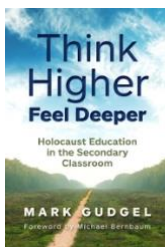


Think Higher Feel Deeper: Holocaust Education in the Secondary Classroom

Reviewed by Ronald Weisberger



**Think Higher Feel Deeper:
Holocaust Education in the
Secondary Classroom**

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In the Foreword to *Think Higher Feel Deeper: Holocaust Education in the Secondary Classroom*, Dr. Michael Berenbaum, one of the leading Holocaust scholars, writes: “A true teacher makes their students enthusiastic about the subject matter and by engaging them enables them to affirm themselves and their teacher. Mark does that and more.” This is high praise and deservedly so. The subject matter of this book contains both information about the Holocaust but also pedagogical approaches to one of the most challenging of subjects.

The amount of works on the Holocaust is voluminous. They include histories, literature both fiction and nonfiction, etc. There is also a great deal of material online from a number of sources including the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Yad Vashem, Echoes and Reflection, and many regional Holocaust and Genocide Centers around the country. In fact, the real challenge, especially for middle and high school teachers, is narrowing down the material to fit into the relatively small amount of time they have to address the subject. What the author of this book has been able to do is to help teacher focus and deal with the “difficult, often daunting task of approaching the Holocaust in your classroom...”

Author Mark Gudgel is in a good position to tackle this task. He has taught the subject for 17 years, and was a Fulbright Scholar and Fellow of the USHMM. He approaches the subject, then, as an experienced teacher of the Holocaust, as well as someone who has a good command of the subject matter. He accomplishes this in 13 relatively short chapters that are nevertheless packed

full of both valuable information on key elements of the subject as well as strategies for approaching it. He begins by discussing how to define and contextualize the Holocaust for young people. He shows that there are a variety of definitions, all of which have similarities as well as differences. He points out, though, that “what is most valuable for educators is to consider the context and the reasons why they hold such similarities and differences.”

Gudgel continues this process of discussing difficult elements related to the subject of the Holocaust and then what the best strategies are for how to deal with them. For example, how to approach the fact that so many of the perpetrators had advanced academic degrees: Does this run counter to our conception of who would commit such a horrific crime? He also doesn't shy away from confronting the numerous misconceptions that exist about this subject such as the Jews didn't fight back, or that most of the deaths did not occur in the camps. He approaches the *Diary of Ann Frank*, which is one of the most assigned works on this subject, in the same way. He argues that it is important to know the backstory regarding how this work came about and became well known, noting that “these facts do not nothing to discredit the authenticity of the writings but rather adds to them a complexity that makes them easier to appreciate and, in context deepens and expands the story of the Holocaust...” He does the same with *Night* by Elie Wiesel, another often-assigned text.

Gudgel takes this approach throughout the book, providing us with a more in-depth approach to the subject that respects both the instructor and the student. Then, after each chapter, he includes references “For Further Learning.” In this way, teachers can follow up in whatever way they feel is feasible, either to include in a lesson or just further their own knowledge. The key for him is taken from the book's title, which he received from Elie Wiesel when Gudgel asked him what advice he would give to a teacher of this subject: “think higher, feel deeper.” That example is one of the important elements in the book. As he himself says, “if you want a more academic approach there is no shortage of works on the subject.” This work, as he points out, is based on his experience teaching it, and reflects “what I wish I known when I set out to teach the course” and what he has learned along the way. He also doesn't shy away from discussing his mistakes as well as his successes. This is what makes this work valuable because it is a teacher talking to other teachers.

In that regard, Gudgel always begins with a story from his own classroom. He then moves on to the subject of the chapter; such subjects include “Holocaust denial” or “Humor and the Holocaust.” These are tricky subjects that again he treats with care as he advises teachers. The same for the use of movies, a subject Gudgel wrote his doctoral dissertation on. Topics addressed include what makes the movie *Life is Beautiful* problematic and *Schindler's List* useful if utilized correctly.

That teaching about the Holocaust and other genocides today is more important than ever is a given. The question is how to teach it effectively and realistically. Given that time is a precious commodity for teachers, *Think Higher, Feel Deeper* is the best text I know of to consult and utilize both to incorporate the Holocaust into a course as well as the curriculum in general. By the way, the book also contains a useful glossary and references, as indicated in each chapter, but also at the end of the book. Finally, in keeping with the more personal nature of the book, the author includes his email address for the reader to ask questions, give feedback, etc.

Author Biography

Ronald Weisberger, EdD, is director of the Holocaust and Genocide Center at Bristol Community College, Fall River, MA. He is also adjunct professor of history at Bristol, where he teaches American and African American History. In addition, he co-teaches an honors course

each spring entitled “Remembering the Holocaust in Literature and History.” He is the co-author with Howard Tinberg of *Teaching, Learning and the Holocaust* (Indiana University Press, 2014).