



**6<sup>TH</sup>**  
**GRADE**  
VOLUME 6.3

# Book Club Teacher's Guide

*Four Perfect Pebbles:  
A True Story of the Holocaust*

For pairing with *C. I. A. Unit of Study—  
Historical Fiction, Esperanza Rising 6.3*

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## Foreword: How to Teach the Holocaust

by Peter Dewitz

Some say I am a Holocaust survivor, but I am not sure. My mother left Cologne, Germany, in 1931, before Adolf Hitler came to power, and my father left Berlin, Germany, in 1936, three years after Hitler became the chancellor of Germany. Almost all of my relatives anticipated the horror of the Holocaust and left for other countries before they felt the full brunt of the Nazi plan. A few were not so fortunate, and they died in the concentration camps. Father was a survivor, as were other family members.

Later in this unit you will encounter the story of my father's cousin, Lore Zeller. The two cousins grew up together in Berlin, the capital of Germany, and they both escaped the Nazis' horror. They both made their way to Los Angeles, California, where they raised children and had full lives. *Four Perfect Pebbles* and Lore's story are both filled with luck. Sometimes luck arrives early, sometimes late, and for most of the unwanted and condemned in Nazi Germany it never arrived.

I have always had a deep fascination with the Holocaust. How, I wondered, had my family lived in Germany during the rise and reign of Hitler, and how had they managed to escape? These personal questions were answered reluctantly; few Holocaust survivors desired to relive the past. Most wanted to put it behind them and live in the present. A few, like Lila Perl and Marion Blumenthal Lazan, authors of *Four Perfect Pebbles*, tell the story to the world. Eventually my curiosity about the Holocaust shifted, and I approached it with different questions. Why did it happen, and what can we learn from this horrible experience?

I developed a unit of study about the Holocaust that I taught to my students, and that unit was used to teach many middle school students in Virginia and Maryland. From my teaching, I developed some guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust that I am sharing in this foreword. The central questions remain the same: Why did the Holocaust happen? What should we learn from that experience? For Jews like me the goal is to Never Forget. Elie Wiesel, a true and eloquent Holocaust survivor, wrote “. . . we reassured ourselves that it would be enough to relate a single night in Treblinka . . . to shake humanity out of its indifference and keep the torturer from torturing ever again.” We teach the Holocaust to prevent any nation from repeating the horror.

To answer the question of why, you must provide your students with some background on the Holocaust. Go beyond the initial explanation offered in *Four Perfect Pebbles*, the book your students will be reading. In chapter two of that book, the authors offer a sketchy account of Hitler's rise to power and mention the conditions in Germany that enabled Hitler to seize political control of Germany. This account lacks depth and at times avoids some painful truths. First, it is important to know that Hitler ran for political office and came close to winning. In the last free presidential election in 1932 Hitler won 37 percent of the vote to Hindenburg's 53 percent. Ultimately Hitler was appointed to the head of the German state when Hindenburg grew ill and tired.

In addition to explaining the political facts, it is important to expand on the economic and social conditions within Germany at the time of Hitler's rise to power. *Four Perfect Pebbles* mentions that economic conditions were very bad and the worldwide depression made things worse. Neither of these concepts is explained well, particularly in terms of how the lives of everyday Germans were affected. To understand the appeal of Hitler the students have to understand why he rose to power.

Typically, Holocaust stories revolve around four character types—victims, perpetrators, rescuers, and bystanders. Be careful when you discuss each of these actors. It is tempting to simplify a discussion of the victims. Hitler killed Jews, homosexuals, Gypsies, the disabled, and Communists and other political prisoners, but mainly Hitler killed Jews—6 million of them. One question that is

frequently raised about the victims is the question of why didn't they resist? Some did attempt resistance; almost all of them were killed. The Nazis had overwhelming military power, and the Jews had none. Anne Frank's family tried hiding, and for a while they survived, until someone turned them in.

One point is vital for understanding the perpetrators. The Holocaust was premeditated and systematic. In 1924, Hitler, in his book *Mein Kampf*, wrote about his hatred of the Jews and their need to be eliminated from Europe. In 1941 the Nazis created the goal of eliminating all the Jews from Europe. In 1942, at a meeting called the Wannsee Conference, the goal was organized into an official plan. Jews from around Europe were to be transported in trains to Poland, and there they would all be killed. The most notorious of the killing centers, Auschwitz-Birkenau, were in Poland.

Be careful of the rescuers. While there were many—Oskar Schindler, Raoul Wallenberg, and others—only a very few Jews were rescued, and that does not balance the scales for the 6 million who died. To over-focus on the rescuers turns the Holocaust into a story of bravery when it was actually a story of horror and cowardice. To focus on the rescuers is to romanticize the Holocaust. The rescuers inspire us to stand up and protest against evil, and we should, but the message of the Holocaust is not to wait and pray for rescue but to protest when political conditions turn ugly.

The bystanders present an even more difficult problem. It is tempting to argue that the brutal Nazi regime was forced on the Germans, but that was not the case. Remember, 37 percent of the Germans voted for Hitler, and they agreed with his views of Jews. Many Germans were not innocent bystanders but *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. That is the title of a book by Daniel Goldhagen, who writes that centuries of anti-Semitic beliefs preceded the rise of Hitler and the Nazis. The majority of Germans accepted the Jews as the scapegoats for their problems and were comfortable with eliminating Jews from Germany. Because of these stark facts, Holocaust education is mandatory today in Germany in many grades.

There are a few additional ideas to consider. First, it is important to avoid comparisons. The Holocaust is unique and unlike any other experience of genocide in world history. It is unique by virtue of its thoroughness and its coldblooded actions. Avoid comparing Hitler and the Holocaust to other leaders and other experiences. We may be tempted to compare Hitler to other contemporary leaders we dislike, but that is dangerous. Let the Holocaust speak for itself.

This unit includes a second account of the Holocaust for you to share with your students after they have finished *Four Perfect Pebbles*. This one was written by my cousin, Lore Zeller, who grew up with my father in Berlin, Germany, before Hitler came to power. Lore was 87 years old when she wrote about her flight from Germany. Both accounts stress courage and luck, but in different proportions.

### **The Causes of the Holocaust**

A good place to start is with this general overview about the causes of the Holocaust: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/introduction-to-the-holocaust>. This can lead to a more intensive study of anti-Semitism (<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/antisemitism>), or students might want to study the economic conditions that underlay the rise of Hitler and the Nazis (<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-great-depression>).

### **Perpetrators**

For many, the study of the Holocaust begins with learning about Adolf Hitler. Begin your search here: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/adolf-hitler>.

Other figures of interest might include Reinhard Heydrich, who is considered the architect of the final solution to the "Jewish Problem." At a conference held at the Wannsee resort he outlined

the plan for exterminating the Jews of Europe (<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/reinhard-heydrich-in-depth>).

At this site you can find some interesting information about the Wannsee Conference: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/wannsee-conference-and-the-final-solution>.

Adolf Eichmann was the individual given the responsibility of carrying out the plan developed at the Wannsee Conference. Eichmann escaped at the end of World War II and hid in Argentina until he was captured in 1960 by the Israeli secret service and taken to Israel for trial (<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/adolf-eichmann>).

### **Victims and Survivors**

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has extensive resources about victims and survivors. You might have your students study what became of Jews, the disabled, Roma (Gypsies), or other groups. The students might construct an oral or written report. We suggest that they begin with the general overview that can be found at this website: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/mosaic-of-victims-an-overview>.

After reading this general overview, students can select one of the persecuted groups in Germany and Eastern Europe to study further. This website will take you to stories of many different groups: <https://www.ushmm.org/remember/the-holocaust-survivors-and-victims-resource-center/survivors-and-victims>.

### **Rescuers**

There are a number of famous rescuers, with Oskar Schindler as the most notable. Students can study many facets of Schindler's life at this website: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/oskar-schindler>. Schindler was the most prominent rescuer, but the museum contains many other stories of people who risked their lives to save the Jewish people. These people are called Righteous Among the Nations and their stories can be found here: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/tags/en/tag/righteous-among-the-nations>.

*Four Perfect Pebbles* Text Complexity

QUALITATIVE MEASURES	QUANTITATIVE MEASURES
<p><b>Levels of Meaning</b> The text offers multiple levels of meaning and nuances of abstract concepts related to genocide, the Holocaust, immigration, and the Jewish culture.</p> <p><b>Structure</b> This narrative is told mostly chronologically, with a flashback near the beginning of the book.</p> <p><b>Language Conventionality and Clarity</b> The setting of this story adds some complexity to the language. Dialogue that incorporates historical and regional language makes this text qualitatively challenging.</p> <p><b>Knowledge Demands</b> This text requires knowledge of the genre memoir. In addition, students will need to rely on background knowledge of the Holocaust.</p>	<p>The Lexile level for <i>Four Perfect Pebbles</i> is 1080, based on word frequency and sentence length. This is in the lower range of the complexity band for 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> grade according to the Common Core State Standards.</p> <p><b>READER TASK CONSIDERATIONS</b></p> <p>These should be determined locally with reference to motivation, knowledge, and experiences as well as to purpose and the complexity of the tasks assigned and the questions posed.</p>

## DAY 1, PART 2: OUTSIDE TEXT

### Video: Surviving the Holocaust

Lauren McMillen

Retrieved on September 10, 2018, from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1\\_ZQTXihDb8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_ZQTXihDb8)

**This video tells about...** Marion Blumenthal Lazan's story.

**In this lesson...** you will be reminding students that sometimes readers use outside sources to help them build background knowledge about a topic and setting.

#### Learning Targets:

Integrate content presented in diverse media formats (RI 7)

Convey ideas precisely using appropriate vocabulary (L 3, 6)

Engage in collaborative discussion (SL 1, 2, 4, 6)

## Teach:

*Today I am going to remind you...*

...that good readers learn about the time period in which their book takes place and the important events that occurred during this time period. This book takes place during a time known as the Holocaust. The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. During the era of the Holocaust, 1933–1945, German authorities also targeted other groups.

The purpose of broadening your knowledge of an era is to make meaning out of the statistics. By reading personal accounts and memoir literature, you will come to know some of the individual voices of this collective experience.

The Holocaust took place because individuals, groups, and nations made decisions to act or not to act. Throughout this unit of study, we will focus on these decisions in order to better understand history and human nature, and to become critical thinkers.

Throughout this unit we will be studying primary documents from the time period, some of which are horrific. I will expect each one of you to handle the content of this unit with maturity, sensitivity, and respect.

As a class, we will agree to avoid stereotypical descriptions. Though the Nazi Party targeted all Jewish people, the experiences of all Jews were not the same. Although members of a group may share common experiences and beliefs, generalizations about them tend to stereotype group behavior and distort historical reality. When sharing statistics about a group of people, we will use qualifying terms such as “sometimes,” “usually,” “in many cases,” etc.

Throughout the unit, we will be using diverse media—primary documents, articles, and video—to help increase our knowledge of this time in history. Much of the media we will look at will come from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website and its online encyclopedia.

Today, we are going to watch a video interview with Marion Blumenthal Lazan, filmed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D. C. As you watch, consider why Marion Blumenthal Lazan chooses to share her story.

**Play the video interview, *Surviving the Holocaust*, by Lauren McMillen.**

## Share-out:

Discuss: Why do you think Marion Blumenthal Lazan chooses to share her story?

## Link:

*Today and every day when you read...*

...I want you to consider how information in outside sources might help you understand the setting of the story better.

## DAY 4, SETTING

**In this lesson...** you will remind students how good readers focus on the setting—often in terms of either the location in which the story takes place, which may be shown on a map or in an image; or the time period in which the story takes place, which may be shown on a timeline; or in the characters' circumstances.

To prepare for this lesson, print the following maps and images:

Map found on page 127, *Four Perfect Pebbles*

Map of Bergen-Belsen Camp, retrieved September 10, 2018, from <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/map/bergen-belsen-concentration-camp-1944>

### Learning Targets:

Read closely to monitor comprehension (RI 1)

- Infer setting clues
- Visualize

Show understanding of story elements (RI 3)

- Setting

Use what you know about genre to help you understand the story better (RI 5)

Integrate content presented in diverse media formats (RI 7)

Gather and categorize information through note taking (W 8)

### Connect:

*We have been learning...*

...that good readers gather important information from outside texts.

### Teach:

*Today I am going to remind you...*

...that good readers pay attention to the setting of the story. Today you will focus on details about the setting of *Four Perfect Pebbles*. You will learn about what life was like in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

## Guided Practice—Work Time:

Turn to page 10 in your book club notebooks. Today as you read, you will stop each time a new detail is revealed about the setting and visualize the setting in your mind. You will use printed maps to help you visualize the setting of the story.

(Hand out the maps and instruct students to tape them into their book club notebooks on page 10.)

The first map is the same map found on page 127 of the book *Four Perfect Pebbles*. You will use this map to keep track of where each of the events of the story are taking place in Europe.

The second map is a map of Bergen-Belsen camp—the camp described in chapter 1 of *Four Perfect Pebbles*. You will use this map to help visualize the setting of this chapter.

You will have 35 minutes to read, after which you will meet your partners in the meeting area to discuss what you read and then participate in a whole-class share-out.

(Assign students their pages to read and dismiss them for independent work.)

***Four Perfect Pebbles***—Read chapter 1 (pp. 1–9).

## Share-out:

**(At the beginning of the share-out time, give students 5 minutes to discuss chapter 1. Then move into a quick, whole-class discussion.)**

Discuss: What was life like for Marion and her family at Bergen-Belsen? Using the map of Bergen-Belsen, count the number of watchtowers. How many are there? How does this map help you understand the characters' circumstances?

## Link:

*Today and every day when you read...*

...I want you to think about what you know about important setting clues in order to understand the story better.

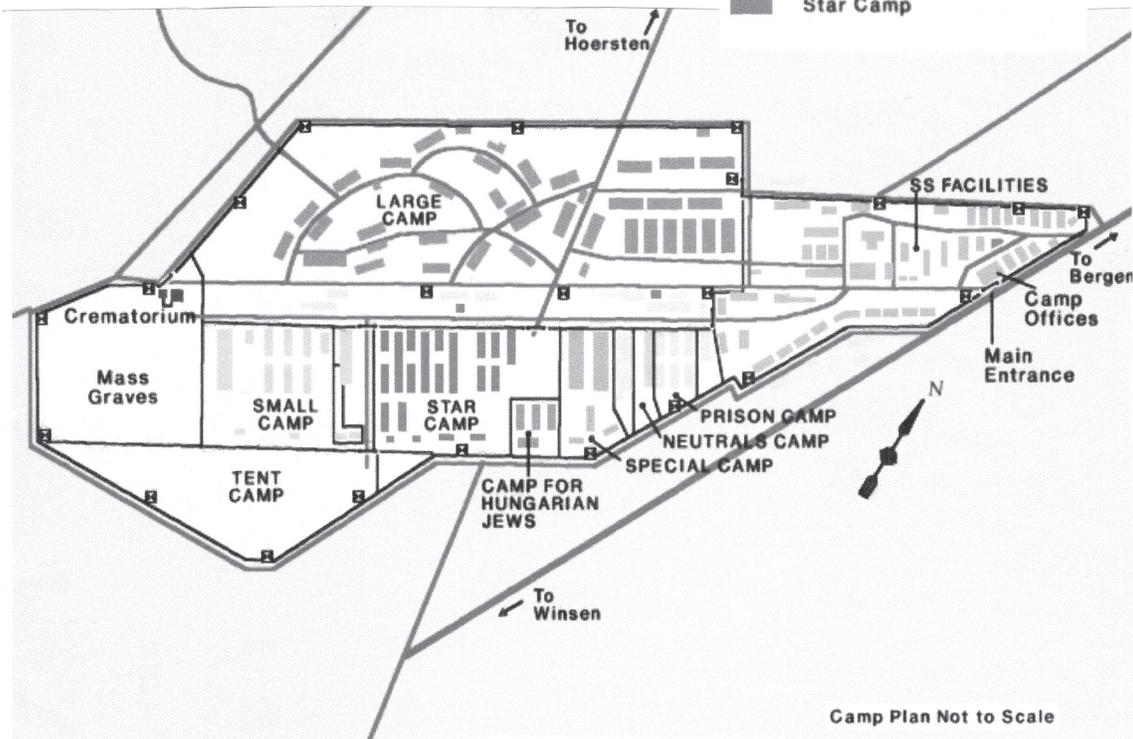
Four Perfect Pebbles Setting Map Sample



BERGEN-BELSEN  
CONCENTRATION  
CAMP 1944

CAMP PLAN LEGEND

- Barbed-Wire and Other Fences
- Roads
- Gates
- Buildings
- Watchtowers
- Water Reservoir
- Camp Administration and SS Compound
- Prison Camp
- Camp for Hungarian Jews
- Large Camp for Women
- Neutrals Camp
- Small Camp for Women
- Special Camp
- Star Camp



## DAYS 11–12, QUADRANT 1 BOOK CLUB MEETINGS

### Book Club Meeting 1

**In this book club meeting...**students will be responding to questions about the characters, setting, problems, and main events revealed in quadrant 1 of their book club books. Students will use the charts in their book club notebooks to aid their discussion. Students will also share their predictions about what they think will happen next in the story. Throughout the discussion, students should each share and respond to thinking.

#### Learning Targets:

Summarize the text (RI 2)

Show understanding of story elements (RI 3)

- Character
- Setting
- Plot

Prepare for collaboration with others (SL 1)

Express ideas and respond to others' ideas clearly and persuasively (SL 1)

Acquire and use key vocabulary (L 6)

#### Connect:

*We have been learning...*

...that good readers read slowly at the beginning of a book in order to make sure they understand all the story elements, including character, setting, and plot. At the end of quadrant 1 they stop and write a retell summary as a way of monitoring their comprehension.

## Teach:

*Today I am going to remind you...*

...that good readers discuss their thinking about a book with others in order to synthesize their thinking and evaluate the thinking of others.

When we meet together in book clubs, the expectations will be that you each

1. Bring your book and book club notebook to the meeting, with all assignments completed;
2. Come prepared to respond to questions and to share your thinking about the book with the group;
3. Participate by both sharing with and listening to group members;
4. Respond to another student's thinking before sharing your own; and
5. Use polite language and mannerisms with everyone in the group.

When you respond to another person's thinking, please use one of our response stems:

- I agree with you because...
- I disagree with you because...

## Opening discussion questions:

**(Have 2–3 students share their responses to each of these questions. Ask a student to respond to another student before sharing his or her own thinking. As you move through the series of questions, make sure each student gets a turn to talk.)**



### *Four Perfect Pebbles*

*Open up to the setting map on page 10 of your book club notebooks.*

Discuss: The story begins by telling Marion's experience in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp at the age of nine. Why do you think Marion chooses to start her story here, before flashing back to the time of Hitler's rise to power?

Discuss: What do you think it might have been like for Marion to live in a concentration camp at the young age of nine?

*Open up to the important events list on page 11 of your book club notebooks.*

Discuss: How did Hitler and the Nazi Party rise to power in Germany?

Discuss: What was the significance of the Night of Broken Glass?

*Open up to the problems list on page 11 of your book club notebooks.*

Discuss: How did the US immigration quotas make it challenging for people like the Blumenthals to enter the United States during the Holocaust?

Discuss: Do you think it is the responsibility of other nations to protect or support persecuted citizens of another nation?

### **Time for questions:**

Do any of you have any questions at this point in the story that you would like the group to answer or help you with?

(Allow time for students to ask their questions, if any. Encourage group members to respond to the questions. Step in to answer questions only when group members are unable to.)

### **Share-out:**

Now you are each going to have an opportunity to share the prediction stem and/or empathy stem you prepared on page 19 of your book club notebook. Please turn to your stems now.

(Allow each student a chance to share his or her stem or stems. Ask a student to respond to another student before sharing his or her own thinking.)



# Book Club Meeting 1

Be prepared to talk about:

- Character
- Setting
- Problem
- Main Events

Be prepared to share a prediction about what will happen in the book.

Be ready to listen and respond to the members of your group!

When the book said this was going to be the start of  
an uneasy and worrisome life,

I made a prediction. I think the family will have to  
worry about their survival

because with Hitler in power, their lives  
are in danger.

When the book said they had to leave behind almost everything I felt empathy for the Blumenthals. I felt sad that they couldn't keep things that were special to them. This helps me understand how unfairly Jews were treated.

### **Vocabulary Words Learned While Reading *Esperanza Rising***

Social System	Anguish	Irritable	Charitable
Revolution	Corrupt	Separated	Uncharitable
Patient vs. Impatient	Resurrected	Grateful	Indignant
Resentment	Privileged	Ungrateful	Menacing
Self-importance	Selfish	Tormented	Misjudged
Joy	Unselfish	Repatriation	Exploit

### **Vocabulary Words Learned While Reading *Esperanza Rising***

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