

10/25/2008

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WRITING
PROJECT
SATURDAY
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BLOGGING THE HOLOCAUST -
RESPONDING TO PROMPTS

Blogging the Holocaust

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Rationale

I began using blogs in my classroom a year ago. For the most part, my students actively engaged in the various assignments I came up for them to do. My focus for blogging was to create an environment where students could share and store their digital media creations such as podcasts and video. In addition, my students engaged in a discussion of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. You can link the blog by going here: <http://millerhighschool.blogspot.com/>. I teach in a small high school, and most the students engaged in the blogging had grown up together. The students' familiarity with each other hampered my attempts at getting them to participate in a serious online discussion. However, I chalked this up to my inexperience at managing their off task behavior. Overall, I was extremely pleased with my first foray into the world of blogging and beginning to look for new ways to use blogs in other classes.

This past summer I was extremely fortunate to be selected to attend a Reading, Writing, and Teaching the Holocaust seminar in New York City. During our two weeks there, participants were saturated with information about the Holocaust and ways to teach the Holocaust when we were back in our classrooms. Each participant was required to demonstrate a best practice. For my best practice demonstration, I wanted to show how anyone could use a blog as a classroom tool for teaching. I talked the facilitators into letting me create a blog for the seminar. Here's the link to that blog: <http://holocausteducation.blogspot.com/>. In this blog we generated quite a bit of discussion, and for many, this was their first foray into blogging. There was a lot of discussion about blogging. In fact, after my demonstration, one teacher from Nebraska became so excited about the possibilities of blogging she asked if I wanted to try a collaborative blog between her English III and my College English classes. We both became giddy with the possibilities of such an adventure and made plans to work out details when school started.

Using a Blog to Teach the Holocaust

My colleague from Nebraska and I decided to have our students read and discuss via a blog Elie Wiesel's Nobel Peace Prize winning book Night. What we do is have students read a chapter and write down at least three questions they have regarding the text. I would look through the student generated questions looking for common themes. I would then create a blog assignment that looked like this:

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2008

Extended Discussion Questions (Ch. 2)

Answer the following discussion questions in your small group. Be honest in your responses and support every declaration you make.

1. What would you have done if you were on the train?
2. When Mrs. Schachter saw the fire, was it a mental breakdown or was it a premonition? Defend your answer.
3. What was going through the minds of the Jews when the doors of the train opened and they saw the flames from the crematorium? Were they in a state of mind to feel regret for their actions against Madame Schachter?

(Add an image to your post that reflects what you have stated.)

POSTED BY DANIELLE AT 9:01 AM

Using a Blog to Teach the Holocaust cont'd

Our students break into four person groups for discussion. After 30 minutes of discussion they write a group response to the questions/prompts. We allow as much time as needed, usually about 20 minutes, for them to compose the response. Students then read each others' posts. They are required to individually comment on each post by a group from the other classroom. In other words, my students comment on each post from a group in Nebraska, and the Nebraska students comment on each group post from Missouri. The following is an example of this discussion to the above assignment.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2008

Extended Ch. 2 Questions

1. What would you have done if you were on the train?

I probably would have just stood back and let the people do what they were doing. They didn't really have a choice and I wouldn't have stood in the way of a bunch of Jews whose lives were in danger. There wasn't much else they could've done. I probably wouldn't have changed what they were doing anyway. It was either beating one person just enough so that she'd be silent or risking the lives of a whole cattle car packed full of people.

2. When Mrs. Schachter saw the fire, was it a mental breakdown or was it a premonition? Defend your answer.

It was a premonition because she kept screaming that she saw a fire, that it was a furnace, so we think that it was a premonition more than a mental breakdown because she seemed to have a very vivid picture of the fire in her mind and it was as if she somehow knew what their future was.

3. What was going through the minds of the Jews when the doors of the train opened and they saw the flames from the crematorium? Were they in a state of mind to feel regret for their actions against Madame Schachter?

They were in a state of shock because what Mrs. Schachter was screaming was actually true. We don't think that anyone really regretted what they had done to Mrs. Schachter. They needed her to be quiet and that is what mattered. They weren't beating her because of what she was screaming, they beat her because she was screaming. So we don't feel that anyone was in a state of regret. It was probably more like shock at what they saw and what she had been screaming.

-Natasha A., Shelby R., Seyd P., Wade T., Don P.

POSTED BY SHELBY LYNN AT 9:50 AM

21 COMMENTS:

Danielle said... I would ask your group the same question as the previous one - how does your picture relate to your response?

OCTOBER 17, 2008 8:39 AM

Natasha said... It is a crematorium from Auschwitz. When they arrived they saw the flames that were coming from the crematorium.

OCTOBER 17, 2008 10:20 AM

Danielle said... Thank you for defending your choice.

OCTOBER 18, 2008 1:53 PM

katrinalogan said... Your answers are very good. You answered them well. I also like your picture, it does relate to the subject. good job.

OCTOBER 20, 2008 8:37 AM

Elizabeth said... I agree that the people in the cattle car probably wouldn't have been too remorseful about the way they treated Mrs. Schacter. By the time they were sent into Auschwitz, they were more concerned about their fate. But, i do also think that Mrs. Schacter had a mental breakdown, as well as a premonition because obviously if she were in her right mind she would have been able to control herself better. She wouldn't have wanted to create a further nerve-wracking environment with all her crazy talk.

OCTOBER 20, 2008 8:40 AM

Darius said... If it were me i would have tried to defend Mrs. Schachter. Even if i had to get a beating i would have changed something. though i wouldn't know what to do about risking the lives of others on the train, i wold probably have them help me come up with a plan or something. I wouldn't just stand there let my fate be decided for me. I like how you answer the questions given. You think thoroughly which is good. Just give a little more detail to help support your answers, good job.

OCTOBER 20, 2008 8:42 AM

Sam said... Your group answers were really good. I thought you guys answered all the questions well. I also think that your picture fits Mean they did see that and i think that would of been very scary to see. So good job.

OCTOBER 20, 2008 8:42 AM

EndZoneFreenzy_CardinalFootball said... I agree. I also believe in the heat of the situation I wouldn't really know what to do. On number two, do you really think that they were close enough to see the flames? I think they may have been a little to far away to see the flames from the first see cried out 'fire.' But no one really knows because the Jews really believed her at first, like they could have been close enough. Who knows??? Like the group above stated I think they were thinking death. They were probably really scared, I know I would have been.

OCTOBER 20, 2008 8:45 AM

Missouri State Single Season Strikeout King said... I completely agree with your first answer. I would be doing the same as you. I like your second answer as well. You cannot really tell if it is a premonition or mental breakdown but you defended your choice well. Your third answer is best. They weren't beating her because of what she was saying, they just needed her to be quiet. It was either hurt her to get her to stop or get everyone else hurt or killed. Good job.

OCTOBER 20, 2008 8:47 AM

suzy said... You did a really good job of defending your answers. I probly would have done the same thing and just tried to distance myself from the situation. Good job guys.

OCTOBER 20, 2008 8:52 AM

Samantha said... If i were on the train with them i wouldn't have stood back and watched. At this point and time, i think it was very important for the jews to stay together. I don't think that they should have beat her, especially since she ended up being right. I don't think the only reason they beat her was because they wanted her quiet, that was only why they began to. I think they were mostly just taking out frustration and she seemed like the best target at the time. I would have tried to keep order on

the train and explained that they were all in it together and they needed to not go against each other like the Germans were against them, not just been a coward and stood back and watched.

I like your answer to number two. I think it was more of a premonition also. It was just easier for them to blame it on her insanity at the time. Great Job!

I don't agree with your third answer. I think that if it were me, as soon as them cattle doors opened and i saw the fire, then i would have just started weeping. Weeping because once again i should have believed the warnings that were givin to me. I think that they felt regret. How could you not?

OCTOBER 20, 2008 8:53 AM

Natasha said... In the book it says they arrived at the camp and they could see the flames. (in response to endzonefreenzy's comment)

OCTOBER 20, 2008 9:14 AM

Natasha said... We say that we wouldn't feel regret because they succeeded in keeping her quiet, which is what they had intended...so regret, not so much; shock, absolutely. (in response to samantha)

OCTOBER 20, 2008 9:17 AM

donnie p. said... Darius, you have to think about your mental strain, and then think if all of this bad stuff was happening don't you think that you would not try to help the spread of panic, Mrs Schacter was seriously going nuts and needed to be stopped.

OCTOBER 20, 2008 9:21 AM

Darius said... Well yes i was thinking of the mental strain but that doesn't give the people the right to get their frustration out on another by beating them. Fighting will only cause more fighting, which will cause everyone to be more crazy.

OCTOBER 20, 2008 9:34 AM

donnie p. said... How else were they going to get her to stop spreading panic? They had to do something to get her to stop screaming.

OCTOBER 20, 2008 9:40 AM

Natasha said... They weren't beating her to get out their frustration. They were beating her to get her to be quiet...which I have mentioned several times. It was beat her to get her to be quiet, or let her keep screaming and risk all of their lives. It wasn't a matter of getting out their frustration. It was a matter of life and death.

OCTOBER 20, 2008 9:40 AM

Danielle said... If you are broken down, humiliated, hungry, thirsty, exhausted and in fear, how would your mental state be different? Was it the Nazi's plan to have the Jews turn on one another?

OCTOBER 20, 2008 9:55 AM

Natasha said... I guess it wouldn't be much different. It was just the fact that Mrs. Schachter broke down where everyone could see it. Who are we to say the Jews weren't already just as mad, but just had more self-control. I don't think they Nazis had intended for them to turn on each other, but I bet they weren't disappointed that they did turn on each other.

OCTOBER 20, 2008 9:58 AM

Jackie G. said... I think that is what the Nazi's were doing but I could be wrong to may be they weren't trying to so what they did

OCTOBER 20, 2008 11:17 AM Danielle said... Jackie G. - it's fine to give your honest opinion and to be confident in it. Don't worry about others disagreeing with you!:)

OCTOBER 20, 2008 3:11 PM

Using a Blog to Teach the Holocaust - cont'd

As you can see, the students are engaging in some sincere and serious discussion. Much of this I attribute to students unfamiliarity with each other. My experience with book discussion during the previous year finished without much in the way of comments. Students last year seemed reluctant to disagree with anyone in their classroom. As you can see, this is not the case here. An unexpected learning outcome has arisen in this endeavor. Students are not only willing to disagree with each other, but they also are learning how to communicate their disagreements in a respectful manner, not always an easy task. It must be noted here that students are required to post pictures that coincide with the content, but these have been eliminated here for this document to save space.

To view the McCool Junction, Nebraska and Miller, Missouri collaborative blog, Breaking Down Barriers visit this link:

<http://mccoolmiller.blogspot.com/>

Demonstration Sequence

1. Introduction – 5 minutes
2. Show clip from *Sophie's Choice* – 5 minutes
3. Freewrite – generate at least two questions for discussion - 5 minutes
4. Break into small groups of four and discuss questions as a small group – 15 minutes
5. Have one person post to the blog a group response reflecting the group's discussion – 15 minutes
6. Individually read and comment on the blog to other groups' posted responses - 30 minutes
7. Have participants write a comment about the demonstration – 5 minutes
8. Discuss the demonstration - 10 minutes

Questions?

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