

# **Adversity in Literature: Narrative Writing and Collective Identity**

*Faye Kallison*

*Add B. Anderson*

## **Abstract**

This unit is tailored for 8th-grade students receiving instruction in small-group English/Language Arts. It builds upon a unit focused on Jewish identity during the Holocaust, as taught in the 8th-grade general education curriculum. The primary objective of this unit is to examine how and why countries persecute subsets of their population. Students will compare and contrast readings exploring Jewish life in Germany against texts discussing specific ethnic subgroups or ideologies that were oppressed in the Soviet Union. Week 1 will focus on the representation of marginalized groups during the early to middle twentieth century who were persecuted by the governments of the USSR and Germany, with an emphasis on drawing comparisons and contrasts. Week 2 will focus on reflections regarding personal experiences with oppression. Students will create an essay or project that summarizes their understanding while referencing the historical content discussed in the week prior. The unit aims to foster critical thinking, empathy, and a deeper understanding of persecution.

Keywords: Germany, Soviet Union, Judaism, persecution, conflict, group discussion, reflection, compare and contrast, narrative

## **Unit Content**

### **Introduction**

I am a middle school learning support teacher at Add B. Anderson Elementary, a K-8 school located in the Cobbs Creek section of Philadelphia. I support general education curricula and remedial skills. My small groups focus on math, reading, and writing skills. Students come to me for 45-minute groups in order to practice the areas of need listed in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP), to get extended time on assignments or tests, to get support with classwork, or to vent about their challenges. Many of my students have behavior goals and use the classroom as a calm-down space where they can decompress before returning to the general education class.

Philadelphia's students are behind grade-level academically. The pandemic only exacerbated this situation. This is most clearly seen in communities of color. "Only 9.3% of Black students scored proficient and above on the math tests, while 44% of their white counterparts scored proficient or above. Some 11% of Hispanic students scored proficient or better in math while nearly 53% of Asian students scored the same." <sup>1</sup> This is something I balance as I work to remediate missing skills for students who have an IEP- what they need due to disability identification, contrasted with what their class peer average is in need of, skill-wise.

Our school is a Title I institution and is part of the former Acceleration Network. In 2020, we had 500 enrolled students; however, for the 2024-2025 school year, our enrollment decreased to 350. Projections for next year are estimated at about 320 students. The student demographics are as follows: 94.8% are African American, 2.7% are Hispanic, 1% are multiracial, and 1% are White. Of these students, approximately 65 receive pull-out learning support for academic subjects. The responsibility for these students is split between myself and the other building case manager, who teaches grades K-4. The decline in enrollment is partly due to many students leaving to attend local charter schools or magnet schools outside of the catchment. Observing as students advocate for better educational opportunities has prompted me to reflect on my own teaching practices. I live in one of the wealthiest school districts in Pennsylvania: Lower Merion. My daily commute to Southwest Philadelphia takes me through several underserved neighborhoods where students do not receive adequate funding for their education.

This is my third year as a teacher, and I have worked in different parts of the city each year. I began my teaching career as a corps member for Teach for America, which also counted toward my AmeriCorps service. There are significant implications regarding how we value education and the complications of placing new teachers in front of students living below the poverty line, both in urban and rural districts. That said, I found this path a beneficial way to begin my teaching career. Being in a college lecture does not provide you with the experience gained by being directly in front of students. My first summer was in Strawberry Mansion, working during the Extended School Year (ESY) in 2022, and then I spent two years in West Philadelphia. During this time, I completed my Master in Education and teaching certifications at the University of Pennsylvania. I try to frame my understanding of the norms and expectations these students have and are raised with against my own upbringing, which was outside of Philadelphia, in a town where over 95% of residents are white.

My goal is to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment that addresses the challenges of my students while fostering their academic growth and personal development. I prioritize respect for distinct cultural norms and recognize that language is an important form of self-expression. Personal narrative is a way for any individual to share their own story. As a class, we discuss themes like identity and resilience, in order to help students to appreciate their own stories and those of their peers. My goal is for students to explore their own identities, develop a sense of agency, and understand that they can redefine themselves however they see fit.

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<sup>1</sup> Philly students are making gains on state tests. Yet large racial and economic gaps persist. (2023, November 8). Chalkbeat. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/philadelphia/2023/11/8/23952992/student-test-scores-show-increase-pre-pandemic-in-english-math/>

## Standards

This unit follows the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts, which are designed to support the instruction of English Language Arts and content knowledge. This unit focuses on developing close reading skills, written expression, and citing textual evidence to support written and verbal claims. Students will be tasked with drawing comparisons, making inferences, and connecting their conclusions to personal experiences.

## Background

### *Persecution of Those Practicing Judaism and Other Ethnic Groups*

While studying the readings for my Teachers Institute of Philadelphia (TIP) seminar, I considered how identity shapes lived experiences. For class, we read literature that focused on populations I had not previously learned about in my experience with Russian literature, having primarily read classic authors such as Chekhov, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy. We considered the following questions: Who is telling the story? Why is it being told? Is it intended to convince people to feel a certain way? Is it a means of state propaganda? These questions were employed in analysis of literary works in the context of Soviet history. In my unit, I will contrast this literature and social context with those of Germany, as follows.

Stalin ascended to power in the Soviet Union following Lenin's death in 1924, initiating a significant departure from earlier socialist ideals. A decade later, in 1933, Hitler rose to power in Germany. Both leaders retained their authority until their deaths—Stalin in 1953 and Hitler, who took his own life, in 1945. German mass political violence in these years sought to create a "perfect race" and eliminate the perceived flaws among the country's citizens, whereas the Soviet Union was interested in industrialization and progress. One method taken was to seize the economy and implement state control over industries, which was carried out as part of Stalin's Five-Year Plans. These efforts aimed at transforming the Soviet Union into a major industrial power by prioritizing heavy industry and collectivizing agriculture, restructuring the economic landscape. Many peasants resisted the collectivization of agriculture, and were repressed by violent means. Additionally, in the late 1930s Stalinist society was swept by a wave of state-sponsored violence, extrajudicial executions, arrests and imprisonments in work camps, directed disproportionately against the elites of society. This violence is termed in retrospect the Great Terror.

Soviet propaganda utilized images of mass industrialization, in bold colors, showing the benefits of industry and the improvement to the lives of the people within the Soviet Union's bounds. During Stalin's reign, those who opposed state policies were targeted and sent to work camps, or gulags. The goal was rehabilitation of supposed political dissidents and other criminals. This forced labor helped fuel Soviet economic expansion and contribute to achieving the goals of successive Five-year Plans (there were multiple, interrupted by World War II). The territory of the Soviet Union stretched across Asia and Europe, making it at its peak the largest country in the world: "... a federation initially made up of Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia (Belarus), and the Transcaucasian republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> (n.d.). *The Birth of the Soviet Union and the Death of the Russian Revolution*. JSTOR Daily. <https://daily.jstor.org/the-birth-of-the-soviet-union-and-the-death-of-the-russian-revolution/>

Collectivization was catastrophic for many inhabitants of the USSR, resulting in mass starvation in certain regions. Excess grain was seized and kept in centralized reserves. Holodomor, meaning “death by hunger” was a widespread famine, considered by some scholars to have been intentionally engineered in order to carry out a genocide of the Ukrainian people.<sup>3</sup> The famine took place between 1932-33, and death estimates are in the 3-5 million range.

Stalin foresaw that Hitler’s plans for westward conquest held implications for the Soviet Union. One of his safeguards was to sign a mutual non-aggression treaty with Germany.<sup>4</sup> This pact, known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, signed in 1939, allowed Stalin to focus on consolidating his power in order to prepare the Soviet military for future conflicts.

In contrast, Germany’s approach to social transformation involved extensive propaganda to promote the idea of Aryan superiority and to justify the oppression of those deemed undesirable, including Jews, Romani people, homosexuals, and others. Over 44,000 concentration camps of varying types were created, resulting in approximately 17 million deaths.<sup>5</sup> This internal social violence was coupled with aggressive militarization and expansionist policies, leading to invasions of neighboring countries, with the goal of taking over and subjugating people to Nazi ideals.

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was terminated only two years after its inception, ending in 1941 with Hitler’s surprise attack on the Soviet Union. Hitler initially invaded and occupied Poland, and with that success, continued West. The conception of Lebensraum, a German version of the American manifest destiny, motivated the Nazi party to expand swiftly and aggressively.<sup>6</sup> Lebensraum, a term coined in the 1890s, was adopted as a core tenet of the Nazi party. One of the beliefs was the concept of migration and colonization. The second tenet was similar in some manner to the policies of the Soviets, in that it was based in a belief in the importance of working the land, and having agricultural success. “Because of its lower middle-class appeal, emigrationist colonialism became a significant influence in politics in the 1870s as it lost its liberal connection... It remained an element of German radical conservative thinking... was prominently featured in Nazi ideology.”<sup>7</sup>

The conflict between Nazi Germany and the USSR under Stalin not only marked a significant military confrontation but also a clash of ideologies that underscored the atrocities committed by both regimes. By the end of World War II, the devastation left by these totalitarian states was profound, leaving multi-generational trauma, devastated agriculture, and heedless death. The legacies of these regimes continued to influence global politics, highlighting the dangers of unchecked power and extreme ideological fervor.

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<sup>3</sup> (n.d.). *Holodomor History*. Holodomor Museum. <https://holodomormuseum.org.ua/en/the-history-of-the-holodomor/>

<sup>4</sup> Raack, R. C. “Stalin’s Plans for World War II.” *Journal of Contemporary History* 26, no. 2 (1991): 215–27. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/260789>.

<sup>5</sup> (n.d.). *The Concentration Camps: Inside the Nazi System of Incarceration and Genocide*. Kupferberg Holocaust Center at Queensborough Community College, CUNY. <https://khc.qcc.cuny.edu/camps/charts/>

<sup>6</sup> Smith, Woodruff D. “Friedrich Ratzel and the Origins of Lebensraum.” *German Studies Review* 3, no. 1 (1980): 51–68. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1429483>.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, Woodruff D. “Friedrich Ratzel and the Origins of Lebensraum.” *German Studies Review* 3, no. 1 (1980): 51–68. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1429483>.

The Nazis also turned to American Jim Crow laws as one of the inspirations for their own eugenics' laws. America's rigid hierarchy of access and legal rights based on skin color was enacted after the dissolution of slavery.<sup>8</sup> In some cases, this was a further deterioration for former slaves, as they were now without access to housing and work, and were arrested en masse on ludicrous charges, jailed, then sent to work outdoors in prison gangs. Prisoners were subject to the same brutality as slaves, and were kept in inhumane conditions, forced to work long hours without compensation. Confederate ideals of viewing certain portions of a population as inferior appealed to the Nazi party. Books written by American eugenicists were read heavily as the Third Reich formed, and American laws were studied, as the Nuremberg Laws were created.<sup>9</sup>

The students will be given this information as an introduction to create a basis for broader comparisons that bridge connections between the Soviet Union, Germany, and the United States. The goal is for students to analyze the actions taken by countries undergoing rapid social modernization in conjunction with the use of mass violence. The structure of mass violence was expressed in different ways, with some opting to target political opponents and peasants and others opting to target racial minorities, religious groups, or ethnic subpopulations. Each country analyzed in this unit had both sympathizers and opponents, both utilizing social engineering and widespread violence. Public fear-mongering, such as public lynching that occurred in the American south, acted as a social force of control. This component of public domination is discussed more in the following section.

In summary, the totalitarian regimes of Stalin's Soviet Union and Hitler's Germany reveal their profound influence on both governance and the everyday lives of individual citizens. These narratives serve as a cautionary tale: given enough time and power, anyone can create oppressive systems. Power can be wielded to manipulate societies and erode human rights. Throughout history, sympathizers of evil acts have existed in various capacities, with some becoming household names. In the United States and Europe, figures such as Charles Lindbergh, Walt Disney, Henry Ford, and Coco Chanel expressed sympathies or support for Nazi actions. Reflecting on these historical events reinforces the importance of fostering empathy, understanding, and resilience. It also prompts us to question the motives of those who capitalize on human suffering for personal ambition.

### ***How Personal Identity is Crafted***

How we identify ourselves is deeply influenced by the ideals and actions of the society in which we were raised. America, rooted in colorism, resembles a caste system. Since European settlers arrived in the early 17th century, people of color have faced enslavement, violent persecution, discriminatory legal policies, and marginalization. The extermination of Native populations occurred during the process of colonization of North America, laying the groundwork for a society that systematically marginalized individuals based on their skin color and heritage.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Wilkerson, I. (2020). *Caste: the origins of our discontents*. Random House.

<sup>9</sup> Wilkerson, I. (2020). *Caste: the origins of our discontents*. Random House.

<sup>10</sup> Wilkerson, I. (2020). *Caste: the origins of our discontents*. Random House.

Historical representations of identity can accurately or inaccurately portray the individuals they describe, influencing how others perceive them and how they perceive themselves. Legacies of oppression have deep roots and continue to influence socioeconomic status, access to education, and opportunities in the workforce. Today, discrimination based on skin tone persists, shaping perceptions and interactions in various contexts. Throughout history, lighter skin has often been linked to privilege and acceptance, while darker skin has faced prejudice and exclusion. Understanding this complex history is crucial for addressing ongoing issues related to race, identity, and social justice in contemporary America.

America plays a significant role in this, as the decisions our ancestors made still impact us today, creating a generational story we sometimes forget. An example of this is, despite the atrocities the Nazis carried out in the Third Reich, the United States opted to utilize the mass brain drain that took place after the Nuremberg Trials. Capitalizing on the near global disfavor Germany had fallen into, the US government installed 642 foreign specialists into laboratories, universities, and military positions, under the leadership of President Truman.<sup>11</sup> This was later to be known as Project (or Operation) Paperclip, an economically successful but ethically questionable venture, criticized for prioritizing advancement over morality.

I am connected to Philadelphia via family ties, as my parents and maternal grandparents were born and grew up in the city. I have noticed that Philadelphia is a city of neighborhoods, many of which tend to be insular. Despite spending weekends at my grandparents' home in Mayfair and attending art institutions (that have since closed) as a student, I did not fully appreciate the city's vastness and cultural diversity until I began teaching. My grandparents were born and raised in Bavaria, growing up an hour apart from each other, but total strangers until meeting in a night school English class in Philadelphia.

My grandfather initially came to the United States as a prisoner of war. His town, Ansbach, was raided on Kristallnacht. As an adult, I worked for a woman who was from Ansbach, and had her father taken to Auschwitz the night of the Kristallnacht raids. She was three at the time, suffering from the flu, and was being rocked by her father when the Nazis broke in. She never saw him again. I think of her story as I witness the generational trauma caused in the United States by slavery, redlining, and institutionalized educational inequality.

Our identities shape our communities and broader societal influences. I want my students to explore this concept during our lessons. It is essential for them to understand how their backgrounds and experiences act as lenses through which they perceive themselves and their surroundings. By examining the stories and traditions of various neighborhoods and how culture manifests on a broader scale, students can develop a deeper appreciation for the diverse communities that comprise our city. An example is that in our discussions, my students noted that the "N" word was originally a term of hate, but the Black community has reclaimed it as a term of brotherhood. The students use the softer "a" version in contrast to the harsher "er" ending.

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<sup>11</sup> LASBY, C. G. (1966). PROJECT PAPERCLIP: GERMAN SCIENTISTS COME TO AMERICA. *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 42(3), 366–377. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26443040>



Through these discussions, I aim to create an environment where students feel safe to express themselves and delve into the complexities of their identities. By fostering open dialogue, we can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society. Additionally, I encourage my students to reflect on how their identities may change and evolve as they interact with diverse cultures and perspectives. Ultimately, I hope these lessons inspire my students to become active participants in their own communities, celebrating the differences that enrich our shared experiences.

### *Outline*

This unit will last two weeks; week one will focus on comparing mass repressions, social engineering, and state violence in the Soviet Union and Germany. Students will consider how concentration camps were designed to kill, while gulags were work camps with much higher rates of releasing individuals back into society. They will explore the Jewish diaspora in Germany and examine how displacement affects a person's identity. They will also investigate the Soviet Union's vision and how it impacted the lives of peasants, ethnic groups, and political opponents. There will be two days for reading the texts, a group discussion day, a day to write the essay rough draft, and a day to write the final version.

In week two, students will reflect on their work from week one and examine themes of identity, adversity, and how cultural norms are established through the treatment of subsets of people. They will read texts that depict the lives of citizens outside the Jewish faith, looking at the experiences of Black authors. They will also examine photographs and essays from Americans who visited the Soviet Union. Students will have the choice between writing a narrative essay or creating a visual project, where they will demonstrate the connections they made to the texts and explain how these connections led them to reflect on their identities and experiences.

To enhance our exploration of these themes, I plan to introduce multimedia resources, such as photography, personal journals, and survivor testimonies, to provide students with a deeper understanding of the Holocaust and the experiences of Jewish people in Germany. We will also discuss how the Soviet Union was a welcome respite from American Jim Crow, and Black Americans felt liberated by Soviet cultural norms regarding race. Some individuals chose to stay and marry into Soviet society, where they could work jobs utilizing their trade skills or other talents. Students can engage with the material on multiple levels by choosing to write, create visual presentations, or both. This will help them make personal connections and foster empathy as they learn about the diverse narratives within this historical context. This approach aims to create a more immersive learning experience that encourages critical thinking and personal reflection.

Throughout the two-week unit, I will provide strategies for students to consider the identities of the characters in the texts and how their backgrounds influence their experiences with adversity. This reflection will help students not only understand the historical context but also recognize the implications of these events on contemporary issues of tolerance, acceptance, and respect for diversity in their own communities. Philadelphia is a large and diverse city with a rich cultural mix, making it an ideal backdrop for this exploration.

To emphasize this connection, I will incorporate local history and multicultural resources, encouraging students to draw parallels between the texts and the varied cultural narratives of their neighborhoods. We will engage in discussions, group activities, and projects that highlight the importance of understanding different perspectives and experiences. By the end of the unit, students should be able to articulate how identity shapes individual experiences and collective societal narratives. This understanding will ultimately foster a greater sense of empathy and social awareness, empowering students to become active participants in promoting inclusivity and respect for diversity in all aspects of their lives.

The readings are as follows:

Class readings from curriculum:

Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History by Art Spiegelman  
Night, Elie Wiesel (From Unit Textbook)  
Often a Minute by M. Klein. (From Unit Textbook)  
The Action in the Ghetto of Rohatyn, March 1942. (n.d.). (From Unit Textbook)

My group readings:

Week 1: Anna Akhmatova, “Requiem”, Shalamov- Excerpts from Kolyma Tales

Week 2: Langston Hughes “One More "S" in the U.S.A”, Wayland Rudd collection,  
Isabel Wilkerson- Excerpts from *Caste* (Nazi Eugenics), Operation Paperclip article discussion

Optional: Sections from *Jamila* by Chinghiz Aitmatov

After the two weeks allotted for reading and essays, we will hold a reflection session where students can share their projects and insights. This will be an opportunity for them to elaborate on their understanding and reinforce the lessons learned throughout the unit. I am hopeful that these discussions and activities will not only deepen their comprehension of historical events but also encourage them to make connections between the literature outside of our unit. The unit readings for 8th graders involve stories of overcoming adversity.

In conclusion, I aim to create an educational experience that resonates with students on multiple levels—intellectually, emotionally, and personally—by weaving together literature, history, and their personal experiences. This approach will help them grasp the complexities of human experiences while fostering a sense of connection and responsibility toward others in their daily lives.

### **Essential Questions**

1. How does the experience of Holocaust survivors mirror the experience of those who lived through the pogroms?
2. How does the Jewish experience mirror the experiences other ethnic groups faced in the Soviet Union? How does it differ?
3. How does reading about the experiences of ordinary citizens from historical periods lead you to reflect on your own life?



4. What parallels can you draw regarding the treatment of certain groups in societies based on your own experiences?

### **Teaching Strategies**

**Close Reading:** Students will read selections from the text and analyze them with teacher support, then work independently to apply their understanding of the material. They will read, then reread, highlight and underline key areas of the text so that those areas can be discussed or quoted.

**IDEAS:** Inference, definition, example, antonym, synonym. This is a method I have used to teach students to use context clues when coming across an unfamiliar word. They use the other words for context, define the word, use the word in a sentence, give an antonym, and a synonym.

**Journaling:** Students will journal their thoughts to engage with the source material and deepen their understanding of the material.

**Graphic Organizers:** Two teacher-made organizers are utilized in this unit. Students will complete a Venn diagram comparing the treatment of targeted citizens in the Soviet Union and Germany. They will also complete a page that requires them to list the thesis and topic sentence of each paragraph, enabling them to organize their ideas effectively.

**Group Discussion:** Students will discuss their thoughts on the readings and their connections.

**Guided Notes:** Students will receive handouts containing information about key ideas present in the literature, as well as main ideas or terms that require definition.

**Models:** Exemplary work will be provided and explained.

**Modeled Writing:** Showing students how to use the areas of interest in the text to create a thesis that answers the written prompt. Reminders will be provided on what areas to skim, underline, and highlight.

**Note-taking:** Areas of interest, including underlining and highlighting important sections will be utilized.

**Pre-teaching:** Overview of necessary skills, such as using a topic sentence and supporting details.

**RACE:** Restate the question, Answer all parts of the question, Cite text evidence, and Explain how the cited text supports your claims.

**Scaffolding:** This provided for these students, as many have not previously learned about these topics, and they may request or need additional support as they build skills and confidence.

**Socratic method:** This will be the primary method of questioning and engagement.

**Thesis statements:** Students will practice writing a thesis statement for their writing. It will utilize the restate and answer approach.

**Think-pair-share:** Students will turn to a partner and discuss their ideas and their partner's ideas. After the partner discussion, they will share their partner's ideas with the whole group, noting key takeaways or highlights.

**Venn Diagram:** Students will complete a compare-and-contrast Venn diagram to organize their ideas, which can then be translated into essay form.

### **Classroom Activities**

#### **Lesson 1: Unit Introduction and Soviet Union Readings**

**Time:** 45 Minutes

#### **Materials:**

- Readings: Anna Akhmatova, "Requiem", Shalamov- Excerpts from Kolyma Tales
- Note-taking supplies (paper, pencils, highlighters)

**Objective:** Students will closely read texts from the Soviet Union to draw comparisons about the treatment of the country's citizens and how this reflects the social values of the Soviet Union and compares or contrasts with those of Germany.

#### **Standards:**

##### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.1**

Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

##### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.4**

Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

#### **Procedure:**

Introduction: 10 Minutes - Introduce the unit and outline the next two weeks, discussing the purpose of this unit. Answer any questions the students have and check for understanding. Reaffirm the method for close reading and identify the key areas to scan for when reading.

Lesson: 30 minutes - Students will have 30 minutes to read the texts, take notes, and consider how the reading relates to the Holocaust unit they have completed. 30 minutes will be allocated tomorrow for the readings as well. Students will be encouraged during this time to write notes in the margins of questions they have or connections they have made.

Conclusion: 5 min- Group discussion highlighting the main ideas of the texts read today. What stood out from the text? What questions do you have? What connections can you make to the readings you did in Module 3 of the Holocaust Unit?

### **Lesson 3: Group discussion**

**Time:** 45 Minutes

#### **Materials:**

- Imagine Learning Unit book, Module 3 readings
- Maus
- Anna Akhmatova, “Requiem”, Shalamov- Excerpts from Kolyma Tales
- Venn Diagram graphic organizer
- Note-taking supplies

**Objective:** Students, having read texts from the Soviet Union and Germany, discuss in groups their conclusions about the enactment of state violence against citizens, using evidence from the text.

#### **Standards:**

##### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.1**

Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

##### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.4**

Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

#### **Procedure:**

Introduction: 10 Minutes- Introduce the purpose of the discussion, which is to analyze key takeaways from the texts, focusing on how the Jewish populations in Germany were treated contrasted against the individuals who were repressed in the USSR and imprisoned in the gulag. Students will take 5 minutes to fill out a graphic organizer.

Lesson: 30 minutes- “In our era, it is not enough to be tolerant. You tolerate mosquitoes in the summer, a rattle in an engine, the gray slush that collects at the crosswalk in winter. You tolerate what you would rather not have to deal with and wish would go away. It is no honor to be tolerated. Every spiritual tradition says love your neighbor as yourself, not tolerate them.”

— Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*

This quote will be on the Smart Board as a discussion point.

Students will engage in a turn-and-talk activity with their shoulder partner for 4 minutes, discussing their thoughts regarding the prompt. Each person gets 2 minutes to share. After the share out, the whole group will discuss the key ideas and takeaways (5 min). Students will then take 5 minutes to write notes about their ideas and any additional thinking they did based on the ideas they heard. Next, students will take their notes and add further ideas to their graphic organizers. They will use the discussion to create a thesis statement that will serve as the basis for their projects.

Conclusion: 5 min- Students will go around and share their thesis statements. Students will provide feedback to one another on their chosen thesis statements. Students will take quick notes on their Venn Diagram graphic organizer about the suggestions. Everyone will then return borrowed supplies and hand in papers.

#### **Lesson 4: First Draft of a compare and contrast essay**

**Time:** 45 Minutes

**Materials:**

- Graphic Organizers
- Essay Prompt
- Lined paper
- Slide deck with Wilkerson quote
- Sentence starter on board with restate and answer example
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**Objective:** Students will be able to synthesize the discussions held in groups to create a preliminary draft of their compare-and-contrast essay, demonstrating their understanding and analysis of the material.

**Standards:**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.10**

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.4**

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

#### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.5**

With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well the purpose and audience have been addressed.

#### **Procedure:**

Introduction: 10 Minutes - When the students arrive, have the graphic organizers, writing prompt, and lined paper available. Review the expectations for the essay, and stamp the importance of including text evidence from the passages to support their ideas. For direct quotes, include the author's name and the page number.

Lesson: 30 Minutes- Utilize your thesis statement that is listed on your graphic organizer and create a cohesive paper that includes an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Students will be given reminders to consider the flow of the work and the claims they are asserting. Claims must tie to textual evidence from selections read in class or during small groups.

Conclusion: 5 minutes- Check your spelling and writing. Tuck your graphic organizer inside your rough draft and hand in all papers. Put away any supplies you borrowed.

#### **Lesson 6: Personal Narrative Introduction and Readings**

**Time:** 45 Minutes

#### **Materials:**

- Readings: Langston Hughes “One More “S” in the U.S.A” and “Negroes In Moscow: In A Land Where There Is No Jim Crow”, Wayland Rudd collection, Isabel Wilkerson - Excerpts from “Caste” (Chapter 8, p. 74-82), Operation Paperclip article outline

**Objective:** Students will read selections of the Black experience in the United States and Soviet Union, drawing conclusions on how the experiences were similar or dissimilar.

#### **Standards:**

#### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.1**

Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

#### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.4**

Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.1**

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

#### **Procedure:**

Introduction: 10 Minutes - Introduce the content, discussing the purpose of this second half of the unit. Answer any questions the students have and check for understanding. Reaffirm the method for close reading and identify the key areas to scan for when reading.

Lesson: 30 minutes - Students will have 30 minutes to read the Langston Hughes poems and the Operation Paperclip outline. They will also take notes, and consider how the reading relates to the topics covered in Week 1. 30 minutes will be allocated tomorrow for the readings as well. The students will read “Caste”, chapter 8, and look at the Wayland Rudd collection. Students will be encouraged during this time to write notes in the margins of the printouts of questions they have or connections they have made.

Conclusion: 5 min- Group discussion highlighting the main ideas of the texts read today. What stood out from the text? What questions do you have? What connections can you make to the readings you did in Week 1 of this unit?

### **Lesson 9: First draft of narrative essay/ presentation**

**Time:** 45 Minutes

#### **Materials:**

- Graphic Organizers
- Notes from the week prior
- Compare and Contrast Essay with Artifacts
- Texts read during the current and prior week

**Objective:** Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the unit concepts by creating a rough draft of a narrative essay (or presentation) and generating ideas on how their identities have been shaped by the society in which they reside.

#### **Standards:**

### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.3**

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.10**



Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

#### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.4**

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

#### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.5**

With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.

#### **Procedure:**

Introduction: 5 minutes—When the students arrive, have the graphic organizers, writing prompt, and lined paper available. For students opting to use Google Slides or a poster, give them the corresponding project page. Review the essay expectations and stress the importance of including text evidence from the passages to support their ideas. For direct quotes, include the author's name and the page number.

Lesson: 30 minutes- Students will turn and talk to a partner for 5 minutes about their plans for their narrative essay. Each student will have 2 minutes to discuss their ideas, and then 1 minute will be allocated for each person to provide a suggestion or idea to the others based on what was said. The students then have the remaining 25 minutes to work on their initial draft of the writing. Students opting to present their ideas visually will have this time to utilize an outline they have submitted.

Conclusion: 5 minutes- Check your spelling and writing. Tuck your graphic organizer inside your rough draft and hand in all papers. Put away any supplies you borrowed. Set expectations for tomorrow's essay, and answer any questions.

#### **Annotated Bibliography**

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*Source on size of the Soviet Union.*

(n.d.). *The Concentration Camps: Inside the Nazi System of Incarceration and Genocide*. Kupferberg Holocaust Center at Queensborough Community College, CUNY.  
<https://khc.qcc.cuny.edu/camps/charts/>

*Information on the Nazi concentration camps.*

Akhmatova, A. (1961). *Requiem*. Translated by Gwendolyn F. A. Miller

*Poem about her experience as a mother with a child in the gulag. This poem will be read during the first week of the unit.*

Chavez, F. R. (2022). *The Anti-racist Writing Workshop: How To Decolonize the Creative Classroom*. Haymarket Books.

*A teacher resource that gives concrete, actionable steps to create a supportive classroom community.*

Greenberg, Cheryl. (1988). "The Black/Jewish Dilemma in the Early Cold War," conference paper, American Historical Association—Pacific Coast Branch.

Hughes, Langston. (1933). "Negroes In Moscow: In A Land Where There Is No Jim Crow". *International Literature* 4. 78-81.

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*Source of Project/ Operation Paperclip, when the USA brought Nazi intellectuals into the USA and gave them jobs.*

Love, B. L. (2020). *We Want to do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*. Beacon Press.

Moore, David Chioni. (1996). "Local Color, Global 'Color': Langston Hughes, the Black Atlantic, and Soviet Central Asia, 1932." *Research in African Literatures* 27, no. 4: 49–70.  
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*A teacher reference that discusses how American education subjugates and oppresses students of color, for teachers serving a diverse student population.*

Shalamov, Varlam. (1980). *Kolyma Tales*. New York :W.W. Norton,

*First-person account, dramatized as a fiction story, of what life in the gulags of the tundra was like.*

Smith, Woodruff D. “Friedrich Ratzel and the Origins of Lebensraum.” *German Studies Review* 3, no. 1 (1980): 51–68. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1429483>.

*Source on Nazi expansion during World War 2.*

Thatcher, Ian D. (2004). Review of *Stalin and Stalinism: A Review Article*, by R. W. Davies, Oleg V. Khlevniuk, E. A. Rees, David L. Hoffman, Barry McLoughlin, Kevin McDermott, Christopher Read, and Eric van Ree. *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, no. 6 : 907–19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4147372>.

*Information on Stalin’s reign*

*Philly students are making gains on state tests. But big racial and economic gaps persist.* (2023, November 8). Chalkbeat. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/philadelphia/2023/11/8/23952992/student-test-scores-show-increase-pre-pandemic-in-english-math/>

Wilkerson, I. (2020). *Caste: the origins of our discontents*. Random House.

Fiks, Yevgeniy, Denise Milstein, and Matvei Yankelevich, eds. *The Wayland Rudd Collection: Exploring Racial Imaginaries in Soviet Visual Culture*. New York: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2021.

*This provides examples of the African American experience in the Soviet Union to my students.*

*The 8th-grade students read the following texts during their Holocaust unit.*

Klein, M. (1990). *Often a minute*.

Spiegelman, A. (1986). *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History*. Pantheon Books.

*The Action in the Ghetto of Rohatyn, March 1942.* (n.d.).

Wiesel, E., & Wiesel, M. (2006). *Night* (1st ed. of new translation). Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Original work published 1956).

## **Appendices**

### **Common Core Standards for English Language Arts**

#### ***Comprehension and Collaboration:***

##### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.1**

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

##### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.4**

Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

#### ***Key Ideas and Details:***

##### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.1**

Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

#### ***Speaking and Listening***

##### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.1**

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

#### ***Text Types and Purposes***

##### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.2**

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

##### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.2.a**

Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information, using strategies such as definition, classification, comparison/contrast, and cause/effect; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

##### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.3**

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.3.d**

Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.3.e**

Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on the narrated experiences or events.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1.b**

Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1.c**

Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.2**

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.2.f**

Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.

***Writing***

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.10**

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.4**

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.5**

With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.

### Teacher Created Materials

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

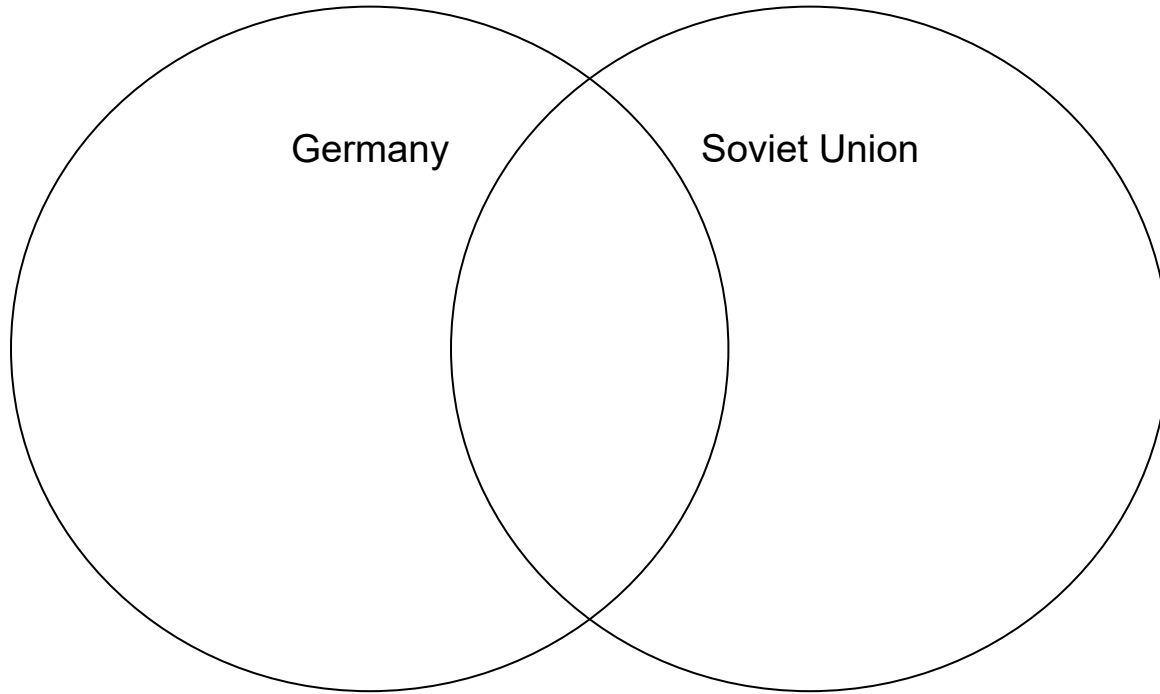
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** Write a 5-paragraph essay (Introduction, 3 body paragraphs, and a conclusion). Use the graphic organizer to help you assemble your topics. Restate and answer the prompt on the thesis statement line. Check your work for spelling and grammar before submission.

**Prompt:** *How does the experience of “dangerous” citizens differ between Germany and the Soviet Union? Who was targeted? Consider how the citizens were treated and what they were subjected to, such as the Holocaust and pogroms. Use examples from the text to support your response.*



## Compare and Contrast



Thesis statement: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Introduction: Restated prompt with your answer.

First Paragraph Topic Sentence:

Second Paragraph Topic Sentence:

Third Paragraph Topic Sentence:

Conclusion:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** Write a 5-paragraph essay (Introduction, 3 body paragraphs, and a conclusion). Use the graphic organizer to help you assemble your topics. Restate and answer the prompt. Check your work for spelling and grammar before submission.

**Prompt:** *How does reading about the experiences of ordinary citizens from historical periods lead you to reflect on your own life? What parallels can you draw regarding the treatment of certain groups in societies, based on your own experiences?*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**RACE** - **R**estate the question, **A**nsWER all parts of the question, **C**ite text evidence, and **E**xplain how the cited text supports your claims.

**R**

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**A**

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**C**

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**E**

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

For the presentation (an alternative to the narrative essay). Create a poster or slide presentation showing your learning. Relate your conclusions about your own experiences to the text selections we read. Consider the questions below as you create your presentation. Include a citation slide or list on the back of your poster/ as the last slide in your Google presentation.

*How does reading about the experiences of ordinary citizens from historical periods lead you to reflect on your own life? What parallels can you draw regarding the treatment of certain groups in societies, based on your own experience?*



KOLYMA TALES are stories of the Soviet forced-labor camps located in the Kolyma (*kah-lee-mah*) region of northeastern Siberia. The well-known historian Robert Conquest, in his study of the area, estimates that three million people met their deaths there. As an absolute minimum, he sets the figure of two to two and one-half million. His estimates are based on ships' records, accounts of firsthand witnesses, and other reliable, although necessarily incomplete, sources.

It might seem incredible that the closest estimate the Western scholar can produce is "give or take a million," but one must remember that historians have no direct access to the records, that there has been no Nuremberg Trial complete with captured archives, witnesses, and so forth. Shalamov, in the tremendously powerful story "Lend-Lease," writes of having learned of an enormous mass grave:

Kolyma is an enormous area with the coldest temperatures in the Northern Hemisphere. The area is so desolate and isolated that in 1927 there were only 7,580 inhabitants in an area five or six times the size of France! In 1932-33 foundations were laid for a massive forced-labor area intended to produce gold for the young Soviet state.

The years 1937-39 were the years of the purges. Millions of people were arrested, held for months in appalling prison conditions, tried under ridiculous charges, and either executed or sent in cattle cars to Siberia. Emaciated from hopelessly inadequate diet, denied even sufficient drinking water and toilet facilities, freezing from the cold, they would arrive at the Siberian ports of Vladivostok, Vanino, or Nakhodka after a trip that lasted anywhere from thirty to forty days! There they were held in concentration camps for varying periods of time



and sent by ship to Kolyma. Michael Solomon, a Rumanian who had been a prisoner in the camps, described the experience:

When we came out on to the immense field outside the camp I witnessed a spectacle that would have done justice to a Cecil B. DeMille production. As far as the eye could see there were columns of prisoners marching in one direction or another like armies on a battlefield. A huge detachment of security officers, soldiers and signal corpsmen with field telephone and motor-cycles kept in touch with headquarters, arranging the smooth flow of these human rivers. I asked what this giant operation was meant to be. The reply was that each time a transport was sent off, the administration reshuffled the occupants of every cage in camp so that everyone had to be removed with his bundle of rags on his shoulder to the big field and from there directed to his new destination. Only 5,000 were supposed to leave, but 100,000 were part of the scene before us. One could see endless columns of women, of cripples, of old men and even teenagers, all in military formation five in a row, going through the huge field, and directed by whistles or flags.<sup>1</sup>

As I began to see where we were, my eyes beheld a scene which neither Goya nor Gustave Doré could ever have imagined. In that immense, cavernous, murky hold were crammed more than 2000 women. From the floor to the ceiling as in a gigantic poultry farm, they were cooped up in open cages, five of them in each nine-foot-square space. The floor was covered with more women. Because of the heat and humidity most of them were only scantily dressed; some had even stripped down to nothing. The lack of washing facilities and the relentless heat had covered their bodies with ugly red spots, boils, and blisters. The majority were suffering from some form of skin disease or other, apart from stomach ailments and dysentery.

Although there was some lead mining, fur trapping, and a fishing industry in Kolyma, the chief occupation of the prisoners was gold mining. At least at first. After a time, gold production was very nearly subordinated to the task of extermination. Because of the geography of the region—its isolation and the mountains cutting off the only path out by land—there was no real opportunity for escape. It was no secret that people were brought to Kolyma to die and produce some gold in the process. The world described in these stories leaves little room for any other conclusion. Hitler once remarked that he had learned a great deal from the Soviets—not so much in the area of ideology as in methodology.

## Shock Therapy

Merzlov, in fact, survived longer than the others. The enormous Merzlakov—a sort of human analogue to the Percheron, Thunder—felt only a greater gnawing hunger from the three spoons of porridge given out for breakfast. A member of a work gang had no way of supplementing his food supply, and furthermore, all the most important foodstuffs—butter, sugar, meat—never made it to the camp kettle in the quantities provided for by the instructions.

Merzlakov watched the larger men die first—whether or not they were accustomed to heavy labor. A scrawny intellectual lasted longer than some country giant, even when the latter had formerly been a manual laborer, if the two were fed on an equal basis in accordance with the camp ration. Not calcu-

We were all tired of barracks food. Each time they brought in the soup in large zinc tubs suspended on poles, it made us all want to cry. We were ready to cry for fear that the soup would be thin. And when a miracle occurred and the soup was thick, we couldn't believe it and ate it as slowly as possible. But even with thick soup in a warm stomach there remained a sucking pain; we'd been hungry for too long. All human emotions—love, friendship, envy, concern for one's fellow man, compassion, longing for fame, honesty—had left us with the flesh that had melted from our bodies during their long fasts.

mysterious. And frightening.

The fish that was to take the place of meat according to the "replacement tables" was half-spoiled herring intended to replenish our intensified expenditure of protein.

fant, and heroic. A man who had received could not feed

V In the camp we learned to hate physical labor and work in general.

But we were not afraid. More than that: the foreman's assessment of our work and physical capacity as hopeless and worthless brought us a feeling of unheard-of-relief and was not at all frightening.

We realized we were at the end of our rope, and we simply let matters take their course. Nothing bothered us any more, and we breathed freely in the fist of another man's will. We didn't even concern ourselves with staying alive, and ate and slept on the same schedule as in camp. Our spiritual calm, achieved by a dulling of the senses, was reminiscent of the

We had long since given up planning our lives more than a day in advance.

Document 2: Anna Akhmatova - Requiem

☐

*Unmoved by the glamour of alien skies,  
By asylum in faraway cities, I  
Chose to remain with my people: where  
Catastrophe led them, I was there.*

1961

☐

In the terrible years of the Yezhov terror I spent seventeen months queuing outside the prisons of Leningrad. On one occasion someone “recognized” me. It was a woman who was standing near me in the queue, with lips of a bluish color, and who, of course, had never before heard my name. And now, waking from that state of numbness which was characteristic of us all, she quietly asked me (for everyone spoke in a whisper in those days):

“And can you write about this?”

And I replied:

“I can.”

And then something like a smile flickered across what was once her face.

*April 1, 1957  
Leningrad*

☐

*Dedication*

Mountains are known to bend beneath such sorrow

And mighty rivers to cease to run;

But the prison doors will still stand firm tomorrow,

And behind them the cells will still resemble burrows,

And sadness will long for death to come.

For some cool breezes blow as day is dawning,

Others rejoice in sunsets — but here  
Our days are all alike, monotonous, boring:  
The hateful grating of keys on locks each morning  
And the tramp of boots is all we can hear.  
We arose at dawn, as if to pray together;  
Through the ravaged city we made our way;  
And the morning sun was low in the sky, the Neva  
Was veiled in mist as, paler than ghosts, we gathered  
And the sound of hope seemed so far away.  
The sentence falls ... She feels the tears searing  
Her eyes, and now she's all alone;  
And they'll cast her down, their fingers tearing  
The life from her heart, coarse and uncaring;  
But she'll stagger on down her lonely road ...  
We were thrown together in hell — and yet still I miss them,  
Those random friends; and I wonder where they are:  
What memories crowd the bright full moon, what visions  
Haunt them now in their cold Siberian prison?  
And I send this farewell greeting from afar.

*March 1940*

□

### *Introduction*

This was a time when the corpses

All smiled, as though glad to have died,  
When the city, reduced to an adjunct  
Of its prisons, looked on from the side;  
When driven half crazy by suffering,  
The ranks of condemned shuffled by  
And the trains on the point of departure  
Whistled a song of goodbye.  
The star of death glimmered wanly,  
Far below an innocent land  
Was trampled by blood-stained jackboots  
And crushed beneath black prison vans.

✧

1

They took you as day was dawning,  
Like a mourner I followed behind,  
In the hallway the children were bawling,  
The icon light guttered and died.  
I'll never forget: when you kissed me —  
The chill of your lips; on your brow —  
Cold sweat. Now like wives throughout history,  
I'll stand by the Kremlin and howl.

*Autumn 1935*  
*Moscow*



☐

2

Quietly flows the quiet Don,  
The yellow moon, strolling along,  
Enters a house without a care  
And chances upon a shadow there.  
Not long ago that shadow was still  
A woman — but now she's lonely and ill.  
Her husband is dead, her son is in jail.  
Remember her in your prayers without fail.

☐

3

No, this isn't me, this is someone else who is suffering.  
I wouldn't be able to do it — but let what's happened  
Be veiled in black cloth, let the lamps be removed ...  
And then night.

☐

4

If only you'd known, wicked woman  
Who once cared for nothing but fun,  
Who used to be Petersburg's favorite,  
That the day will finally come  
When, along with three hundred others,

Clutching your parcel, you'll go  
To wait in line while your tears  
Burn through the New Year's snow.  
The poplar tree sways near the prison  
In silence — but so many lives  
Are ending inside for no reason ...

□

5

At the feet of the cruel hangman,  
Prostrating myself, I've groaned —  
For seventeen months, my terror,  
My son, I've called you back home.  
Everything's muddled forever,  
To me it's no longer clear  
Who's a beast, who's a human being,  
And whether the end is near.  
And incense and blossoming flowers  
And tracks on a road leading nowhere  
Are all that remain ... From the sky  
A huge star looks into my eyes  
And I finally understand  
That destruction is close at hand.

1939

6

The weeks flutter by on light wings;  
 What's happened — I scarcely can say:  
 How the white summer nights looked in  
 Through the bars of the cell where you lay,  
 How still they look down on you there  
 With the pitiless eyes of a hawk  
 While the voices of strangers talk  
 Of death and the cross which you bear.

1939

7

*The Sentence*

And I felt the heavy verdict,  
 So long anticipated, fall  
 On my living breast. No matter,  
 I'll manage somehow. After all,  
 I've so many chores to attend to:  
 I must turn my heart into stone,  
 I must liquidate all my memories  
 And learn how to live alone.  
 And if not ... Through my window summer

Is celebrating somewhere out of sight.

I've foreseen it: this house, so empty,

On this day, so desolate and bright.

*Summer 1939*

□

8

*To Death*

You'll come one day for certain — then why not now?

Life is so hard; and while I wait, I've dimmed

The light and left the door ajar to allow

You in your simple splendor to enter in.

Assume for this purpose whichever guise you like:

Burst in like a shell with its load of death;

Sneak in like a skillful burglar as midnight strikes,

Or kill me like typhus, inhaled with a breath.

Or tell once more the well-known story we all

Have heard so often by now it's grown stale,

In which the men in military caps will call

And make the janitor's face turn pale.

To me it makes no difference. Quietly flows

The Yenisey. The North Star shines above.

All I can do is watch as terror enfolds

In mist those bright blue eyes I loved.

*August 19, 1939*  
*The Fountain House*

☐

9

I'm drunk on the harsh wine of madness  
And all but concealed beneath  
Its wing; and now it invites me  
To enter the valley of death.  
And I knew that I had to acknowledge  
Defeat: that now it was time  
To obey these delirious ravings  
As if they weren't even mine.  
And it won't allow me to carry  
Any of my memories away,  
However I try to persuade it,  
Whatever I do or say:  
Not the eyes of my son, filled with terror —  
His suffering as adamant as fate,  
Nor the day of the storm's arrival,  
Nor the vigil at the prison gate,  
Nor the hands' seductive coolness,  
Nor the restless shadow of the lime,  
Nor the sound of words offering comfort  
From afar for one last time.

*May 4, 1940*  
*The Fountain House*

□

10

*Crucifixion*

1

*Don't weep for me, Mother,*  
*As I lie in my grave.*

Choirs of angels hymned the glorious hour,  
Dissolved in flame, the heavens glowed overhead.

“Why hast thou forsaken me, my Father?”

And “Mother, do not weep for me,” he said.

2

Magdalen sobbed and wrung her hands in anguish,  
The disciple whom he loved was still as stone.  
But no one dared to look toward the place where  
The Mother stood in silence, all alone.

*1940-43*

□

*Epilogue I*

I learned how to read the meaning of downcast faces,  
To notice the way in which terror furtively peeks  
From beneath half-lowered lids, how suffering traces  
Its stern cuneiform script on ravaged cheeks,

How the hair which only the day before appeared  
Lustrously black, can turn ashen grey overnight,  
How smiles can fade on trembling lips, how jeers,  
However dry, can betray a tremor of fright.  
And if I now venture to offer up this prayer,  
It's not for myself alone, but rather for all  
Who, enduring the changing weather, stood with me there  
Beneath the indifferent gaze of that blank red wall.

□

### *Epilogue 2*

Once more the hour of remembrance draws near  
And it's almost as though I can see them all here:  
The one who queued to the point of collapse,  
And the one whose time on this earth has now passed,  
And the one, who shaking her head, used to groan:  
“When I enter this place, it's like coming back home!”  
And I would have recorded you all in my verse,  
But they've taken the list where your names were preserved.  
So instead I've made you a shawl out of words,  
Saved from the talk which I once overheard.  
And I'll never forget you, wherever I go,  
Whatever new horrors I'm destined to know.  
And even if one day they somehow suppress

My voice through which millions of lives were expressed,  
I ask that you all still remember to pray  
For my soul on the eve of my burial day.  
And if in the future they give the command  
To raise up a statue to me in this land,  
I consent to this honor — but only so long  
As they solemnly pledge not to place it upon  
The shore of the sea by which I was born,  
For my link with the sea has long since been torn;  
Nor in the park of the Tsars, by the tree  
Where a restless soul is still searching for me;  
But to raise it instead near the prison's locked door  
Where I waited for three hundred hours and more.  
For I fear I'll forget in the vacuous peace  
Of the grave that old woman who howled like a beast,  
Or the rumbling wheels of the black prison vans,  
Or the sound of the hateful jail door when it slammed.  
And from motionless eyelids the melting snow,  
Like tears, down my cheeks of bronze will flow  
As the dove in the watchtower calls from on high  
And the boats on the Neva go drifting on by.

*March 1940*  
*The Fountain House*



# Document 3: Langston Hughes, “Negroes In Moscow: In A Land Where There Is No Jim Crow”

66 *Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs*

*Essays, 1930-1939* 67

## “Negroes in Moscow: In a Land Where There Is No Jim Crow,” *International Literature* 4 (1933): 78-81

In the very heart of Moscow, for a great many years now, day and night, night and day, a tall curly-headed Negro stands looking down on the moving life of Russia's greatest city. Autos and tram cars cross the square, and crowds of people. Overhead airplanes fly. And soon, under his feet, there will be a subway. At night, the lights blaze, electric signs flash and theatre crowds merge. By day, mothers with kids come and sit on the park benches around the square and often say to their children, “Look, there is Pushkin.” And sometimes the children walk up the steps to the foot of the statue and learn to spell, among their first words, the name of the greatest of the Russian poets.

Pushkin! Pride of the Negroes, too, standing in the central square of Moscow. I first read about him years ago as a child in the Negro magazine, *The Crisis*. The *Negro Year Book* contains a sketch of his life, as well. And recently, on a long tour of the South, I saw his picture in

many schools and colleges in the American Black Belt. I heard colored teachers in Mississippi and Georgia point to him as an inspiration for their oppressed and exploited pupils. And in their graduating orations, black students laud him every year as one of the great persons of Negro blood in the cultural past of the world.

Pushkin! Dead nearly a hundred years. Standing now in bronze in the heart of the Red Capital, looking down on the workers who own the earth; standing with his long black cape thrown about his shoulders, an equal of Shakespeare, Dante, Goethe, in the literature of all time; Pushkin, his books sold and read and studied everywhere by more people than ever before because the Russian masses now are literate; his poems loved and recited by the sons and daughters of workers and peasants; his memory honored by the Soviets even more than it could have been honored by the Tsars.

Pushkin, a great grandson of the Negro of Peter the Great.<sup>24</sup> Of course, by the time the black blood got down to the poet, two generations removed, it was pretty well mixed with the blood of the Slavs and Tartars, too. But Pushkin's mother was a beautiful mulatto. And Pushkin himself was dark enough to show, in hair and skin, traces of Africa. There is an anecdote current in Russia that Poe, the famous American poet from Baltimore, refused to shake hands with Pushkin when he looked into his face upon meeting and saw how much it resembled the faces of some of the light slaves in Maryland. Pushkin, however, being a member of the nobility, deemed it beneath his dignity to be insulted by a mere white American—otherwise there might have been a duel of historical and literary importance.

Pushkin died in 1837. Before the end of the century, another Negro of purer blood, a black actor from America, was attracting the greatest of attention and receiving high praise for his art from the Russian public. This man, Aldridge, played Shakespeare with great force and power.<sup>25</sup> He specialized in Othello, but also performed King Lear and other roles most successfully and for his performances he was made a member of the famous Imperial Academy of Arts and Sciences in St. Petersburg. In several old books on the Russian theatre, Ira Aldridge is written on at length and his photographs displayed.

From the more recent past, indeed since the October Revolution, two other famous Negroes have crossed the Russian scene.<sup>26</sup> One is Claude McKay, the poet and novelist, who lived for a time in Moscow, and whose books have been published in Russian. The other is Roland Hayes, the singer, who was invited to sing in the largest Soviet cities.<sup>27</sup> He sang

to immense audiences in the Big Hall of the Conservatory at Moscow, leaving a most favorable impression on the crowds of music lovers who came to hear him.

Claude McKay is well remembered in the Moscow literary world. His picture and one of his poems may be seen in a text book of the Russian language for foreigners. It is said that McKay wrote a book in Moscow about the American Negroes, too, a very rare book that appeared only in Russian (now out of print) and is the only factual book he ever wrote. Claude McKay was one of the first of the Negro intellectuals to come to Moscow after the Revolution. He came as a friend and a comrade, and his visit evidently made a great impression, as many people in Moscow still ask visiting Negroes for news of him.

There are, among permanent foreign working residents of Moscow, perhaps two dozen Negroes, several of whom I have not met as there is no Negro colony; and colored people mix so thoroughly in the life of the big capital that you cannot find them merely by seeking out their color. Like the Indians and Uzbeks and Chinese, the Negro workers are so well absorbed by Soviet life that most of them seldom remember that they are Negroes in the old oppressive sense that black people are always forced to be conscious of in America or the British colonies. In Moscow there are no color bars, and the very nature of the Soviet system can never admit any sort of discriminatory racial separation, or the setting apart from the general worker's life of Negroes or any other minority groups.

Indeed, in Moscow, the balance is all in favor of the Negro. The Russian people know that he comes from one of the most oppressed groups in the world, so the Soviet citizen receives the black worker with even greater interest and courtesy than is paid to most other foreigners coming to the capital. In the Moscow papers and magazines, schools and theatres there is frequent and sympathetic attention paid by writers, teachers and playwrights to the widespread and difficult struggle of the black peoples in the capitalist lands where they are subjected to exploitation and oppression as serfs and colonials. Negroes in Moscow sense at once this great Soviet sympathy for them. Black workers soon feel at home. And most of them resident at present in Moscow have no thought of returning soon to the countries where Jim Crow rules.

Among the foreign specialists in the factories of the Moscow district, Robert N. Robinson is one of the best known. His picture is frequently seen among the *udarnik* groups (shock brigade workers) whose photos are often displayed in the windows of the Moscow shops. His dark face

68 *Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs*

*Essays, 1930-1939* 69

70 *Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs*

is thus known to thousands of Muscovites who pass in the city streets. Some two years ago his name flashed across the press of the world as the Negro who was attacked by white Americans in the dining room of the Stalingrad Tractor Plant, said Americans being expelled from the Soviet Union immediately on a charge of racial chauvinism. Thus the Union protects its darker workers from imported prejudice.

Robinson came to Russia in a group of more than a hundred American specialists brought over to work at Stalingrad in 1930. He was the only Negro in the group. Seven other Negro specialists had been contracted, but at the last moment backed out, with the characteristic reluctance of most North American Negroes to pioneer abroad. (Robinson himself is a Jamaican, B. W. I.) He formerly worked as a gauge grinder at the Ford Plant in Detroit. There, being the only Negro in his department, he has many tales to tell of how his fellow workers attempted to drive him off the job, even putting a short circuit into his machine so that upon touching his tools he would receive a severe shock.

In the Soviet Union no such things have happened. After two years at Stalingrad, Robinson is now working as general tool maker and instructor in the gauge grinding department of the Moscow Ball Bearing Plant. His work, of all in the tool room, requires the most exact precision, demanding an accuracy of up to one-thousandth of a millimeter.

In his spare time, Robinson is a lover of the theatre, especially the opera. He has seen the best of the theatres abroad, London, Paris, New York, and Berlin, but he insists that none of them compare with the Soviet productions, and that the music at the Bolshoi is the finest he has ever heard. And in Moscow there are no Jim Crow galleries.

There are other Negro workers in Moscow factories who, unfortunately, I have not been able to interview. And in far away Tashkent, there is a group of American Negroes employed at the Machine-Tractor Station and Seed Selection Station of the State Cotton Trust. Members of this group may be seen occasionally on vacations in Moscow, bringing their Russian wives to the shops and theatres.

Among the oldest Negro residents of the capital are two artists of the theatre and concert stage. Emma Harris and Coretti Arle-Titz. Emma Harris has been in Russia for more than thirty years and is well known by the resident American workers and journalists. Among other things, she is famous for her apple pies. But these pies are among the least of her achievements. Her life story would make a colorful and exciting book.

She came to Europe in 1901 as a member of the “Louisiana Amazon Gods,” a singing group which included Fannie Wise and Ollie Borgynne,

now old and well known artists in the States. After a tour of Germany, a smaller group, the “Six Creole Belles,” invaded Russia and Poland with great success. When this group disbanded, Emma Harris formed a singing trio of her own which performed in the large cities for a number of years. Finally, stranded in Siberia, Mrs. Harris taught English for a livelihood. Upon her return to Russia proper, she appeared as a concert soloist. And during the early days of the war she conducted a motion picture theatre in Kharkov. Later she owned an American Pension in Moscow. During the days of the Civil War she served as a nurse for the revolutionary forces in the Ukraine. Then under Colonel Haskell she worked with the American Relief Association. And after the establishment of the Bolshevik power, she continued active as a speaker and propagandist for the International Red Aid.

One of my first memories of Moscow is Emma Harris speaking at a huge Scottsboro meeting one July night in the Park of Rest and Culture, her dark face glowing in the blaze of the gigantic flood lights, her voice magnified by loud speakers so that thousands of people could hear. She is more than sixty years old now, but no one would think so. She is full of life and fire. And she has come a long way from Augusta, Georgia, through the days of the revolution to the red freedom of Moscow.

Coretti Arle-Titz has been in Russia for more than twenty years. She thinks in Russian, and often English words come hard for her now. For a time, she sang with the Emma Harris trio, then she took up the serious study of voice at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, and later with Madame Vladimirova at the famous studio in Moscow founded by Ippolite Ivanov. She has sung the role of Adina at the Kharkov Opera, and has toured the whole Soviet Union in concert with great success. Her scrap books are full of critiques and testimonials from workers and Red Army men. She has known many of the leading revolutionaries and is a friend of Maxim Gorky's.

At the Moscow school for children of English speaking parents there is a Negro teacher, Lovett Forte Whiteman of Chicago. His field is chemistry, physics and biology. He has lived in Moscow for more than five years, is married and intends to be a permanent resident.

Of those Negroes who came with the Moschepoln film group in 1932, three have remained as workers. Wayland Rudd, the actor, is a member of the famous Meyerhold Theatre. He acts a small role in Russian in one of the new productions. At the same time, he is taking full advantage of the opportunities which the theatre offers for the study of singing, dancing, fencing and allied theatrical arts.

Homor Smith, a former postal employee of Minneapolis, is now a special consultant in the rationalization of the Soviet postal system. He is credited with the planning and supervision of Moscow's first special delivery service recently introduced. He is the only American, Negro or white, in a position of high responsibility in the Soviet Post Offices, and as such, is being frequently written about in the press.

The youngest member of the film group, Lloyd Patterson, came directly from his graduation at Hampton Institute in Virginia to the Soviet Union. He is an expert painter, and whereas in America he could work only at simple jobs of house painting, he is employed in Moscow on the interior decorations of the de luxe tourist hotel, Metropole. Patterson is married to a talented Kommomolka<sup>28</sup> who is a painter of pictures, and together they executed some of the best street decorations for the last May Day demonstration.

Although the actual number of Negroes in Moscow is not large, the Muscovites, from reading and from the theatre if not from direct contact, are well-informed on the various phases of Negro life. Each year, a number of books by or about Negroes are published. At present *Georgia Nigger* has appeared in both Russian and English.<sup>29</sup> The Moscow papers follow the Scottsboro case closely. In the theatre, Muscovites have started with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and have lately come down to a very modernistic production of Eugene O'Neill's worst play, *All God's Chilluns Got Wings*, called in Moscow, *Negro*. At the Children's Theatre there is a playlet called, *The Good Little Negro Girl*. And recently the manuscript of a new play has been completed by a Russian playwright, Roon, depicting the struggles of a black boxer in America whose career is hampered by prejudice, and who is exploited by his managers for all the money they can get out of him.

Negro music is popular in Moscow, too. Irma Yunzen, the great folk singer, uses southern melodies on her programs. Sergei Radamsky of New York sang [with] a Negro group during the past season. And it is rumored this fall Paul Robeson is expected to appear in concert. In the Museum of Western Art there is a bust of the American Negro musician and composer, Hall Johnson, done by Minna Harkovs, of the New York John Reed Club.<sup>30</sup>

So modern Negro art, both literature and music, is well represented in the Soviet capital. The music is kept alive not only by Coretti Arle-Titz and visiting Negro artists but by the Russian singers, also. And as to the workers, the great task of building socialism and the labor it entails has given work of importance to the competent black hands of Robinson,

Patterson, Homor Smith, and other Negroes in Moscow, whose specialities from all countries in the world are employed.

A Moscow poet, Julian Amisimov (translator of a forthcoming anthology of Negro poetry), has written a little poem which begins like this article with Pushkin, but which ends, not like this article, with today, but with tomorrow.

It is called:

Kindship  
The blood of Pushkin  
Unites  
The Russian and the Negro  
In art.  
Tomorrow  
We will be united once  
In the International.

So merge past facts and present prophecy.

## Document 4: Outline of Project Paperclip article

### Project Paperclip: German Scientists Come To America

#### Key Points:

642 specialists were given positions at American institutions. This includes positions at the military, universities, and laboratories. The “Von Braun” team consisted of 127 rocket scientists and engineers were brought to the United States in 1946. World War II ended in September of 1945. President Truman was in office at the time, and this was all executed by the State Department and military. Whole families were moved to the United States, given the promise of both citizenship and good salaries.

#### Reasoning:

The United States was in the Cold War against the Soviet Union and wanted to enhance their military technology. Prior to this, the US had considered the scientists an advantage against the Japanese. The Von Braun team had the ability to use their rocketry skills to build bombs. The scientific and military advancements were seen as more important than the moral ambiguity of bringing Germans (and possible Nazis) into the United States.

#### Public Outcry:

In December of 1946, citizens, including Albert Einstein, wrote to President Truman, stating the former Nazi party members were dangerous, full of racial and religious hatred, and anti-democratic. US organizations, including the Federation of American Scientists, worked for civil freedom and also spoke up, disagreeing with the project. They all disagreed that those brought over from Germany should be given citizenship, and therefore, American protection.

#### Further Controversy:

Some of the Germans brought to the United States were assumed to have been in the Nazi party. This was not the case. Many had also been victims to Hitler’s vision, or forced into service. Some had been to one, or multiple, concentration camps. The Office of Controls refused to grant visas unless the Germans could prove no connection to the Nazi party. The State Department vouched for these individuals, granting visas to those they deemed incapable of security threats.

#### After the 1940s:

Immigration for German specialists was passed between 1950-1952, given strict immigration laws passed by the United States. They were eased in 1952, and Germans began to immigrate, again. The Von Braun scientists, working in Alabama, created the first satellite in 1958.