapted for use with any memoir of genocide.

Ellin Glassband & Stacey Gasper



First They Killed My Father
Loung Ung

"From 1975 to 1979—through execution, starvation, disease, and forced labor—the Khmer Rouge systematically killed an estimated two million Cambodians, almost a fourth of the country's population.

This is a story of survival: my own and my family's."

TAKEN FROM AUTHOR'S NOTE

"I believe that we have to educate children at a young age, not to name-call, not to judge a specific group of people, or a younger generation might become people who hate."

Oyinade Ifaroti
Grade 9

ABOUT the AUTHORS

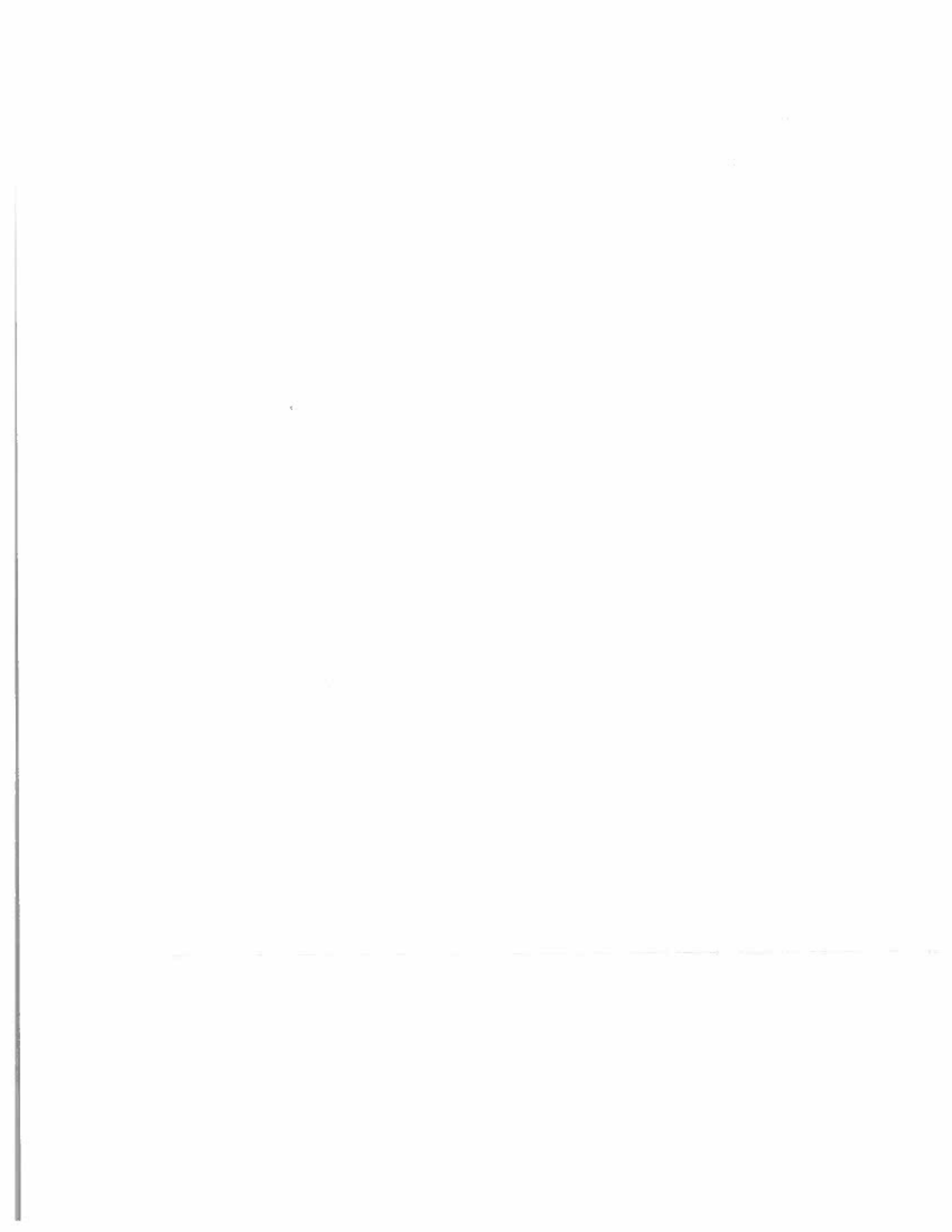
Ellin Glassband has been teaching Language Arts for fifteen years. She received her undergraduate degree in Secondary Education and English from The University of Vermont in 1991, and a Master's Degree in Literature from The American University in Washington D.C. in 1992. Ms. Glassband has taught in Maryland and Georgia, and has spent the last seven years teaching Grades 9, 11, and 12 at West Windsor Plainsboro High School South in Princeton Junction, New Jersey.

Stacey Gasper has been teaching Special Education in the content area of Language Arts for six years. She received her undergraduate degree in Special Education from Rowan University in 2002 and has highly qualified status in Language Arts. She is currently working on her Master's Degree in Special Education, also from Rowan University. Ms. Gasper has been teaching Grades 9-12 at West Windsor Plainsboro High School South in Princeton Junction, New Jersey since the beginning of her teaching career.

Ellin Glassband and Stacey Gasper have taught Inclusion together for five years. Together, they teach Language Arts I, where they have developed the following materials.

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Cambodia's Recent History

Cambodia is a country located in South East Asia which borders Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. Many students know little about this part of the world, and will be shocked to learn of its tragic past.

From 1863-1953, Cambodia was colonized by France. When it declared its independence, King Norodom Sihanouk took over as its Constitutional Monarch. As the neighboring Vietnam War gained momentum, Sihanouk chose to remain neutral, angering many, and leading to his overthrow in a military coup by Prime Minister Lon Nol. Lon Nol was supported and backed by the U.S. government.

"As in the Ottoman Empire during the Armenian Genocide, in Nazi Germany, and more recently in East Timor, Guatemala, Yugoslavia, and Rwanda, the Khmer Rouge headed by Pol Pot combined extremist ideology with ethnic animosity and a diabolical disregard for human life to produce repression, misery, and murder on a massive scale."

Cambodian Genocide Program
Yale University, 2008.
www.yale.edu/cgp/

Meanwhile, the Communist Party, called the Khmer Rouge, was increasing its membership. Sihanouk himself joined them. These followers were vehemently Anti-American and opposed their country's new leader. On April 17, 1975, they entered the capitol city of Phnom Penh and evacuated all of its residents. They overthrew the Lon Nol government, and elected a new leader, Solath Sar, also known as Pol Pot. With the Khmer Rouge in power, Cambodia's genocide began. The new government wished to create an agrarian society, free from all Western influences. People were put to work in villages and labor camps, resulting in the deaths of millions from starvation, disease, torture, and murder. It is estimated that 25% of the country's population was

annihilated between the years of 1975-1979.

NOTE TO TEACHERS REGARDING GROUP RESEARCH PROJECT

We have found it useful to allow the students a few days to explore and understand the history and culture of the country in question. Before we delve into this particular memoir, students present their research and learn from one another. This offers everyone a strong background in the region we are about to study. In addition, student listeners were required to fill out information based on each group's presentation. In this way, every member of the class was actively involved. (We have provided a copy of the student questionnaire.) We recommend doing this for any historical piece. Our students greatly benefited from this information.

Student Response:

"I found that the presentations were very informational and helpful. It was a good idea to learn about this country."

Adrian Fernandez
Grade 9

GROUP RESEARCH PROJECT

We are about to embark on a reading of a powerful memoir, First They Killed My Father by Loung Ung. As the book is set in Cambodia, a country with which many of you may not be familiar, we will begin by doing some research. In groups chosen by us, you will spend two days in the library answering the questions we have given you. Each group member is responsible for his/her own part of the presentation, and will be graded individually. We will monitor your progress in the library to ensure that you are working cooperatively. Please exchange emails and/or phone numbers with your group members, so you can continue to work on your assignment outside of class. A PowerPoint presentation is required; in addition you may include a handout, a poster, a chart, or something else that will enable the rest of us to learn from your research. On the day of your presentation, all students are responsible for taking notes on each group's research.

DUE DATE:

Group 1: Geography of Cambodia * GROUP MEMBERS:

1. Where is Cambodia? Provide a map, and explain its place in the world.
2. What countries border Cambodia? Describe Cambodia's relationship with its neighbors.
3. What type of terrain is found in Cambodia? Is it the same throughout the country?
4. What type of climate does Cambodia have? What seasons do they have, and what types of major weather events occur there?

Group 2: Cambodian Economics and its People * GROUP MEMBERS:

1. What economic problems have Cambodians faced in the past? What caused these problems? What solutions have they come up with?
2. What types of jobs exist for Cambodians?
3. What are the natural resources and trade of Cambodia? What is the country's major source of income?

Group 3: Cambodian Culture * GROUP MEMBERS:

1. Describe the lifestyle of a typical Cambodian. What types of leisurely activities do they enjoy?
2. What religions exist in Cambodia? What is the major religion? Explain its central beliefs, and rituals.
3. What language is spoken in Cambodia? Is it like any other languages? Provide examples of specific words and expressions that will help us understand it.
4. Describe Cambodian food. What makes it unique from its neighboring countries? What are the most popular dishes?
5. Are there special holidays that are important to Cambodians? What are these, and how are they celebrated?

Group 4: The Civil War - Pol Pot's Regime and the Khmer Rouge * GROUP MEMBERS:

1. What caused the civil war in Cambodia? How long did it last? What brought it to an end?
2. Identify and explain the purpose of the Khmer Rouge. What "new rules" did they introduce to Cambodia?
3. Who is Pol Pot? What was his goal? Did he succeed?

Group 5: Cambodian Refugees * GROUP MEMBERS:

1. What caused the Cambodian refugee problem?
2. To what countries did they flee? How did they get there?
3. Describe the refugee situation in the U.S. How many Cambodians came here? In what years? Where in the U.S. are they concentrated?
4. What kinds of challenges exist for Cambodian refugees?

PRESENTATION RUBRIC

30 points

STUDENT:			
	Criteria	Points Earned	Points Possible
POWERPOINT	<i>eye-catching</i> <i>minimum text</i> <i>maximum pictures</i>		10
SPEAKING SKILLS	<i>strong eye-contact</i> <i>clear</i> <i>audible</i>		10
CONTENT	<i>organized</i> <i>relevant</i> <i>understandable</i>		10
TOTAL			30
COMMENTS:			

2. What religions exist in Cambodia? What is the major religion? Explain its central beliefs, and rituals.
3. What language is spoken in Cambodia? Is it like any other languages?
4. Describe Cambodian food. What makes it unique from its neighboring countries? What are the most popular dishes?
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Cambodian Refugees

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NOTE TO TEACHERS REGARDING EYE COLOR JOURNAL

We regularly use prereading journals to get the students to personally connect to the topic we are about to explore. This particular journal entry could be used before teaching any piece about genocide. The activity asks each student to imagine what it feels like to not only be excluded, but also trapped in their current situation. When we discuss their entries, we find that the class is typically split in how they envision they would respond: half wants to fight back, and half wants to submit in any way necessary to survive. This engages them in a meaningful conversation about the dangerous realities of either choice.

Student Response:

"This assignment made me realize that the everyday life for these people would be horrible, and they would live in complete fear."

Lucas Kriebel
Grade 9

NOTE TO TEACHERS REGARDING 3-DAY LIST

Many memoirs of genocide involve families being forced from their homes and the necessity to make quick decisions. In an effort to have the students make personal connections to the text, we created this writing assignment. Tying it into the events of September 11th has been particularly useful in clarifying the reality of a situation like this. This activity prompts in-depth and meaningful discussion.

Student Response:

"This has been one of my favorite activities by far. The class was truly able to relate to what it must have been like to go through such a quick decision and how hard it must have been to make the choices as to what to bring."

Julianne Lee
Grade 9

NOTE TO TEACHERS REGARDING THE POEM "HOME"

Because the memoir we teach focuses on a young child, we want the students to understand that many of the emotions she experiences are universal to children in these situations. Theresienstadt concentration camp, often called Terezin, was located in what is now the Czech Republic. It was used primarily as a transit camp for prisoners before they were sent to Auschwitz. Terezin was presented by the Germans as a model Jewish village. In 1944, they even allowed a visit from the Red Cross as a way to convince the world that extermination camps did not exist. Approximately 144,000 Jews were sent to Terezin, of which only 17,247 survived. About a quarter of them died there from hunger or disease, but most were killed after being deported to Auschwitz.

Many of the prisoners had been educated, privileged Jews. The camp was filled with musicians, artists, and scholars. The adults insisted that the children in the camp continued their education. They set up daily classes in hiding. Most notably, the children wrote stories and poems which were later collected and published in a book called I Never Saw Another Butterfly. We urge you to share this information with your students before presenting them with the enclosed poem written by a child prisoner. The author, Franta Bass, was sent from Terezin to Auschwitz where he died at age 14. The emotions he expresses in this particular poem should strike students as similar to those of Loung Ung's.

After reading the poem aloud, we give students class time to write a formal paragraph comparing Franta's voice and emotions with Loung's. At this point in the book, the students have become attached to Loung Ung and have begun to understand her longing to return to her former life. Their responses are often heartfelt and moving.

Student Response:

"This poem gives me a sense of hope. She is going through a war, but still remains optimistic about the future. In a world so big and unpredictable, home is the one place that can bring you back."

Ariana Efstathios

Grade 9

NOTE TO TEACHERS REGARDING PROPAGANDA & DESENSITIZATION

This is an in-class activity where students actively review the chapters that they had read at home the night before. Propaganda is an essential tool for a totalitarian regime and presumably will present itself in any book you choose to teach on this topic. We have defined both propaganda and desensitization for the students making it easier for them to see the way these elements play out in the chapters. We follow this exercise with a class discussion, sharing what they found before they turn in their work.

Student Response:

"The activity was important because it allowed the class to see the importance of propaganda in genocide...It turned the people against one another."

Julianne Lee
Grade 9

Name: _____

Propaganda

First They Killed My Father
"The Child Soldiers" (pages 129-143)

PROPAGANDA is deceptive information or rumors spread to further one's cause.

Totalitarian regimes, such as the Khmer Rouge, rely on propaganda to maintain control.
The villagers are regularly misinformed and brainwashed.

Directions→ Find examples of propaganda between pages 129-143. Write the quote and page number in the chart below. Be sure to include enough of the quote to demonstrate how it is an example of propaganda. Provide explanations when necessary.

PROPAGANDA	
Quote	Page #

Name: _____

Desensitization

First They Killed My Father
"The Child Soldiers" (pages 129-143)

DESENSITIZATION is the act of making someone less responsive to a difficult or feared situation.

While the villagers are given minimal rations of food, they are fed a constant stream of propaganda. The propaganda meetings, along with the atrocities of daily life under the Khmer Rouge Regime, have numbed many of the people. They no longer react to the horrific violence and turmoil around them. They have become desensitized.

Directions→ Find examples of desensitization between pages 129-143. Write the quote and page number in the chart below. Be sure to include enough of the quote to demonstrate how it is an example of desensitization. Provide explanations when necessary.

DESENSITIZATION	
Quote	Page #

NOTE TO TEACHERS REGARDING "WALKING WITH LIVING FEET"

This powerful piece enables our students to see an additional example of memoir writing; in this instance, the writer was not a victim, offering a new perspective. Our students marvel at the writing skills of this young girl, as they are the same age as she was when she wrote it. We give the students comprehension and inferential questions to answer that link this memoir to the one they are reading. This piece can be used with any account of genocide as it explores the range of emotions that accompany the study of these topics.

Student Response:

"When I was doing the worksheet for this, I was wondering how this was going to tie in with the book. I realized they were similar not in the direct sense, but in the way of experience and meaning."

Ariana Efstathios
Grade 9

WALKING WITH LIVING FEET

Dara Horn

Only my squirming skin could attest to my surroundings, and the crawling air made my lungs tighten.

I had a very unusual fifteenth birthday. During my birthday week, the end of April, I was traveling with 5,000 high school students from around the world, visiting concentration camps in Poland. I learned more there than I learned during my entire life in school; once I stepped out of a gas chamber, I became a different person. When I turned fifteen, I discovered that no matter how much you read about the Holocaust, nothing can ever be like seeing it with your own eyes. The day after my fifteenth birthday was the turning point of my life. I was at Majdanek, one of the largest Nazi concentration camps. And I will never forget it.

Majdanek has been left exactly as it was when it was in use, so intact that if it were to be "plugged in," it could start gassing people tomorrow.

I stood in a gas chamber there, at Majdanek. I saw the blue stains of Zyklon B streaking the ceilings and walls, the poison used to kill the people who were crushed into this tiny, gray cement room. I could see how their fingers had scraped off the white paint, trying to escape. The cement floor that I sat on was cold and clammy; the air in the room seemed made of chills. When I first sat down I did not notice, but soon those chilling waves were seeping into my skin, like so many tiny fingers trying to pull at my nerves and make my bones quiver. All around me, kids were crying hysterically, yet the chills that rankled the air around me hadn't reached my mind, and I could not feel. I hated myself for it. Anger, fear, pain, and shock—I could have felt all those and more, but instead I felt nothing. That void was far worse: all the other emotions around me showed the presence of human hearts, but I was almost not there at all. I wanted to feel; I hated the guilt I had at my lack of reaction as much as I hated what happened there. Only my squirming skin could attest to my surroundings, and the crawling air made my lungs tighten. I wished I could cry, but I couldn't break down my mental blockade. Why?

The camp of Majdanek extends for miles, but one of the worst things about it is that it's right in a town, almost a city called Lublin. There are actually houses right next to the barbed wire, the fence with its thorns that stabbed my frightened eyes, enough to separate a universe. The people of that city would have to have been dead not to notice the death which struck daily, right behind their backyards, where I saw children playing. People marched through Lublin from the train station, entered through the same barbed wire gate that I did, and left through the chimney. Nobody in Lublin noticed, because if they had, their fate would have been the same. And today the camp's long gray barn-like barracks still extend forever, in endless rows, the sky a leaden weight blocking the colors that grace free life. Gray is the color of hell.

Inside each of the barracks is a new horror. Some are museum exhibits, with collections of people's toothbrushes (they were told that they were being "relocated" and to bring one suitcase, the contents of

which were confiscated) and people's hair. All of the walls in one barracks are covered with people's hats, hanging in a row. But the worst were the shoes.

About five of the barracks are filled with nothing but the shoes of some of the people who were killed there—over 850,000 pairs. In one barracks, I sat on a platform about five feet off the ground, and surrounding it was an ocean of shoes, five feet deep. In the gas chamber I could not feel, but in that room filled with shoes, my mental blockade cracked. The photographs meant nothing to me, the history lessons and names and numbers were never strong enough. But here each shoe is different, a different size and shape, a high heel, a sandal, a baby's shoe so tiny that its owner couldn't have been old enough to walk, and shoes like mine. Each pair of those shoes walked a path all its own, guided its owner through his or her life and to all of their deaths. Thousands and thousands of shoes, each pair different, each pair silently screaming someone's murdered dreams. No book can teach me what I saw there with my own eyes!

I glanced at my own shoe, expecting it to be far different from those in that ocean of death, and my breath caught in my throat as I saw that my shoe seemed to be almost the same style as one, no, two, three of the shoes I saw; it seemed like every shoe there was my shoe. I touched the toe of one nearby and felt its dusty texture, certain that mine would be different. But as I touched my own toe, tears welled in my eyes as my fingers traced the edges of my dusty, living shoes. Eight hundred and fifty thousand pairs of shoes, but now I understood: they weren't numbers, they were people.

Soon I was crying, but for someone else: for the child whose mother's sandal rested on that pile, for the woman whose husband's shoes swam motionless in that sea, like the tears that streaked my face, for the girl whose best friend's slippers were buried in that ocean of grayness and silence. I was lost to the shoes there. I wished I could throw my shoes in to that pile, to grasp and feel each shoe, to jump into the sea of shoes, to become a part of it, to take it with me. I wanted to add my own shoes to that ocean, but all I could leave there were my salty tears. My feet clumped on the wooden platform as I left, and I had never been more conscious of how my shoes fit my living feet.

At the very end of the camp was another gas chamber and the crematorium, its smokestack jutting through the leaden sky. This gas chamber did not have the blue poison stains that streaked the walls in the one I saw first, or maybe it did: the only light in that cement room was from dozens of memorial candles. It was too dark to see. The air inside was damp and suffocating, like a burial cave, and yet the air was savagely alive. It crawled down my neck and compressed me as the walls and ceiling seemed to move closer. No words can express how it felt to step out of that gas chamber alive, wearing my living shoes.

And I saw the crematorium where the corpses were burned, ovens shaped to fit a person. As I touched the brick furnaces with trembling fingers, my tears froze in my eyes and I could not cry. It was here that I felt my soul go up in flames, leaving me an empty shell.

Majdanek reeks of death everywhere. Even the reminders and signs of life that exist in a cemetery, like a foot print or rustling leaves, are absent here, every image of life erased. Even the wind does not ruffle the grass, which never used to grow here because the prisoners would eat it. But in the crematorium, I felt

Thousands and thousands of shoes, each pair different, each pair silently screaming someone's murdered dreams...

something I cannot express. No words exist to describe how I felt. It was someone else's nightmare, a nightmare that turned real before I even noticed it. It was a stark and chilling reality that struck me there, standing where people were slaughtered and burned, and my mind simply stopped. Have you ever been to Planet Hell? My people are numbers here, struck from a list and sent out the chimney, their children's bodies roasting. And I was there. You cannot visit this planet through any film or book; photographs cannot bring you here. Planet Hell is beyond the realm of tears. This is why I could not cry.

I left the camp. How many people, who had walked in those 850,000 pairs of shoes, once dreamed of doing what I had just done? And did they, too forget how to cry?

In Israel I planted a tree with soil I had taken from concentration camps. In the soil were white specks, human bone ash. I am fifteen years old, and I know I can never forget.

Miss Horn lives in Short Hills, New Jersey, and is in the tenth grade at Millburn High School in Millburn, New Jersey. She wrote her essay while in the ninth grade. Other of Miss Horn's works on the subject of the Holocaust have been published in Hadassah magazine and in a newspaper for Holocaust survivors. In addition to reading and writing (and taking courses in writing), Miss Horn greatly enjoys travel, drawing, painting, being on her school's fencing team, and taking piano lessons.

Walking With Living Feet

Dara Horn

SHORT ANSWER

Answer each of the following questions in complete sentences.

1. What does Dara notice on the wall when she walks into the first gas chamber?

2. What do you think Dara means when she writes "one of the worst things about [the camp] is that it's right in a town, almost a city, called Lublin"?

3. What is Dara's first reaction to everything that she sees? Describe what horror changes Dara and why it does so.

4. When Majdanek was in use, grass did not grow in the camp. Why is this?

5. What does Dara do with the soil that she took? Why does she do this?

PARAGRAPH

Reread page 59 from First They Killed My Father. Make a direct comparison between Loung's incident with her red dress, and what happens to Dara Horn in this essay. Consider our theme of "innocence and experience."

NOTE TO TEACHERS REGARDING THE ARTICLES ON CAMBODIA

We frequently provide the students with contemporary news articles to supplement our reading of the Cambodian genocide. These articles allow them once again to make global connections and to acquire information from several sources. As a reaction to the articles, we do a variety of activities ranging from journals to group discussions to written responses. We have included one journal entry as an example.

Student Response:

"It was more helpful to comprehend everything when you had more insight on the topic."

Ariana Efstathios
Grade 9

A Birthday Wrapped in Cambodian History

NY Times ^ | April 17, 2005 | LOUNG UNG

OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

Cleveland

TODAY is my birthday. April 17 is what's on my driver's license and other documents. But I don't know for sure, and probably never will. All I know is that I was born in Cambodia, sometime during 1970.

In Cambodia, we didn't celebrate birthdays, so while my mother and father knew the date, I had no reason to remember it. Instead, my early years were marked by joyous events like the New Year, the Water Festival and various Buddhist holidays.

In the early 1970's, Southeast Asia was full of strife; the Soviet Union, China and the United States were fighting in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. But my earliest years were wonderfully free of war and conflict. My father was a high-ranking military officer, which meant a privileged lifestyle. Our house was filled with food and toys and even had a washing machine and an indoor toilet. I spent my days fighting with my three sisters and spying on my three brothers as they danced to Beatles songs in their bell-bottom pants. We went to school six days a week, and on Sundays, we swam or watched movies at the international youth club in Phnom Penh.

On April 17, 1975, the Communist Khmer Rouge regime took over my country, and my charmed life came to an abrupt end. I remember that day well. I was on the street playing hopscotch with one of my sisters when rows of mud-covered trucks drove by. On the trucks, men in uniforms were yelling into bullhorns, ordering us to leave our homes, telling us that the Americans were going to bomb us and if we didn't leave we would die. Chaos and fear swept through Phnom Penh. More than two million people were evicted in less than 72 hours. Later, we heard that those who refused to leave were shot dead.

My family was forced to march to a remote village. There we lived without religion, school, music, clocks, radios, movies, television or any modern technology. The soldiers dictated when we ate, slept and worked. Desperate to eliminate any threats, real or perceived, to their plans for the country, the soldiers proceeded to execute teachers, doctors, lawyers, architects, civil servants, politicians, police officers, singers, actors.

While children elsewhere in the world watched TV, I watched public executions. While they played hide-and-seek with their friends, I hid in bomb shelters with mine; when a bomb hit and killed my friend Pithy, I brushed her brains off my sleeve. I will never forget the day they came for my father. They said they needed him to help pull an oxcart out of the mud. As he walked off with the soldiers, I did not pray for the gods to spare his life. I prayed only that his death be quick and painless. I was 7 years old.

My war ended in 1979 when the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia and defeated the Khmer Rouge's army. But it was too late for the 1.7 million Cambodians killed, almost a third of the country's population of seven million. Among the victims were my parents and two sisters. My birth date died with them.

In 1980, my oldest brother, Meng, found a fishing boat that would take us from Cambodia to a refugee camp in Thailand where we would eventually be sent to America. Because we could afford to buy only three seats on the boat, the family decided that Meng and I, along with Meng's wife, would make the trip, leaving behind our three surviving siblings.

When we arrived at the camp, Meng had to fill out the refugee papers, which asked for my birthday. He chose April 17 - the day the Khmer Rouge took over our country. With a few strokes of his pen, he made sure I would never forget Cambodia.

Of course I knew April 17 wasn't really the day I was born, but I loved the American custom of celebrating birthdays. I was excited as each one approached, but I also felt sad and guilty. It was hard to be joyful on a date so many associated with death. In my early 20's, I stopped celebrating my birthday, hoping to leave Cambodia and the dead behind.

It wasn't until 1995 - 15 years after leaving Cambodia - that I had the courage to go back. My anxieties increased and my nightmares returned. Though I was eager to see my relatives, I was also filled with guilt knowing that while I had enough food to eat, attended school and played soccer in America, my sister and her family lived without electricity and running water and struggled to grow their own food in fields littered with land mines.

And when I emerged from customs in Phnom Penh - smiling, and dressed like an American traveler in loose-fitting black pants, a brown T-shirt, and sporty black sandals - I was greeted by frowns. "You look like a Khmer Rouge," a cousin announced, saying my clothes resembled the uniform worn by the soldiers. I realized then that the Khmer Rouge will affect me forever.

Since that awkward first visit, I have returned to Cambodia more than 25 times. My heart still breaks when I think about the Khmer Rouge - their corruption, their cruelty, their murders and the devastating poverty they left behind. The sadness turns to anger when I think that, 30 years to the day since the horrific takeover, the surviving Khmer Rouge leaders have not been punished (although an international tribunal is within tantalizing reach).

But when my thoughts turn away from the genocide to its survivors, I am immensely proud. Our people have been waiting 26 years for justice, but we have stayed strong, resilient and hopeful. On this anniversary date and on my birthday, these are the strengths that support me when the dark memories resurface. My Cambodia today is beautiful even as it continues to recover from the killing fields; it is also filled with new memories of life and love, shared by a new generation of Cambodians and a new generation of Unga. I know now that no matter where I live or what my real birthday is, Cambodia will always be in my heart and soul.

Lost tribe bypassed by history

The New Zealand Herald | December 10, 2004 | Jan McGirk in Phnom Penh



Romam Chhung Loeung, a 50-year-old former Khmer Rouge soldier, with his family in Lout, the village they fled 25 years ago.

It was an old truck tyre, warped beyond repair, and discarded in a remote rainforest in southern Laos that eventually bore the tribe of lost soldiers out of the Stone Age into the 21st century.

Clad in strips of bark and woven leaves, the ragtag band of Khmer families who fled the killing fields of Cambodia 25 years ago trekked out of the malarial thicket in crude sandals hacked from the rubber tread.

They had no idea the tyrant Pol Pot was dead, that the Vietnamese Army was gone or that the civil war that had forced them into hiding was long since over.

They had shunned all strangers as potential enemies, and the distant sound of a hatchet or shotgun would drive them deeper into the forest.

Eventually, they were left completely disoriented in the dense foliage, their ammunition depleted. Tigers and bears prowled around their temporary camps, and landmines were a more worrying menace than even the poisonous snakes.

With their clothes only a distant memory after a quarter of a century as hunter gatherers in the deep jungle, they ran into bewildered police officials in Laos who handed them to United Nations authorities.

They were whisked across the frontier to Cambodia and an emotional reunion with family members in Ratanakiri province.

Romam Chhung Loeung, now middle-aged, was a reluctant Khmer Rouge fighter. He was among the dozen refugees who bolted from Lout, a village in the farthest northeastern corner of Cambodia, when it was overrun by Vietnamese troops one afternoon in 1979.

His relatives were astonished this week when he turned up with all the lost villagers, plus some 22 new offspring who were born in the wild.

Unlike about 1.7 million of their countrymen who perished under the Khmer Rouge, the group had managed

to avoid execution on the killing fields or death through starvation or torture.

"I cannot remember how many huts we built during those years," Romam said, as he recounted their life on the run to his old neighbours.

The women had packed only a few tools away in their hastily assembled bundles of clothing so long ago. They took crockery, pots and knives, but were mostly loaded down with packets of rice and salt.

Weapons became useless once all the ammunition was spent, but knives and machetes were kept sharp for decades. Torch batteries went flat within weeks, and the group lit fires caveman-style, conserving a smouldering ember in a leather pouch to start the next blaze.

Lek Mun, who was barely 15 when he ran away from the village, recalled how Vietnamese soldiers had emptied their automatic rifles into the trees around Lout, aiming at Khmer Rouge guerrillas who they believed were in the upper branches.

"I saw three people killed. Would you stay in an area like that? No way," Lek Mun, now 39, said. "All we cared about was survival. We ate anything we could swallow - red ants, mice, snakes, birds, even tree roots."

It was common for Cambodian villagers to flee from advancing soldiers as the last gasp of the Cold War played out behind the Bamboo Curtain.

And many Cambodian refugees were forced to survive on grass and rodents. But these plucky refugees from the village endured far more than the usual weeks or months on the run.

Before long, this cautious group lost track of time. Warplanes and bombing sorties were replaced by the vapour trails of distant airliners after Vietnamese troops pulled out of Cambodia in 1989.

Ten years later, the Khmer Rouge's Brother Number One, Pol Pot, died of old age in a lavatory near the Thai border.

But the runaways knew nothing of these changes.

Medicine quickly ran out, and the group was left to improvise with herbs and leaves, desperate to remember the specific folk healing techniques to speed up a woman's birth contractions or ease the symptoms of infants suffering from dengue fever. Wounds and scrapes quickly went septic in the heat.

"We ate bird meat but kept the seeds from the bird's crop to plant," one old-timer said.

These improvised jungle gardens were sparse, and quickly abandoned when it was deemed time to move on, so the hungry refugees supplemented their diet with meat by using primitive snares fashioned from vines, or stones and slings.

Children born while their parents wandered in the jungle have never encountered anyone outside their little group until now, when the eldest are in their early 20s. Inter-marriage became the norm, and sometimes produced sickly infants.

"I had to leave because I wanted to die in a better place "explained Lek Mun, a sinewy man with tired eyes.

It was up to the elder Khmer Rouge cadres to lead their band back into civilisation. They walked towards the hum of traffic and into the arms of the Lao police. No one had dreamed that they had crossed into another country during their wilderness years.

Once back home, the prodigal villagers were greeted with a feast of rice wine, pork soup and ripe papaya.

Some of their relatives said they had never given up hope.

"I felt that they were out there in the jungle, but I could not reach them. I feel so sorry for them," said grandmotherly Nong Konthap, 60.

There is plenty of news to catch up on.

Cambodian elections, first held in 1993, paved the way to reconciliation in a society weary of civil war. Prime Minister Hun Sen, who ruled Cambodia with an iron fist for years, now shares power with the royalist party. A new monarch, King Norodom Sihamoni, has replaced his father, King Norodom Sihanouk, on the throne.

Facing the brave new world, Mun Kayang, a refugee in his early 20s, said he felt as though he had moved from darkness to light.

"I want to thank the old people who were brave enough to lead me out of the jungle. Otherwise, I would never have known what a car looked like."

- INDEPENDENT

NOTE TO TEACHERS REGARDING LIFEMAP

This is the students' final project. The planning and execution should be easy to follow based on the student sheet we have provided. Countless works of fiction and nonfiction follow the protagonist on a journey. This project can certainly be adapted to another piece of literature in an effort to show growth, maturity, and loss of innocence. This has always been an extremely successful project, allowing the students to delve back into the text, review the events, and tackle a disconcerting book in an artistic and creative way.

Student Response:

"I think that this book was one of the best I've ever read. It is very informative, emotional, and powerful. There are parts of the book where I was left speechless...This book was phenomenal."

Omotayo Kuku
Grade 9

First They Killed My Father by Loung Ung

LIFEMAP

DUE DATE:

We will embark on a creative assignment to culminate our unit for the third quarter. You may choose to work alone or with a partner.

This book is a journey, both literally and figuratively. Your assignment is to represent this journey in a creative manner. You will create a "lifemap" for Loung, where you depict the various villages and camps to which she traveled in the book. While this certainly can be a poster, we encourage you to be original and represent this journey in any abstract manner you like. Each place on the "map" should be given a symbol that represents the life-changing event that took place there. The "map" should follow and illustrate her growth from *innocence to experience*, including a minimum of eight symbols. A written component is NOT necessary, as you will present your project orally to the class, thereby explaining the work you have done. Good luck...you have done an excellent job with this challenging book, and we hope that your final project reflects this.

Name: _____

Final Project

LIFEMAP PLANNING SHEET

"Location"	Symbol	Explanation

PROJECT PLAN:

NOTE TO TEACHERS REGARDING LETTER WRITING CAMPAIGNS

As teachers, we often search for ways to help our students make connections between books they read and real world events. In response to our class reading of a book about the Cambodian genocide, we initiated a school-wide letter writing campaign. As you can see, we have gone about this in two different ways. One year, our students urged their readers to give attention to the crisis of landmines. Another year, they confronted the genocide in Darfur. Both of these projects enabled them to see beyond the text, to learn about the world around them, and to improve their persuasive writing skills. Some of the ideas concerning to whom to send the letters were taken from the Genocide Instructional Guide: Child Alert Darfur published by the New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education.

We encourage you to choose any global issue as a basis for this assignment. The students learned a great deal, and they put enormous effort into their letters, knowing they would be mailed. Some students were lucky enough to receive responses, and others had their letters published in local papers.

Student Responses:

"Genocide is a nightmare that will not go away for the people in Darfur. The fact that we are letting millions of people die is a huge problem and we need to address it."

Brittany Schwing-Nady
Grade 9

"It is our responsibility to aid these kids and families in any way we can."

Omar Espinal
Grade 9

DARFUR WRITING ASSIGNMENT

We have all completed our reading of *First They Killed My Father*, Loung Ung's powerful memoir of the Cambodian genocide. Tragically, many of the atrocious acts carried out by the Khmer Rouge are being repeated today in the Darfur region of Sudan.

What can we do?

L.A. I curriculum dictates that all freshmen write a persuasive paper using research and methods of argumentation. This year, we will put our learning into action by writing and mailing letters to either:

1. **THE MEDIA**→ Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper or to other news outlets to comment on their coverage of Darfur and to express your views about the importance of public attention to the story.
2. **GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES** (even the President!)→ Contact your government representatives to let them know your views and concerns about the events in Darfur.
3. **THE LOCAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL**→ Urge your town council to publish a public condemnation of the events in Darfur or to begin a local relief project.
4. **RELIEF ORGANIZATIONS**→ Find out more about relief organizations that can mount efforts to help civilians affected by the crisis. Encourage them with your ideas of how to help.

How to begin:

- *Do your research first!
- *Think about where you would like to send your letter.
- *Class time will be given to incorporate your research into an effective persuasive piece.
- *Names and addresses of newspaper editors, government representatives, local council members, and relief organizations will follow.

LANDMINE WRITING ASSIGNMENT

In response to Loung Ung's passionate plea for landmine victims, we will embark on a persuasive letter writing campaign to respond to these atrocities. This will be an appropriate and powerful extension of our First They Killed My Father unit.

What can we do?

L.A. I curriculum dictates that all freshmen write a persuasive paper using research and methods of argumentation. This year, we will put our learning into action by writing and mailing letters to either:

1. **THE MEDIA**→ Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper or to other news outlets to comment and express your views about the importance of public attention to the story.
 2. **GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES**→ Contact your government representatives to let them know your views and concerns regarding the use of landmines as a weapon of mass destruction.
 3. **RELIEF ORGANIZATIONS**→ Find out more about relief organizations that can mount efforts to help civilians affected by the crisis. Encourage them with your ideas of how to help.
-

How to begin:

- *Do your research first!
- *Think about where you would like to send your letter.
- *Class time will be given to incorporate your research into an effective persuasive piece.
- *Names and addresses will follow.

Letter Writing Campaign

School's Name
School's Address

DATE

Recipient's Name
Recipient's Title
Recipient's Company
Recipient's Address

Dear Recipient's Name,

Introduction

1. **Grab your reader's attention by using an engaging opening technique.**

2. **Link your opening to your purpose for writing. Provide background information on your chosen topic.**

3. **Introduce yourself.**

4. **THESIS STATEMENT** (This is the purpose of your letter. **REMEMBER** that this statement should control the entire letter.)

Body Paragraph 1

1. **Topic Sentence** (Introduce your first argument.)

2. **Explain your argument. Support your argument with research. (YOU MUST INCLUDE A QUOTE!)**

3. **Link your argument to your thesis.**

Body Paragraph 2

1. Begin the paragraph with a transition.

2. Topic Sentence (Introduce your second argument.)

3. Explain your argument. Support your argument with research. **(YOU MUST INCLUDE A QUOTE!)**

4. Link your argument to your thesis.

Conclusion

1. Why is the issue important to you?

2. What do you hope to accomplish?

3. What action would you like the reader to take?

4. Link your letter back to your thesis statement.

BRIEFLY THANK THE READER FOR READING YOUR LETTER.

Sincerely,

Your Full Name

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING BOOKS ABOUT GENOCIDE:

1. Prereading activities! Research, journal entries, and discussions get the students aware of the setting and situations leading up to the text they are about to read. If the students are better prepared as they begin a book, they will have a much easier time getting through it.
2. Read aloud. Even in the higher grades, this topic is often too unsettling for the students to work through on their own. Reading excerpts aloud in the classroom and following up with a discussion will help them deal with any issues that might arise.
3. Often students who are upset by the material will not feel comfortable sharing these feelings in class. A helpful idea is for students and teachers to engage in an ongoing discussion through reflective journal entries. Have the students write several times a week as a way to respond to assigned chapters, ask questions, and share thoughts. Teachers should take the time to respond to these entries as frequently as possible, establishing a private dialogue with each student.
4. Encourage cooperative learning. Put four essential questions on the board in response to the previous night's reading and allow the students to gather in small groups to answer these questions with quotes and support from the text. Engage in a large group discussion at the end.
5. Find guest speakers to visit your school. Holocaust survivors, volunteers from relief organizations, and local activists can bring the books to life for your students.
6. Film is a powerful tool to make an abstract concept seem concrete. If you have time constraints, it is not necessary to show an entire movie; often, excerpts will serve your purpose. As a supplement to the text we teach, we show a short clip from the Academy Award winning film, *The Killing Fields*. The students are then able to visualize much of what they had imagined.
7. On a final note, it's okay to show emotion! This material can be very difficult, and if you do break down (which we have done many times!) it will only serve to allow your students to do the same if they need to. If nothing else, it will capture their attention!

NATIONAL BESTSELLER

FIRST THEY KILLED MY FATHER

a daughter of cambodia remembers

UNG BUN

LOUNG

3/T-590023

"A shocking memoir... an important, moving, and well-written book that should not be forgotten and read by all who care about the lives of the people of Cambodia." —*Los Angeles Times*

L O U N G U N G