

“I am Canada’: Exploring Social Responsibility in Social Studies Using Young Adult Historical Fiction”

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Abstract

This paper explores educating for democratic citizenship with a focus on the intersection between reading and values, specifically the nurturing of social responsibility. Using a pre-designed framework for teaching for social responsibility, excerpts from a young adult historical fiction series are used to consider learning possibilities in the social studies classroom.

Introduction

In the following excerpt from Carol Matas’ book *Behind Enemy Lines* (2012), a Canadian soldier wonders how things got so bad for the Jews in Europe while a Jewish resistance fighter challenges him about Canada’s policy on Jewish immigration during the World War II era.

‘But why did anyone put up with it? I can tell you, if anyone had tried to do that at home—in Canada—we would have made their life a misery!’ ‘Really?’ he said. ‘Then I wonder why your country won’t take in any Jewish children with visas. We tried to get a large group out of a camp. They had visas for Canada, the Germans said they could go, and Canada refused to take them’. ‘I don’t believe you!’ I said. (Matas, 2012, p. 54)

It is here, in rich excerpts such as this that creative social studies teachers begin to envision the incredible learning potential embedded within literature. Why did the Jews and others “put up” with infringements on peoples’ rights? What was Canada’s immigration policy during this time? Did this event from the book actually occur? Were there other examples of prohibited Jewish immigration? Why? These questions beg to be asked and answered using helpful thinking strategies and imaginative means of presentation. This paper explores educating for democratic citizenship with a focus on the intersection between reading and values, specifically the nurturing of social responsibility. Using a pre-designed framework for teaching for social responsibility, excerpts from a young adult historical fiction series are used to consider learning possibilities in the social studies classroom.

Background

For most children, schools are the first and most extensive public institution they encounter in their lives. Indeed, the first day of school is considered a significant marker

on a life journey not only because it indicates a child is growing up but because they are also growing out. He or she is adding the public sphere as a new social domain in which to conduct their lives.

Schools as the arena for this initial foray into the public sphere are thus identified as having a particular mandate: educating for citizenship. In Canada, it is educating for *democratic* citizenship. Across Canada, curricula used to frame teaching within schools espouse this as their central goal (Sears, 2004). Education entails many things including, with greater or lesser emphasis depending on the school, province, or region of the country, learning to read, write, speak, calculate, question, and answer. In addition, schools teach children content knowledge deemed important for future employment and for the conduct of their role as democratic citizens, as well as nurturing values deemed important for personal growth and the continuance and enhancement of the civil society. It is the intersection of reading and values as part of educating for democratic citizenship that is the focus of this paper.

Why Reading? It's hard for most of us to imagine a world in which we are unable to read. From signs to newspapers, from instruction manuals to the Internet, we are inundated daily with various forms of text that each of us is expected to be able to read if we are to live our lives fully. Therefore, society expects schools to place an emphasis on learning to read. However, educating for democratic citizenship entails more than simply knowing how to read. Wolk (2009) states, "living in a democracy poses specific obligations for reading. While a nation needs workers who *can* read, a vibrant democracy requires people that *do* read, read widely, read critically, and act in response to their reading" (p. 665). He builds on earlier work by Engle and Ochoa (1988) who believe that the decision-making inherent in democratic societies requires citizens to develop certain intellectual and political skills. The ability to read *well* (i.e., critically and deeply) is one of those skills to be developed.

Why Values? Nurturing values has always been part of educating for citizenship. The question has always been what values should be promoted? Who decides? How should they be nurtured? Case (2008) believes that there are no simple answers to these questions, but suggests there is broad societal consensus around the personal and social values identified in and encouraged by Canadian curricula for over fifty years. Though Canadians might disagree on ways of approaching the teaching of these values, they generally seem to agree that certain values need to be nurtured to maintain and enhance the civil society.

Embedded within a list of personal and social values that includes "respect for work well done", "respect for the rule of law", "desire to make a productive contribution to society", is one of particular interest—"acceptance of social responsibility" (Case, 2008, p. 172). Curriculum documents from across Canada have identified this value as an important part of educating for citizenship, viewing it as necessary for students' individual and social development. For example, British Columbia's Ministry of Education (2008) published its *Program Guide for Graduate Transitions* stating that by graduation students should achieve "the knowledge and skills required to be socially responsible citizens who act in caring and principled ways, respecting the diversity of all people and the rights of others to hold different ideas and beliefs" (p. 2). Though less

explicit, Ontario's Ministry of Education (2005) broadly refers to social responsibility stating in its *Canadian and World Studies, Grades 11 and 12* curriculum document:

Students are expected to demonstrate an understanding of the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of citizenship, as well as willingness to show respect, tolerance, and understanding towards individuals, groups, and cultures of the global community and respect and responsibility towards the environment. They are also expected to understand that protecting human rights and taking a stand against racism and other expressions of hatred and discrimination are basic requirements of responsible citizenship. (p. 24)

These curricular excerpts give insight into the meaning of social responsibility but perhaps Berman (1997) said it most succinctly, calling it "a personal investment in the well-being of people and the planet" (p. 15).

As a professor in a faculty of education preparing future teachers, I encourage pre-service teachers to take seriously the need to awaken in their future students a consciousness of the world while helping them develop the knowledge and inspiration to make a better world. One of the ways I suggest these dispositions can be encouraged is by exploring social responsibility through the use of young adult historical fiction in social studies.

Narrative, Historical Fiction, and Social Studies: A Review of the Literature

Before proceeding to an exploration of social responsibility using young adult historical fiction, some contextualization is required. Herein I offer a review of the academic and professional literature related to narratives, historical fiction, and social studies.

People have always found meaning through narratives. Beginning with oral traditions and continuing with visual forms and written texts, people have created narratives to convey experiences, communicate understandings, and express feelings. In this light, it is not surprising that narratives found their way into the social studies, though not without controversy. The relationship between the social studies and narratives is contested ground. Speaking in reference to history, one of the social studies disciplines, Husbands (1996) notes that the "uneven border between fact and fiction, between truth and lies, between emotional and causal logic" (p. 46) has often been derided and dismissed by academic historians and history teachers alike. Most believing that the fictive aspects of narratives—the embellishments and outright imaginary elements—detract from learning the 'facts', as well as the investigation procedures, analytical processes, and expository techniques traditionally used in the study of history.

However, academic historiography has within its disciplinary confines proponents who have embraced the "border territory" of narratives (Husbands, 1996, p. 58). For example, Natalie Zemon Davies (1987) has explored the place of narrative techniques and rhetorical forms in archival documents from 16th century French courts, noting that "storytelling is part of the history" (p. 4). This perspective also extends to the field of education. Educational psychologist, Jerome Bruner (1986), notes that both narratives and 'paradigmatic' thinking have their place in understanding the past, stating,

each provide distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality. A good story and a well-formed argument are different natural kinds. Both can be used a means for convincing another. Yet what they convince of is fundamentally different: arguments convince of their truth, stories of their lifelikeness. (p. 11)

Bruner notes one of the key elements narratives offer students of history—humanity. As Penelope Livey (as cited in *Husbands*, 1996) says in her exposition of the virtues of fictive narratives, "history cannot come so near to human hearts and human passions as a good novel can. To make a bygone age live again, history... must be turned into a good novel" (p. 59). Birkerts (1994) would undoubtedly concur, stating that, "literary works have always derived their artistic value, their importance, from the fact that they comprehended the changing terms of our world and gave us narratives that could help us understand the forces impinging on our lives" (p. 204).

For the social studies teacher, making the world come alive or appear life-like while also intriguing, inspiring, and informing students, requires good storytelling as found in novels and excerpts from novels, specifically young adult historical fiction. Huck, Hepler & Hickman (1993) define historical fiction as "all realistic stories that are set in the past" (p. 601). Young adult historical fiction is that which is targeted at an adolescent reading audience. The academic and professional landscape in Education includes an extensive array of literature on what kind of books teachers should consider when incorporating young adult historical fiction into their social studies classes (types), why they ought to (rationales), and how they might incorporate them (strategies).

Types. The types of young adult historical fiction teachers should consider are, of course, those books (or excerpts from books) with persons, places, events, themes, and issues related to the social studies curriculum to be taught to students. Books should also be age and reading-level appropriate to the student or students at hand. Above all, they should have engaging character(s) and plot. Beyond this, authors encourage teachers to consider folk literature as a source of cultural understanding (Virtue & Vogler, 2008); novels with Native perspectives (Meyer, 2011); multicultural themes and subject matter (Knapp & Vance, 1994; Smith & Johnson, 1995; Fry, 2009); characters, settings and events that are global in nature (Smolen & Martin, 2011); characters with exceptionalities (Lintner, 2011); as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender themes (Sieben, 2010).

Rationales. Few teachers, particularly at the elementary and intermediate school levels, would argue that young adult historical fiction doesn't have a place in the social studies classroom and thus student learning. A review of rationales for using young adult historical fiction illustrates an array of beliefs and understandings about what it offers students, the ways students learn, and the goals to be achieved. Huck (1977) notes that its use allows students to imaginatively enter into the past and explore "conflicts, suffering, joys and despair of those who lived before us" (p. 469), while Johnston (2000) states that "literature can offer students insights into events and experiences beyond their own world view and enable them to reflect on their own lives in re-imagined ways" (p. 1).

Others focus on the integration of literature to enhance reading ability (Boyle-Baise, Hsu & Johnson, 2008); foster critical thought, talk, and inquiry (Roser & Keehn, 2002); enhance concept development (James & Zarrillo, 1989); acquire and extend cultural, geographical, historical, and economic concepts (Savage & Savage, 1993); teach values (Kim Suh & Traiger, 1999); explore spirituality (Cottingham, 2005); learn historical processes through a focus on evidence, perspective, and interpretation (Monte-Sano, 2011); augment civic learning (Paquette & Kaufman, 2008); and increase social studies content knowledge (Huftalin & Ferroli, 2012/2013). In the end, the rationales for integrating young adult historical fiction in social studies are succinctly stated by Clark (2002):

the primary reason why it is worthwhile to use novels (or excerpts) in the teaching of social studies...is to help students personalize events, to develop historical empathy, a strong sense of what it actually might have been like to have those experiences, in a way that textbooks cannot. (p. 2)

Strategies. In an exploration of trade books and social studies teaching, McGowan and Sutton (1988) noted that explanatory or “how to” articles constituted 68% of then recent scholarship. It is highly unlikely that much has changed in the years since. Indeed, many teachers are convinced of the merits of using trade books, novels, or what I’ve termed young adult historical fiction, and are more interested in the strategies they can use in the classroom. The literature outlines approaches for using multimedia lesson plans and webquests (Taylor, 2011); literature response journals (Farris, Howe & Fuhler, 1998); literature circles (McCall, 2010); story composition (Martin & Brooke, 2002); graphic novels (Cromer & Clark, 2007; Mathews, 2011); songs (Palmer & Burroughs, 2001); visual images (Youngs, 2012); and murals, mobiles and dioramas (Davis & Palmer, 1992). As exemplars of the scholarship in this area, Turk, Klein & Dickstein (2007) outline a series of strategies that consider eras, themes, essential questions, identity, and use of language. Kieran Egan (1986) suggests that any social studies topic can be approached as a good story and has outlined his own “story-telling approach” involving the answering of questions as the story unfolds. As well, authors encourage and outline the integration of literature and social studies with mathematics (Kinniburgh & Byrd, 200); geography (Flaim & Chiodo, 1994); art (Buedel, 2005/2006); drama (Fennessey, 1995); and, of course, English (Hicks & Martin, 1997). It would seem that the possibilities are endless.

Young Adult Historical Fiction: The ‘I am Canada’ Series

There is a wealth of quality books available to social studies teachers today. However, of particular interest for this paper is a series of books released by Scholastic Canada beginning in 2010 called ‘I am Canada’. Designed as a companion series to the ‘Dear Canada’ series started 2002 that features female characters in the lead, this series presents male protagonists engaging in interesting adventures in historical settings. Though reviewers often refer to ‘I am Canada’ as a “series aimed at boys” (“I am Canada series”, 2013), teachers should refrain from grouping books into gender categories and presenting them in gender specific ways. Gender is a highly contested concept and

traditional notions of what it means to be a girl or boy are being challenged by society as well as scholarship the field of young adult fiction (Moeller, 2011; Crisp, 2009; Bean & Harper, 2007; Harper, 2007; Dutro, 2001). Teachers need to be mindful not to propagate gender stereotypes and heteronormativity in their classrooms. Assuming a book is only suitable for a boy or girl serves to create a marginalizing climate for those who speak, act and think differently than the majority, and is potentially harmful. In short, not all boys are engaged by war stories and not all girls are inspired by heroines waiting to be rescued and that must be respected when considering what books to make available to students and how to use them effectively. The 'I am Canada' series, in the hands of a thoughtful teacher, offers the potential for *all* students to critically explore important and relevant social issues.

Seven novels have been released thus far and the following is a brief overview of the books that could be used to explore social responsibility.

Prisoner of Dieppe (2010) Written by Hugh Brewster, *Prisoner of Dieppe (2010)* is the story of 18 year-old Alistair "Allie" Morrison, who on the coaxing of his friend Mackie, enlists in the Canadian forces in 1941. Eager for battle after months of training in England, the boys' first battle is the disastrous raid on the German-held French port of Dieppe. While a thousand Canadians died that day, Allie and Mackie survive and are taken as POWs to Stalag VIII B in Germany. Still shell-shocked from fighting and living in tough conditions, the soldiers struggle to maintain their courage and hope for victorious rescue or heroic escape.

Blood and Iron (2010) *Blood and Iron (2010)* is written by Paul Yee and tells the story of young Lee Heen-gwong as he immigrates to Canada from China with his debt-ridden father and grandfather to work on the great "Iron Road". The living conditions provided for workers are miserable and work on the railway is almost unbearable. Dynamiting tunnels and transporting tons of rock and gravel turns out to be deadly for many of the Chinese workers and friction with the "Red Beards" (whites), who barely acknowledge these deaths, threatens to boil over. Heen finds refuge in his journal, where his sharp observations of the peril and injustice facing the Chinese workers serve as an indelible testament to their contributions to Canadian history.

Shot at Dawn (2011) Written by John Wilson, *Shot at Dawn (2011)* explores the reality of trench warfare through the eyes of Allan McBride. Like many other young soldiers, Allan enthusiastically signed up for the chance to join the war effort and be a part of the fighting. But after months in the ravaged battlefields of France, watching men like his friends Ken and Bob get blown up by German shelling, Allan snaps and he leaves his unit, believing he is walking home to Canada to get help for a friend. Allan wanders aimlessly before being taken in by a band of real deserters — men who have abandoned their units, attempting to survive in the woods of northern France. Once Allan realizes what he's done, he's overwhelmed by the reality of his circumstance: whether he is caught or returns to his unit voluntarily he'll undoubtedly be charged with desertion, which is a capital offense.

Deadly Voyage (2011) In one of many books written in anticipation of the centennial of the world's most infamous maritime disaster, *Deadly Voyage* (2011) author Hugh Brewster brings forth the story of 14 year-old Jamie Laidlaw and his family as they journey from England to Canada on board the RMS *Titanic* in 1912. The biggest ship in the world was thought to be "unsinkable" but it proves only too fragile when confronted with a deadly mixture of ego, negligence, icebergs, and the sea. Sinking fast, Jamie takes his fate into his own hands, by jumping into the sea and surviving the cold on an overturned lifeboat. Over 1,500 of the original 2,224 passengers perished on April 5th but Jamie is rescued by the *Carpathia* only to learn his life has changed forever.

Behind Enemy Lines (2012) *Behind Enemy Lines* (2012) is written by renowned children's author Carol Matas. It is the World War II story of pilot Sam Frederikson who finds himself caught in Nazi-occupied France in 1944. Finding himself working with the French Resistance only to be captured and sent to Buchenwald concentration camp as a spy, Sam experiences many deprivations and witnesses numerous atrocities on his journey. He struggles to maintain hope that the Allies will emerge victorious and liberate the prisoners, before it's too late.

A Call to Battle (2012) Timed for release on the 200th anniversary of the start of the War of 1812, Gillian Chan's tale, *A Call to Battle* (2012), relates the ambitions of Alexander "Sandy" MacKay to fight along side his father and brother against the invading American forces. Brought up in Ancaster, Upper Canada, Sandy eventually finds himself on the front lines of the July, 1814 battle at Lundy's Lane. He soon realizes that the fight for country and glory comes at a terrible price for all.

Storm the Fortress (2013) Maxine Trottier's novel *Storm the Fortress* (2013) tells the story of the Siege of Québec in 1759 through the eyes of young Nova Scotian, William Jenkins. Sailing on the British warship *Pembroke* with his faithful dog, King Louis, William crosses paths with Generals Wolfe and Montcalm, as well as his childhood friend, Vairon, now a French soldier. This sets off a series of events that cause William to question what it means to be loyal to his king and to his friend.

Exploring Social Responsibility Using the 'I am Canada' Series

Stephen Wolk (2009) developed a framework for exploring social responsibility. It includes ten related and occasionally overlapping themes that are used herein as the basis for developing inquiry-based teaching ideas using the 'I Am Canada' series. As Wolk (2009) states, "teaching through inquiry and teaching for social responsibility have a symbiotic relationship. Classroom inquiry nurtures social responsibility, and living a socially responsible life means to live a life of inquiry" (p. 666). The themes are:

- Caring and Empathy
- Social Problems and Social Justice
- Government and the Constitution
- Power and Propaganda
- Social Imagination
- Historical Consciousness and Historical Empathy

- Multicultural Community
- Global Awareness
- War and Peace
- Environmental Literacy

Each theme is considered in turn by using specific excerpts from the seven 'I am Canada' books, ideas for exploring social responsibility are presented. These ideas are not intended to be finished or completed lessons or units but an example of the possibilities for teaching social responsibility in the elementary or intermediate social studies classroom using young adult historical fiction.

Caring and Empathy. Exploring caring and empathy are the first of Wolk's (2009) themes. It involves more than caring for one's belongings and empathizing with others who are hurt or injured, though this is part of it. Here, caring and empathy as related to social responsibility is a deep understanding that each of us is connected to each other, the Earth and creatures of the Earth. Given this, our very survival and growth as human beings, civilizations and caretakers of the Earth entails developing a sense of caring and empathy. Noddings (1991) wrote about the need for schools to teach caring. She believed that "caring should be the foundation of our curriculums, including caring for ideas, friends, family, the earth and its ecosystems, human-made objects, and strangers and distant others" (p. 110).

In Wilson's *Shot at Dawn* (2011), Allan expresses the following after witnessing his childhood hero Ken suffer an emotional breakdown under horrific trench warfare conditions, "I had spent most of my life trying to imitate Ken. He was the reason I was in the war at all. To see him weeping and shaking uncontrollably in the shell hole had been horrifying. I felt betrayed that he had turned out to be a coward" (Wilson, 2011, p. 83).

Over time, Allan begins to crack under the pressure as well, which provides him with new insight into the fragility of the human mind and spirit under trying conditions. Chart Allan's initial labeling of Ken as a 'coward' to his eventual empathizing with his friend as a person doing the best he could in difficult circumstances by identifying passages from the book. Why was Allan initially so harsh with Ken? What causes him to change his viewpoint? In a journal entry, share an experience whereby you were initially harsh with someone only to come to better understand what they're going through. What happened to change your viewpoint?

Social Problems and Social Justice. Teaching for social responsibility means exploring issues of social justice and attempting to understand what is at the root of social problems. It also entails considering possible actions that can be taken to make positive change. According to Wolk (2009), "living a socially responsible life means understanding and acting to improve problems ...especially involving gender, economic class, and sexual orientation" (p. 667).

In *Deadly Voyage* (2011), the Titanic hits an iceberg and begins sinking. As the crew is attempting to load the lifeboats, the following occurs:

'Women and children only!' Officer Lightoller called out when the boat was ready. Third class women in coats and shawls were escorted forward, some of them carrying children. 'Any more women?' Lightoller shouted when the boat

was about half full. ‘There *are* no more women!’ a voice in the crowd yelled as several men clambered into the boat. ‘Out, *now*, all of you!’ order Lightoller as he pulled one man out. The others sheepishly followed. (Brewster, 2011, p. 96)

Why did the officer act as he did? While never part of international maritime law, the cultural notion of saving the weak and vulnerable persists. In this age of gender equality should gender or age be a consideration in disaster situations at all? Debate the issue.

Government. Wolk’s (2009) third theme is entitled ‘Government and the Constitution’, clearly a reference to governance within of the United States. Using young adult historical fiction can be an entry point to learning about governments.

In *Shot at Dawn* (2011), author John Wilson explains in the historical notes that when war broke out in Europe, Canada and other parts of the British Empire were also at war. Explore how the government of Canada was structured in 1914 and how it is structured in 2013. How do the structures differ? What happened to cause these changes? In what ways are the structures the same? How might the structures be improved? Present your findings to the class.

Power and Propaganda. All countries uses propaganda as a means to an end, whether that is to influence public perception, shift attitudes, or motivate action. Recognizing propaganda as a tool of power is central to educating for democratic citizenship. Social responsibility not only requires an understanding of how power can be abused, but the consciousness to see it and the ethical commitment to counter it.

In *Behind Enemy Lines* (2012), Carol Matas effectively composes a scene whereby reality, rumor, power, and propaganda collide. Speaking with a Jewish prisoner in Buchenwald concentration camp, Sam shared the following:

Finally I said, ‘A good friend of mine is Jewish and he told me that Jews were being rounded up. He told me there was torture, even murder.’ ‘But you didn’t believe it?’ ‘I don’t know what to believe now, after seeing that’ I said, jerking my head toward the bodies. ‘We didn’t believe it either,’ the man said sadly. (Matas, 2012, pp. 135-136)

Why did Sam doubt his friend? Why did he continue to struggle with doubts after seeing the dead bodies waiting to be cremated? Why did the Jewish prisoner also have early doubts? Create powerful questions about propaganda as a tool of power to consider with a guest speaker on the Holocaust. How can people be prepared to confront propaganda campaigns in the future?

Social Imagination. Greene (1995) defines ‘social imagination’ as “the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, and in our schools” (p. 5). Teaching for social responsibility entails helping students to question the world we live in and envision a better world that could be.

Although, the traumatic effects of war were largely unknown and misunderstood during WWI, some were beginning to imagine new treatments for soldiers suffering the psychological scars of battle. In *Shot at Dawn* (2011), Ken explains the help he received:

A doctor in London realized that I had more wrong with me than a bullet through the chest. He arranged to have me transferred to Craiglockhart, a place in Scotland where there was a Doctor Rivers who was working with shell-shocked officers. The man was a wonder. He actually understood. (Wilson, 2011, pp. 164-165)

Research the concept of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and develop an informational multimedia presentation for the class. How were “shell-shocked soldiers” perceived during World War I? How are they perceived today? What other experiences can cause PTSD? What services are available to assist those who suffer from PTSD? What could be improved?

Historical Consciousness and Historical Empathy. Historical consciousness and historical empathy are critical for developing a sense of social responsibility. As Wolk (2009) states, “citizens cannot make informed and critical decisions on civic matters...without an understanding of past people and events. Knowledge of the past should help shape our opinions in the present and our vision for the future” (p. 668).

Gillian Chan’s novel, *A Call to Battle* (2012), portrays Alexander “Sandy” MacKay as an Upper Canadian boy enflamed with anger and hate for the Yankee invaders. He wants to join his father and older brother in battle against the ‘enemy’, finding glory and adventure along the way. However, something happens to Sandy when, during a pitched battle, he stumbles upon Abell, a wounded American soldier.

I did not know what to say and was not even sure that Abell would hear me now. He struggled to speak again...’I am...so tired...so cold.’ I reached for him then, put one arm around his shoulders and drew him to me so that his head rested on my shoulder. I grasped his hand with my free one, and felt him weakly squeeze it. ‘Tell...them...I...was...not alone’. (Chan, 2012, p. 151)

Why did Sandy’s attitude about the ‘enemy’ change when he encountered Abell? Find actual stories of kindnesses extended to the ‘enemy’ during wartime (e.g., World War I Christmas truces). Share these stories using a chosen medium and include consideration of how kindnesses impact on perceptions of the ‘enemy’ and may have impacted the post-war peace.

In Brewster’s *Prisoner of Dieppe* (2010), Alistair and Mackie are taken prisoner by the Germans following the failed raid on Dieppe and sent to a POW camp called Stalag VII. The conditions are extremely unpleasant:

As they came towards us we saw they were carrying pails of soup—their lunch ration—to give to us. It was the same kind of weak and smelly cabbage soup we had been given at Verneulles and it had grubs and sand in it. But to starving me it

was life-giving. There were no spoons so I drank my soup from a boot. (Brewster, 2010, p. 140)

It was the discovery of treatment of prisoners in prison camps following their liberation at the end of World War II that precipitated the creation of the Geneva Convention in 1949. Create a historical profile about the Geneva Convention. Include primary source documents relating to its creation and how it has been applied since that time. Consider why it would be in all nations' interests to adhere to humane treatment of prisoners of war.

Multicultural Community Multicultural education is too often limited to teaching about the food, fashion, and holidays of different cultures (Meyer & Rhoades, 2006). This does not serve to highlight political and moral issues of race and culture in our country and around the world.

In *Blood and Iron* (2010), Heen becomes palpably aware of the racial discrimination of the Chinese railway workers relative to the white workers or 'Red Beards'. The white workers are assigned less dangerous jobs, get paid more, and in any conflict with the Chinese workers, they are unquestioningly supported by the authorities.

Watermelon staggered out of the tunnel, coughing from the dust. He ran to drink water. Crew Boss ripped the scooper from his hand, shoved him to the ground and overturned the pail. He cuffed him around the head. Watermelon was dazed and bleeding. We came running. Bookman shouted at Watermelon, 'You stupid fool! That water is for the Red Beards. *Your* water is over there'. (Yee, 2010, p. 71)

Why do you think the Chinese workers were treated this way? Create a timeline of significant moments from Chinese history starting with their arrival in Canada as labourers to receiving a full apology from the Canadian government in 2006. Despite this, in what ways do visible minorities continue to be discriminated against in Canada? How can we act to eliminate discrimination and enhance understanding in our multicultural communities?

Global Awareness. Despite the incredible diversity of peoples that comprise Canada, many students do not pay attention to international events nor do they know much about the world outside their communities. Books, as part of a literature based social studies program or integrated into social studies classes, can help introduce various places around the world and humanize other countries and cultures.

The raid on Dieppe in 1942 was widely reported in the news yet few Canadians would have been familiar with it, or had even heard of the town of Dieppe, France at that time. *Prisoner of Dieppe* (2010) illustrates that beneath the headlines and short news stories of world events are individuals experiencing trauma, joy, adventure, and pain.

Alistair Morrison graphically describes not only what life was like for soldiers on the beaches and in the prison camps but also for the French people living under Nazi occupation. Choose a news event from around the world (e.g., war, natural disaster, political unrest) from a contemporary newspaper and research what is occurring in this place. Find first hand accounts that give insight into how the events are impacting

peoples' lives. What is being done to assist these people? Share your results with the class.

War, Peace, and Non-Violence. Using young adult historical fiction is one way of having students investigate violence and war as well as consider actions that work to promote peace. Throughout history horrific violations have been committed against women and children during wartime.

In *Shot at Dawn* (2011), Allan tries to stop a fellow soldier from the attempted rape of a young girl while they are receiving food from a French family:

I barely stepped outside when I heard a scream from the barn. Dropping the paper, I ran across the yard. Just inside the barn door, there was a girl lying on a pile of straw, wide-eyed and gasping. She could have been no more than fifteen. A red mark was deepening above her left eye. Pete stood over her, glaring. (Wilson, 2011, p. 149)

Research other examples of violations against women and children during wartime (e.g., Comfort Women; child soldiers) and develop an informational poster for a school presentation. Why does sexual violence against women and children continue to be a strategy used during war? Include information on organizations working to prevent such crimes and help victims (e.g., INCITE! Women of Colour Against Violence; Women Helping Women; Child Soldiers International).

Another possibility emerges from Trottier's *Storm the Fortress* (2013). In this story, William Jenkins, a British seaman, is taken prisoner in Québec only to be "rescued" from confinement by his childhood friend, Vairon. Set to work as worker clearing rubble from the streets under Vairon's supervision, William struggles between his duty to escape (and return to fighting the enemy) and the honour of his word not to escape (thereby protecting Vairon from retribution).

'I must have your word...that you will not try to escape from Québec, and that your behavior will be gentlemanly and honourable'. I hesitated. It seemed that it was my duty to escape, and if I could not escape, to cause as much mayhem among the enemy as I could. ...'I give you my word,' I said to Vairon, 'for the sake of our old friendship, and your offer of hospitality. I will conduct myself with honour, and I will not try to escape. But I do this reluctantly'. (Trottier, 2013, pp. 92-93)

In reading circle groups, explore the concepts of 'honour' and 'duty' in war and in peacetime. Define what Mr. Cook meant when he said to William, "without honour, life is meaningless" (Trottier, 2013, p. 92). What does it mean to live honourably? Are the "rules" about honour and duty the same or different during war and peacetime? How so? Should William break his word to his friend and try to escape? Is it ever acceptable to break your 'word'? If so, when?

Environmental Literacy. Social responsibility requires consciousness to environmental problems and the ability to critique a lack of commitment to

environmental stewardship, often associated with a consumerist way of life (Wolk, 2009). Early in *Blood and Iron* (2010), Heen is amazed at the extensiveness of the forests in Canada and the work that will be necessary to build the railway.

Our job is to open a wide path through dense forest. It is madness. The trees are so tall that their tops cannot be seen. Their branches are heavy with needles; overhead they reach out and interlock like fingers. They stand straight as pillars at a temple but press close together, smothering us in darkness that lingers all day. The trees grow so big that six or seven men with arms linked cannot circle their trunks. (Yee, 2010, p. 35)

Heen is caught between the need for money, the adventure of it all, and sadness at the coming destruction of the forest. Yee (2010) writes, “We all raced to be first to chop down a giant. At first we laughed like children. Then we realized these trees had stood for hundreds of years” (p. 35). Research the current state of forests in the rainforests of British Columbia. In what ways are they being threatened? In what ways are they being protected? Introduce fellow students to authoritative Internet websites that support your findings.

Conclusion

As part of their school mandate and as persons who share society with others, now and in the future, teachers must take seriously educating for democratic citizenship. Finding places and creating opportunities where students can be challenged to thoughtfully consider issues of social responsibility nurtures a multi-layered value needed for the maintenance and enhancement of society.

Books, including excerpts from books, can fire the imagination, raise questions, and open the door to discussion. As the academic and professional literature suggests, young adult historical fiction offers variety to a range of reading abilities, engages student interest, and is more comprehensive in range of topics, themes, and issues to explore than textbooks (McGowan & Guzzetti, 1991). As well, the creative use of young adult historical fiction gives students a sense of history (Freeman & Levstik, 1988), leads them on a journey through the complexities of life, and empowers students be socially responsible and make positive societal change (Wolk, 2009). By doing so, teachers are well on the road to fostering the type of young citizens with whom we can all be proud to share the world.

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