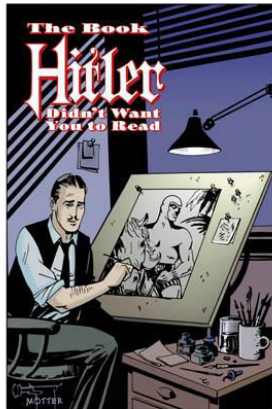
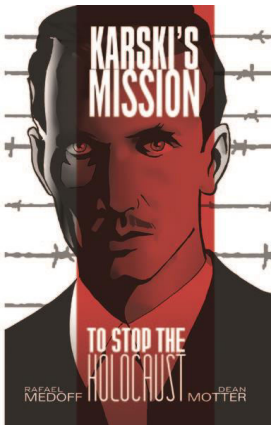


Using Graphic Novels in Education to Teach the Holocaust in Middle Grades

By Meryl Jaffe, Ph.D.

Welcome to *Using Graphic Novels in Education*, an ongoing feature from CBLDF that is designed to allay confusion around the content of banned books and to help parents and teachers raise readers. In this column, we examine books that have been targeted by censors and provide teaching and discussion suggestions for the use of such books in classrooms.

May hosts Holocaust Remembrance Day and so this month we take a closer look at two comics and one graphic novel, all of which retell events of the Holocaust. The two comics, *Karski's Mission: To Stop the Holocaust* by Rafael Medoff and Dean Motter, and *The Book Hitler Didn't Want You to Read: The True Story as Related by Senator Alan Cranston* by Rafael Medoff and Dean Motter are both published by The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies (2015). The graphic novel is *Lily Renee, Escape Artist* written by Trina Robbins and Illustrated by Anne Timmons and Mo Oh (Lerner Publishing Group, 2011)



These publications are all for readers from middle school to high school and older. While relaying some aspect of the Holocaust, from the Hitler's fascist goals as delineated in his *Mein Kampf*, to spy missions informing the world of Nazi atrocities, to the timing, luck and skill of a young Jewish girl who was able to escape from Nazi territory, these books relate:

- The pressures of war, in this case of World War II for Jews and for non-Jews living in Europe and the United States;
- The roles soldiers and private citizens took during World War II;
- The effect World War II had on European adults and children;
- The power and perils of spying;
- The power of information and it's role in fighting Hitler;
- The conflicts people experienced when weighing moral obligations versus personal perils;
- The power of the press, of words and of images during war.

OVERVIEW

Karski's Mission: To Stop the Holocaust by Rafael Medoff and Dean Motter is about Jan Karski, a young Polish (Roman Catholic) man who studied law and diplomacy in Lwow (then Poland). When Soviet forces invaded his country, he and many other Polish soldiers were captured. *Karski's Mission* opens with Karski escaping from his train bound for a Nazi prison camp and we see him running back to now Nazi-occupied Poland to work for the Polish Underground. Within the Polish Underground Karski served as a courier and witnessed much Nazi cruelty and brutality, in particular Nazi atrocities again Poles and Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto and in Death Camps of Auschwitz, and Treblinka. Karski's last mission was to bring information to the British and American leaders about Hitler's mass exterminations. The remainder of the book discusses Karski's treacherous travels to the England and the United States as well as the surprising reactions his news generated.

The text, art, design and details of this book are brilliantly executed. It is a fast read chock-full of information and about true larger-than-life heroes of World War II.



The Book Hitler Didn't Want You to Read: The True Story as Related by Senator Alan Cranston by Rafael Medoff and Dean Motter is about Alan Cranston, a then nineteen year-old Stanford University sophomore visiting Germany on a study-abroad program. Hitler was just coming into power and had published his "*Mein Kampf*." Upon reading the book, Cranston was shocked at discovering that in *Mein Kampf* Hitler was "justifying Mass murder! Hitler isn't hiding any of his plans—wars of conquest... crushing his opponents... destroying the Jews..." Cranston realized he had to do something. The West needed to know about this.

Cranston's story is told through the voice of Lee Falk, creator of the popular 1930's comic strips *The Phantom* and *Mandrake the Magician*. (Falk and Cranston met at a press conference in Italy.) At a press conference in Italy, and upon returning to the United States, Cranston was appalled at how, "the world is sticking its head in the sand" refusing to face the truths about Hitler or Mussolini. Shortly after returning to the United States, Cranston found that Houghton Mifflin had put out an English-language edition of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. After reading it, Cranston was further appalled at how much of the original had been omitted. There was no mention of his violent goals of mass extermination and world domination. Cranston set out to expose the truths of Hitler's original *Mein Kampf*. To do this, he worked with the Anti Defamation League (ADL) to publish his own version of Hitler's book. Cranston's version – was sold for pennies at newsstands everywhere and got a lot of attention. Hitler then sued Cranston and the remainder of this story is about Cranston's brilliant defense.

This story is a fascinating look at Republic versus Fascist regimes and at how Cranston had to creatively fight to get the impact of Hitler's true goals into public domain. It's about the powers and pitfalls of the press and it's about the power of public servants to speak up when others can't. In this comic book as above, the text, and creative work of art and design help tell a fascinating story about the power of working within and outside of U.S. and European legal systems. It is a fast read chock-full of information and about true larger-than-life heroes of World War II.



Lily Renee, Escape Artist written by Trina Robbins and Illustrated by Anne Timmons and Mo Oh is about the life of Lily Renee Wilhelm. At 14, the book opens and she's living with her parents in Vienna when the Nazis march into Austria. Her father managed the Holland America's line of steamships and her family was well-

off. Lily enjoyed ballet, opera, and art. All that changed with the Nazis. The story is about her escaping Vienna and the Nazis.

Lily was one of the fortunate youth to escape the Nazis through a rescue operation called Kindertransport (Children's Transport). She was to go live with a family in England and once there, try to find employment for her parents so they too could be sponsored and come over. As is often the case, Lily's life didn't quite work out as planned. The family she lived with abused her, she couldn't secure work for her parents. Lily eventually realized she had to leave the family she was with. She found various jobs and eventually found her way to the United States, found her parents, and eventually became an accomplished comic book artist, drawing comics of strong, daring, beautiful women who had high adventures while battling the Nazis.

This book covers a lot of ground in 90 pages (78 pages of the story in comic format, and the remainder in prose with detailed notes with "More About Lily's Story") readers get a glimpse at what life was like in Vienna, in England and in the United States during World War II. We learn about Kristallnacht, Kindertransport, concentration camps, internment camps, Chamberlain versus Churchill, The Holland America Line and so much more. This is a story of a young girl's struggles to stay alive while taking care of herself. It is a coming of age story. It is a story of courage and sorrow. It is a story of hope.

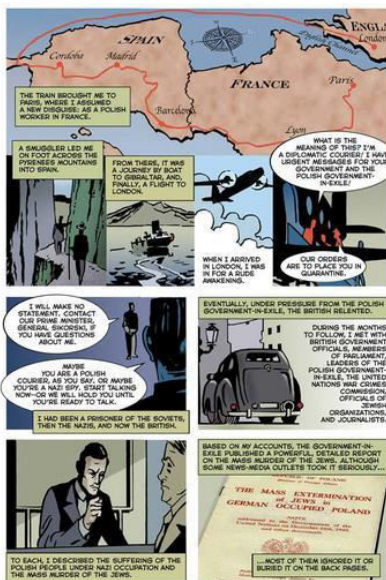


TEACHING/DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS:

Plot, Themes, and Values Related

- Discuss and define the term "hero" and what constitutes real versus fictional heroes.
- Discuss and chart the different themes in these books. How are they similar? How are they different?

- Discuss what life must have been like for Jewish and for non-Jewish children in Vienna when the Nazi's first took control.
- Discuss what it must have felt like for Lily to leave her parents on the Kindertransport. Ask your students what they might have done?
- Discuss how different individuals in these stories balance their sense of moral obligations versus their own personal perils when speaking or acting against injustices.
- Discuss the roles adult and child citizens can take when they see crimes and atrocities around them? What can we learn from the real-life heroes in these books?
- Discuss how the power of the press (be it newspaper articles, books such as *Mein Kampf*, and even comics) to influence and sway public opinion is used and manipulated in each of these books.
- Discuss the dissonance (as noted on page 7 of *The Book Hitler Didn't Want You to Read*) between actual events taking place in World War II Europe and what American reporters reported. Why was there such a dissonance between the reported news and actual events?



Critical Reading and Making Inferences

- In *Karski's Mission: To Stop the Holocaust*, the narrator notes (page 25) that, "Memory is the guardian of history – the key to ensure that past mistakes are not repeated." Debate and discuss this. Does history and memory of past atrocities stop them from being repeated? How? Why? Why not?
- In *Karski's Mission: To Stop the Holocaust*, the narrator notes (page 27) that, "This sin will haunt humanity to the end of time. It does haunt me... and I want it to be so." Discuss why the narrator wants this to haunt us.

- In *The Book Hitler Didn't Want You to Read* the narrator notes (page 4) that Cranston was amazed that in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler was "...justifying mass murder! Hitler isn't hiding any of his plans – wars of conquest... crushing his opponents...destroying the Jews..." Why is Cranston so surprised that Hitler wasn't hiding this? Why weren't others speaking up against it?
- In *Lily Renee, Escape Artist* (page 35) Lily goes to try to find employment for her parents and one woman explains, "I'm sorry, dear. Your parents are plainly not from the servant class. We would hardly feel comfortable having our social peers as servants." Lily thinks to herself in response, "But it's a matter of life or death." Have students discuss/debate this issue. Who's right and who's wrong and why.



Language, Literature, and Language Usage

- Have students describe each of the characters in these books and how we can differentiate each character's "voice."
- Compare and contrast the narrative voices in each of these books. Do your students prefer one type of voice over another? Why?
- In *Karski's Mission: To Stop the Holocaust*, the narrator notes (page 16) that the Warsaw Ghetto "...was like a scene from Dante's *Inferno*: Starvation, deprivation, chaos and fear." Have older students read selections of Dante's *Inferno* and discuss Medoff's reference to it here.
- In *Lily Renee, Escape Artist*, Trina Robins intersperses a lot of German words when describing Lily's life in Vienna (i.e. leibling, Anschluss, kindertransport). Discuss how the German terms help tell and shape the story. Are they distracting or helpful. Why/why not?
- In *Lily Renee, Escape Artist*, Lily is sent on a train (with other children and a few adult chaperones) from Austria through Germany to Holland. As a writing exercise, have students create journals or diaries in the voices of one

of the children on the transport. Have them write about what they may have seen/experienced on the train, how they felt, what they feared, etc.

- In *Lily Renee, Escape Artist* (page 28) Lily notes, “I thought I knew English, but nobody here speaks the way my English teacher spoke in class.” Discuss why this may have been.



Modes of Storytelling and Visual Literacy

In graphic novels, images are used to relay messages with and without accompanying text, adding additional dimension to the story. You may want to compare and contrast the Medoff and Motter’s different use of color, panel and page design in their two comics and/or compare and contrast the use of color, image and desing between all three works. Below are additional suggestions for exploring these books’ use of storytelling and visual literacy:

- Discuss the color palettes of each of these three works and how those color choices “work” for each one.
- Discuss the use of iconic images (such as swastikas, eyes watching (In *Karski’s Mission: To Stop the Holocaust*, page 15), maps, transports, etc.) to help tell the stories.
- In *The Book Hitler Didn’t Want You to Read* (in the middle of page 3) there’s a small panel inserted in the middle of four other panels where the narrator notes how “Meanwhile, America appeared to look on with apathy. Discuss the choice of image used to go with this text.
- In *The Book Hitler Didn’t Want You to Read* (pages 16-17) the narrator discusses how the Nazis carried out two types of war (one against Europe and one against the Jews). Discuss the different uses of image and color to depict these two wars.
- In *Lily Renee, Escape Artist* the authors use different types of text balloons for different types of narration. Chart and discuss these different types of balloons and how they help the authors tell Lilly’s story.



Social Studies Content-Area Lessons:

- In *Karski's Mission: To Stop the Holocaust*, on page 2 as Karski unfolds his story, we learn that, "God, honor, and Motherland... Those were the principles of the newly independent Polish Republic under the leadership of Marshal Pilsudski. Research and discuss Poland pre World War II and Marshal Pilsudski.
- In *Karski's Mission: To Stop the Holocaust* (page 9), Karski mentions "...staging armed attacks such as the Zamosc Uprising against the Nazis' planned mass expulsion of Polish civilians from that region." Research and discuss this incident as well as other Polish underground attacks.
- In *Karski's Mission: To Stop the Holocaust* (page 9), Karski mentions, "The Polish Underground also established a council to aid Jews, better known as "Zegota." Research and discuss this.
- Research reviews of "Story of a Secret State" by Jan Karski.
- Discuss the role and power played by U.S. and international courts in Hitler's suit against Alan Cranston (*The Book Hitler Didn't Want You to Read*). Discuss and debate the powers and perils of republics versus fascist governments.



Suggested Prose, Graphic Novel and Poetry Pairings

For greater discussion on literary style, related themes, similar characters and/or content here are some book suggestions you may want to read and pair with any one of these graphic novels: *Astronaut Academy*:

- *Resistance* a graphic novel series (middle school) by Carla Jablonski and Leland Purvis about two families – focusing on the kids (one Jewish) in Paris during the Nazi invasion. Each member of each family had to decide whether to join the resistance, flee, or cooperate with the Nazis.
- *Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank in which Anne writes about her life with her family as they spend two years in an attic in the Netherlands from the Nazis.
- *The Search* by Eric Heuvel, Ruud van der Rol, and Lies Schippers; Translated by Lorraine T. Miller is a graphic novel (middle school) about Esther who recalls her story growing up in Germany during World War II.
- *A Family Secret* by Eric Heuvel; translated by Lorraine T. Miller is a graphic novel (middle school) about Jeroen who while searching his grandmother’s attic for items to sell at a yard sale finds items that lead to Helena, his grandmother recalling her live during World War II. She tells him how she still mourns the loss of her Jewish best friend, Esther, and her father’s role as a possible Nazi sympathizer.
- *Senorita Rio* comics by Lily Renee Wilhelm – a swashbuckling account of Senoria Rio an American secret agent disguised as a Brazilian entertainer who fights Nazis in Brazil. Here is a link assorted issues:

<http://goldenreadingdomain.blogspot.com/2008/03/seorita-rio.html>

Common Core State Standards (CCSS):

These books can and should be incorporated in grades 5-12. I therefore will be using the Common Core Anchor Standards for College and Career Readiness for Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening. Reading *Lumberjanes* and incorporating the teaching suggestions above promotes critical thinking and its graphic novel format

provides verbal and visual story telling across subject areas while addressing multi-modal teaching. Here's a more detailed look:

- Knowledge of Language: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
 - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.3](#)
- Vocabulary Acquisition and Use: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials; demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meaning; acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking and listening at the college and career readiness level.
 - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.4](#)
 - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.5](#)
 - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.6](#)
- Key ideas and details: Reading closely to determine what the texts says explicitly and making logical inferences from it; citing specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text; determining central ideas or themes and analyzing their development; summarizing the key supporting details and ideas; analyzing how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of the text.
 - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1](#)
 - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2](#)
 - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3](#)
- Craft and structure: Interpreting words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings and analyzing how specific word choices shape meaning or tone; analyzing the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs and larger portions of the text relate to each other and the whole; Assessing how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
 - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4](#)
 - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5](#)
 - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6](#)
- Integration of knowledge and ideas: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually...as well as in words; delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence; analyze how two or more texts address similar

themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.8](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9](#)

- Range of reading and level of text complexity: Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently
 - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10](#)

- Comprehension and collaboration: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively; integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally; evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
 - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1](#)
 - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2](#)
 - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [The Comics Journal - Lily Renée](#) - An interview with the interesting woman who did so much of the art for the strip.
- For resources on Kristallnacht
 - <http://www.holocaustandhumanity.org/kristallnacht/events-leading-up-to-kristallnacht/> from holocaust and humanity.org – a history of anti-Semitism, events leading up to Kristallnacht (November 9-10), local and national responses, and more. This site had maps, primary documents and photographs of destruction.
 - <http://sfi.usc.edu/exhibits/remembering-kristallnacht> from USC (University of Southern California) has a 21-minute video where six Holocaust survivors recount their personal experiences and nightmares during the Kristallnacht.
 - <https://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-features/special-focus/kristallnacht> from The United States Holocaust Museum has background details, related videos and historical photographs
 - <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005201> from The United States Holocaust Museum has detailed history, related articles and related links
- For resources on Kindertransport
 - <http://www.kindertransport.org/history.htm> from The Kindertransport Association is an outstanding resource with detailed

history of World War II, of the kindertransport and includes links and articles and diaries from kindertransport survivors.

- <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/kindertransport/> from The National Archives has teachers' notes, external links, detailed history and introduction as well as primary documents related to the kindertransport.
- <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005260> from the United States Holocaust Museum has impressive details with related articles and links
- For resources on the Warsaw Ghetto
 - <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/warsawtoc.html> has links with maps, photographs, primary sources and diaries and reference material relating to life in the Warsaw Ghetto, people in the Ghetto, persecution in the ghetto, Jewish resistance, and the destruction of the ghetto.
 - <http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/about/03/warsaw.asp-!prettyPhoto> from Yad Vashem has details, videos of survivors talking about starvation in the ghetto, and primary documents.
 - <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005069> from the United States Holocaust Museum has detailed history along with related articles about life in the ghetto and the Jewish uprising.