Lesson plan for

“AND THEY PILLAGED THE DEAD” by DAVID CAMERON

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Note to the teacher

Incorporate contemporary fiction into your curriculum with some or all of these components of complete lesson plans, downloadable in customizable Word documents:

* **About the Author** provides context for the story and authors’ perspectives on contemporary literature and the art of writing it

* **Pre-Reading Activities** engage students in relevant whole-class, small-group or individual exercises
* **Post-Reading Discussion Prompts** address the categories of story/theme and craft/writing
* **Post-Reading Writing Prompts** stimulate analytical and creative thinking and writing
* **Further the Discussion** suggests literature with similar subjects or themes, as well as ways for teachers and students to connect with the author

**PLEASE NOTE**: All stories for *Carve* lesson plans are available to read free online (see link at plan’s onset*)*. However, authors hold the rights to their stories; do not photocopy or distribute without their written permission.

Feedback

We’d appreciate if you could take a moment to give us your feedback at <https://www.carvezine.com/lesson-plans-feedback>. Thank you!

“And they pillaged the dead” by david cameron

Story Text & Audio Player

<https://www.carvezine.com/story/2011-summer-cameron>

subjects

Family, World War II, Holocaust, death, secrets, material possessions, passage of time

Content warnings

Language, drug use, issues of war and death, murder, suicide

synopsis

“And They Pillaged the Dead” joins a long list of short stories and novels that explore the topic of World War II and the Holocaust. But the story does so through the unique vantage point of Brendan, a thirty-year-old narrator who visits his Omi (the German word for grandmother) Eva and her sister, Inge. Brendan has stumbled and struggled through most of his adult life, having lost his job, girlfriend, and nearly all of his material possessions. He visits his grandmother and great-aunt in hopes of finding some “totem” in his childhood to explain his very nature, but as he spends more time with them, their own past comes to light and challenges Brendan’s own beliefs and values. “And They Pillaged the Dead” is an eerie and mesmerizing tale about secrets, truth, and the surprising value of material things.

audio version

Approx. 53 minutes

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Cameron lives with his wife and children near Boston, Massachusetts, where he works in higher education, writing about science and technology. A Pushcart nominee, his fiction has appeared in *Carve* magazine and *Digital Americana*. He is also the fiction editor for *Talking Writing* magazine, at talkingwriting.com. He has also, of late, gotten into some trouble with the *New Yorker* magazine (see link below).

<http://www.thereviewreview.net/publishing-tips/new-yorker-rejects-itself-quasi-scientific-a>.

pre-reading activity

Individually

1. Think of a physical object that you value and free-write first about what makes it valuable to you.
2. Then imagine giving that object away. Would the receiver value the object too? Why or why not? In the same or different ways? If the receiver would not value it, what could you do—in your actions or to the object itself—to change that? Write out your thoughts.

As a group

List as many reasons as possible for why an object becomes valuable—for individuals, between friends, among family members, in an organization, to a culture, and so on.

POST-READING discussion prompts

story/theme

1. Do you think there is a “moral” to the story, and if so, what is it? What are the implications of this moral against the backdrop of the WWII/Holocaust backstory?
2. Brendan goes to visit his grandmother and great-aunt in hopes of finding a “totem.” Do you believe he finds it? What is it?
3. How does Eva’s story affect Brendan, both during and after its telling? In what ways is his future dramatically altered by the visit and Eva’s story?
4. Do you believe that Eva is really the one who stayed through the night with Hannah and used the pillow to smother her? Why might Inge tell Brendan that it wasn’t her?
5. Why do you think Eva (or Inge) went through with Hannah’s request? Do you think Eva/Inge believed it was the right thing to do or was she just following orders? What else might have motivated the character?
6. Why do you think it’s important to Eva and Inge to keep their belongings? What drives them to want to hold onto their possessions even though they’re associated with terrible memories?
7. How important is the passage of time to the story’s central message? Are Brendan’s and Eva’s possessions more valuable because of the passage of time or because of the memory or memories associated with them?

POST-READING discussion prompts

craft/writing

1. Though the story is told in first person point of view from Brendan, Eva tells a large portion of the story as she recounts the past. How does the framing structure of Brendan’s narration affect your reading and understanding of Eva’s story?
2. The author employs the use of a story-within-a-story frame as Eva recounts the events leading to Hannah’s death and aftermath. What is another approach he might have taken and how would it have affected meaning or message(s)?
3. How does Brendan’s increasing intoxication alter the narration of the story? What descriptions, metaphors, and similes does the author use to convey the transformation?
4. The story opens with an exchange between Brendan and his sister, setting up a parallel with Eva and Inge’s sibling relationship. What other parallels does the author set up for Brendan and Eva? What do they have in common?
5. What are the parallels between Eva’s story of Hannah and her childhood and Brendan’s story and his childhood?
6. The passage and perception of time is a recurring theme in the story, culminating in the final section in which we move quickly through Brendan’s life and to Eva and Inge’s deaths. Why do you think the author chose to include this jump ahead before returning to Brendan’s sleepiness in the final lines?
7. The author relies on the reader’s prior knowledge of WWII and the Holocaust to convey important information in the story. What are some examples of this, and why do you think the author chose this method of revelation rather than explicitly explaining?

POST-READING writing prompts

analytical Writing

1. Family is an important subject in the story. Compare the relationship Brendan has with his parents and sister with the relationship Inge and Eva had with Hannah. What do their similarities and differences indicate about the nature or the functions of families?

You can use a version of this graphic organizer to develop your analysis:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Description of relationship** | **Implications of description** | **Key similarities/differences** | **Conclusion** |
| Brendan and immediate family |  |  |  |  |
| Inge and Eva and Hannah |  |  |

1. Brendan, Eva, and Inge each have their own ideas about truth and secrets. Citing examples from the text, describe what you think each character’s own beliefs are on the importance of telling the truth and discuss how these beliefs affect their relationships and their happiness.
2. Compare this story to another work of literature that has the Holocaust or WWII as a backdrop. How do the two stories differ in terms of exposition of the war and the characters’ own journeys? Are there ways they are similar?

POST-READING writing prompts

creative Writing

1. Imagine that rather than Inge confirming Brendan’s suspicions that Eva is really “the chosen one,” Eva decides to tell Brendan herself. Write a monologue in which she explains the truth and why she felt the need to lie.
2. Write a fictional story in which the object most valuable to you is stolen (and never retrieved) and in the story reveal how it changes the trajectory of your life—immediately, in five years, and in fifteen years.
3. Take an idiom similar to “stuff is just stuff” and write a flash fiction piece (approximately 50 – 1500 words) that challenges it. Examples could be: “home is where the heart is,” “people deserve the benefit of the doubt,” "good walls make good neighbors.”

further the discussion

Literary Connections

* + - * John Fleming, “Coward”
      * David Benioff, *City of Thieves*
* Elie Wiesel, *Night*
* Han Nolan, *If I Should Die Before I Wake*
* Art Spiegelman, *Maus I* and *Maus II*
* Bernice Eisenstein, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*

Connect with the author

The teacher may contact this author to further the discussion. Students are also encouraged to leave comments on the story’s page online. Comments are subject to moderation.

Email: [djcameron@gmail.com](mailto:djcameron@gmail.com)

* Yes, author is available for Skype or phone sessions.
* Yes, students may contact directly by email with comments and questions.
* Yes, teachers may contact by email on behalf of students with comments and questions.
* Yes, teachers may snail mail letters on behalf of students. (Please contact author for mailing address.)