Diaries vs. Memoirs - Thoughts to ponder

A *diary* tells what happens within a specific time frame and is written about specific things that have happened. It doesn't address the person to whom these things happened. Diaries are usually written as a record of events, transactions or observations kept daily or at frequent intervals.

In Calkin's book, *Living Between the Lines*, Ernest Becker states: "What human beings fear is not growing old, but growing old without things adding up."

That is why we write our memoirs.

*Memoirs* are not personal narratives. Memoirs are not single moments. Memoirs *are* about the *plot lines or patterns that bind those moments together*.

Virginia Woolf says, "A memoir is not what happens, but the person to whom things happen."

Writing a memoir has everything to do with rendering the ordinariness of our lives so that it becomes significant. Rather than writing with statistics, memoir is written with scenes.

Memoir allows one to select images, events, and treasures that reveal important things about themselves. The central challenge in memoir writing is to find out how particular moments fit into the plot lines of one's own life. One must not only discover the moment of their lives, but the meanings in those moments.

Memoir is always double-edged. In memoir the unfolding story is always being remembered by a writer who is now older and wiser. Interestingly enough, whenever there is a "then" and a "now" in memoir, there seem to be both moments and meanings.

In this light, *memoir writing makes the past real and vivid and compelling, as if it happened yesterday*. The smells, and sounds from other times develop rich, evocative writing. We in turn learn more than a diary provides.

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**Discussion Questions:**

1. What makes diaries unique?
2. How can diaries be used to teach the Holocaust?
3. What are the important issues that can be addressed through diaries?
4. What are some famous diaries that you know of that came out of the Holocaust?
5. Why has Anne Frank had such widespread appeal?
6. How can these themes be translated into the classroom?
7. How much of the story does Anne Frank tell?
8. What is the difference between a diary and a memoir?

Holocaust Bibliography

Holocaust Memoirs and Diaries


Nonfiction account of Alicia, a girl who began saving Jewish lives during the war when she was only 13. (MS, HS)


A biography of Hannah Senesh, who risked her life to parachute into Nazi-occupied Europe to save fellow Jews. (MS, HS)


The story of the Holocaust told in alternating fashion from the perspectives of a member of the Hitler Youth and a young girl who survived Auschwitz. (MS, HS)


An illustrated documented history of the Nazi's largely successful effort to eradicate the Jews and other "undesirables" of Europe, told in the words of the victims, perpetrators, and bystanders.


Details the devotion of a man who accompanied the children in his orphanage to Treblinka. (MS)


Five diaries of teenagers who perished in the Holocaust. Particularly vivid portraits of spiritual resistance. (HS)

The courage of a Christian who was sent to a concentration camp for helping Jews. (MS)


Eyewitness accounts by fifteen children who survived; represented are children of Nazis, Jews, resistance fighters, collaborators, etc. (MS, HS)


A preteen's experiences in war-torn Hungary, hiding from the Nazis. A story of loss, fear and survival, it is also a remarkable portrait of a child's capacity to love and endure. (MS, HS)


Ten Jewish children are hidden by nuns in a refuge in the mountains of France. (E, MS)


Summoned with her mother to Gestapo headquarters in 1943, 14 year old Cordelia was given the terrible choice: to acknowledge her secret Jewish heritage and suffer the consequences or to see her mother charged with treason. The true story of the love between a mother and daughter. (HS)


Paintings, drawings, and text of a young girl growing up (1930-1949) takes the reader through a time before, during and after the war. (All ages)


Survivor's children live in the everyday world and also in their father's nightmare world of the camps. The tragedy of the Holocaust is passed down from parent to child through the bond of love.


A biography of a young German woman who defied the Nazis by helping to restore human rights and dignity to those she befriended. (MS, HS)


Nonfiction book dealing with the Nazi tactics against the non-Jews and factions they found dangerous, such as the Church. (MS)

Actual pictures taken by Grossman who was interned in the Lodz ghetto before he died. (MS, HS)


An anthology of diaries written by children across Nazi-occupied Europe and in England. Twenty three young people, ages ten through eighteen, recount in vivid detail the horrors they lived through, day after day. (MS, HS)


A family in hiding in Belgium for two and a half years. (MS)


First person account of a 19 year old Hungarian Jewish girl sent to Auschwitz. (MS, HS)


A nine year old in 1933 doesn't understand what is happening when her father disappears and the rest of the family is left to try to escape to Switzerland. (Factual) (E, MS)


A stark and sometimes unsettling story of a Hungarian teenager's tale of survival as he hides from the Nazis. (HS)


Memoir of her three years in Nazi concentration camps. Includes updated epilogue from 1957 edition. Documentary won an Oscar in 1995. (MS, HS)


Although she doesn't know it, her grandmother is Jewish and her parents teach her to pretend she is a loyal German. (MS)


True story of a survivor's attempt to lead 100 war orphans out of Poland to a refuge in Israel. (MS)

The fictional Mischa shares his life in the Warsaw ghetto from 1939-1942 in the orphanage of Janusz Korczak. Based on actual documents. (MS)


A memoir of Auschwitz. The Katz family are sent to Auschwitz. Seven of them would stand before Dr. Mengele. Not all of Isabella's family would survive. (Factual) (HS)


Sixty oral testimonies from the concentration camp survivors, partisans, those in hiding, and liberators. (HS)


Ten year old Annemarie Johansen and her best friend Ellen Rosen often think about life before the war. But it's now 1943 and Annemarie must find the strength and courage to save her best friend's life. (MS)


Two boys who are longtime concentration camp survivors finally escape a "death train" and struggle to maintain their freedom and regain their dignity. (Factual) (HS)


Twenty three hidden children give testimony about their experiences during the war. Very powerful vignettes. (HS)


Vladka Meed was 17 when Hitler's army conquered Poland. Thanks to her Aryan appearance, her fluent Polish and her gallantry, she was able to smuggle weapons to the Jewish Fighting Organization inside the Warsaw Ghetto during uprising. (HS/A)


Meltzer turns statistics back into people, as the men, women and children who lived the Nazi terror tell it in their own words. The accounts reveal everyday life in the Nazi ghettos and labor and death camps. They detail the many ways Jews resisted Hitler in ghetto and camp uprisings, underground partisan actions, and in individual decisions to "live and die with dignity." (Factual) (MS, HS)

The author uses materials excerpted from diaries, letters, interviews and eyewitness accounts. (MS, HS)


Leo Baeck helped thousands of Jews escape from Germany, but refused to escape himself. The story of his work, his time in a concentration camp, and his liberation, as well as his rise as a respected Jewish leader. (MS, HS)


Ana survived the war and preserved her diary, the only such account to emerge from Auschwitz with its author. A record of life triumphing over death, as seen through the eyes of a teenager.


A 13 year old girl recounts the difficulties of maintaining her friendship with the daughter of a Nazi. (MS)


Alex is eleven and alone in the ghetto. His mother has disappeared and his father has been "selected" by the Germans. He is forced to take shelter in a bombed-out building at 78 Bird Street. He must forage for food and fuel to survive the cold Polish winter. (Factual) (MS)


A novel based on a real life boy who smuggled goods into and people out of the Warsaw ghetto. (MS)


The story of rescuers who risked their lives to help others. (MS)


It is too late for the Dutch family to escape so their father does his best in arranging hiding places for each of his children and himself. (Factual) (MS)

What happens when people do not stand firm against what they know to be evil and lies. (E, MS)


This story tells of Friedrich's growing up years in Germany during the early 1930s. Friedrich’s father is deported to a "work" camp and his mother dies leaving Friedrich to fend for himself. (Factual) (MS, HS)


The narrator of this book and his friends were actual members of Hitler's Youth movement. Told in the first person, it gives an intimate glimpse into the lives of German youth of the period preceding and during World War II. (MS, HS)


The stories of non-Jews who risked their lives to protect and rescue Jews.


Renee must learn to obey curfews and wear a star. Then she is separated from her parents. (MS)


Nicole and her family feel safe in France during the German occupation since they are non-religious Jews. They soon realize that non-religious Jews are in as much danger as religious ones. Nicole is 8 years old at the beginning of the story and 13 at the end. (Factual) (MS, HS)


What really happened to the children of Mont Brulant is the question Etienne has for his grandfather after the end of WWII. (E, MS)


Teenager Riva Minska survives Auschwitz. She vows to live long enough to tell the story of her people's faith and courage. (HS)

On a cold, dark night in Warsaw in 1942 Edek and Ruth Balicki watch in horror as Nazi storm troopers arrest their mother. Alone, they are determined to find their father who is safe in Switzerland. (MS)


Sequel to *Upon the Head of the Goat: A Childhood in Hungary, 1939-1944*. Sisters survive the horror of the death camps only to learn they have no home left. Shows what it was like to be a teenage survivor of the Holocaust and how hope and courage can mean survival. (HS)


The story of how a family attempts to stay together.


Oral history and personal testimonies of the hunted and the liberators. (HS)


The author relates his parents' stories through the use of cartoons. (MS, HS)


A resource book on the Holocaust divided into eighteen thematic units arranged in chronological order and comprised of children's diary entries, survivors' testimonies, and pictures representing the various countries (and times) in which the events took place. (MS)


Voight's characters question enduring issues of racism, survivor guilt, and altruistic self sacrifice as they reflect on the Holocaust. (MS)


Children's drawings and poems from Terezin Concentration Camp 1942-1944. (MS, HS)


Though Anna survives the Holocaust, she struggles with the burden of her survival. Sequel to *Hide and Seek*. (MS, HS)

Spare vignettes of a young Dutch girl's life during the Nazi occupation.


Story of a Hungarian boy and his father. It reveals the special perception of the moral effects that suffering can have on its victims. (HS)


The author pieces together the fragments of his life from recollections of a childhood in Latvia, separation from family, and his imprisonment in Majdanek at the age of four. From inside the mind of a little boy. We experience love and loss, terror and friendship, and a return to the real world. (HS)


Hannah opens the door for Elijah during a Passover Seder and finds herself in Poland in the 1940s. (MS)


Former Polish countess describes the German occupation of her father's estate and her work in the Resistance movement. (HS)


She resisted the Third Reich by refusing to give the Hitler salute in high school. Later she risked death to smuggle food and medicine to hundreds of political prisoners. A true story. (HS)


A tiny band of children stayed alive by singing in the streets and selling black market cigarettes to the Nazi occupiers. (Factual) (MS)


Teenage girl must face the struggle for survival in the Jewish Ghetto when both her parents die from starvation and illness. (MS, HS)