OMAHA NORTH HIGH MAGNET SCHOOL

Honors Humanities
Genocide in the 20th Century
Course Syllabus 2016-17

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Office Hours: By appointment. Please email or stop by room 205 to schedule a time to meet.

Course Description:
This Honors Humanities course is focused on the topic of genocide in the 20th century, including but not limited to the Holocaust, as well as instances that took place in Armenia (1915), Cambodia (1975-1979), Bosnia (1992-1995), and Rwanda (1994). The material itself is, of course, rather challenging in nature, but the class is designed to offer a place in which both safe and edifying inquiry and academic discovery can (and will) occur. The study of genocide is often difficult, uncomfortable, thought-provoking and disconcerting, but it is my experience that it is also edifying, compelling, and can be inspiring as well. No genocide was preordained; no genocide is inevitable. Ultimately, our study of this subject is a study of what might have been had people acted differently, and what still could be if we, ourselves, steer our world in a better direction, aspiring perhaps to transcend mere tolerance in favor of respect and, dare I even suggest it... love?

Instructional Philosophy:
It is my desire as your instructor that you know these things. It is my job as your teacher to see to it that you have the opportunity to learn this material. But it is my understanding of myself simply as your fellow human being that motivates me to teach this as opposed to, say, a class on the literature of sports, which, incidentally, could also be quite interesting. As human beings, I believe we have an obligation to one another, an obligation to know and to seek to understand one another. This class is thus largely inquiry based, and participation in class discussions is not only mandatory but vital to your understanding of the material. I will do everything I can to inspire you to dig deeper into this subject, and for your part, you must do the digging. For the most part, we can do it together. Never forget that we are studying our fellow human beings, and that they, and by extension our class materials, thereby deserve our full attention and respect.

Content Standards *

Reading: Students will read a variety of grade level texts fluently with accuracy, appropriate pace, phrasing, and expression.

Writing: Students will apply the writing process to plan, draft, revise, edit and publish writing using correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, and other standard conventions appropriate for grade level.

Speaking and Listening: Students will develop, apply, and refine speaking skills to communicate key ideas in a variety of situations.

Multiple Literacies: Students will research, synthesize, and communicate information in a variety of media and formats (textual, visual, and digital).

Course Expectations:
What you need EVERY DAY to succeed in this class:
1. A writing utensil
2. A notebook
3. Whatever book we’re reading in class
4. Your portfolio
5. A desire to learn

Class Rules and Expectations:
In my experience with this course, it works better simply to suggest that the golden rule of “do unto others” must apply in a setting such as this one. We will try to be understanding and empathetic towards one another, and we will be polite and respectful toward one another. Our phones, of course, really have no place in a polite learning environment, save on special occasions, and our attention must always be shared. That should be pretty easy. If this is unclear, please say so. If you’re unwilling to comply, take some other elective (not from me).

Communication:
This is an expectation, a vital skill, yes in this classroom, but also in life. We will practice it daily. There are many instances in which good communication will dramatically improve your grade, and will help maintain professional and friendly relationships with others. As an example, if you miss class, it is up to you to reach out and find out what you missed, either from a classmate or from me. You can do this via email, or by visiting my room before school. “I didn’t know that was due” will never save you from a reduced grade – it is your responsibility to know what is due and when.

Similarly, if you are having a rare day, perhaps your sister is in the hospital about to give birth to your new baby nephew, and on this particular day you can’t focus and you just really need to have your phone out, that’s totally fine. All you have to do is to communicate with me. Didn’t get to sleep last night because you were playing Halo? Make better decisions. Didn’t get to sleep last night because the bus broke down on the trip back from Grand Island? Sure, you can put your head down – just so long as you communicate. If this isn’t making sense, please let me know. Thank you.

Reminders about class, changes to class schedules and due dates, and other crucial information will be provided to you both in class and by text message. Please take a moment to send the code ONHH2019 to 81010 so that you receive class updates. I would also encourage your parents to do this so that they, too, are in the loop. Thank you.

Texts:
Our core text for this class is Samantha Power’s *A Problem From Hell*. In addition, we will draw from a variety of texts that can be found in the classroom to supplement our understanding during each unit of study. Further, you are welcome to introduce outside reading materials, and we will also read numerous articles and essays along the way. Please see me for a complete list of texts, or with further questions. Other texts we are likely to read include, but are not limited to:

- *Forgotten Fire* by Adam Bagdasarian
- *All Rivers Run to the Sea* by Elie Wiesel
- *Night* by Elie Wiesel
- *The Sunflower* by Simon Wiesenthal
- *First They Killed My Father* by Loung Ung
- *Good People in an Evil Time* by Svetlana Broz
- *A Thousand Hills* by Steven Kinzer
- *Machete Season* by Jean Hatzfeld
- *I’m Not Leaving* by Carl Wilkens
- *Maus I and II* by Art Spiegelman

Of course, this is an incomplete list. We will surely introduce other texts as the term goes by, and we will certainly not read all of these. You will enjoy a certain level of autonomy when it comes to selecting books as well.

As far as assessment goes, you will be graded on a series of formative portfolios, which are a compilation of small homework and journaling assignments, as well as on papers, tests, Socratic seminars and projects, which will make up your summative grades. In the past, the students who have been the most successful from a grade standpoint have been those who have made a concerted effort not to fall behind, and who have communicated with me about absences and late work. I highly encourage you to communicate with me as often as you believe is necessary. Never hesitate to reach out with questions or concerns.

Assignments:
There are several different types of assignments that you can expect in this class, and they break down into different categories based on the content standards we are seeking to meet. Below is a brief examination of the sorts of assignments you can expect in this class.

- **Portfolios**
You will be given a folder at the start of the year which I hope you’ll make your own. During each unit, all of our notes, contemporary issues of intolerance, stream of conscious journals, and other “smaller”, formative assignments will be put in your portfolio. Reflections over shorter readings will also appear in your portfolio. I will keep a list of what goes in each portfolio on the class bulletin board. At the end of each unit, your portfolio is turned in. This is one of our only formative grades, and it is weighted, so it carries substantial value. Portfolios that are incomplete will always be downgraded. I suggest you make a friend in class who will tell you what you miss and share their notes with you. You can also, of course, ask me.

- **Presentations and Public Forums**
In our class, you can expect to present independently as well as in groups on a regular basis, and also to engage in Socratic seminar-style discussions. All of these are typically graded, and the weight and category (formative or summative) is determined by the style of the assignment, the expectations, and the time you have to prepare. Please note that you do not have the right to “tune out” when someone is presenting in this class, and it wouldn’t be at all anomalous if you grade took a hit if you were rude during a classmate’s presentation. In all things, act with maturity and respect, and communicate well in the rare instance that this is not possible.

- **Projects**
Your summative work in class comes most often in the form of projects. These may be one-off projects, like the letter-writing assignment that we will do during our unit on Armenia, or they may be your notes over a particular full-length text. These will always be explained in detail in class. They make up much of your final grade.

**OPS Secondary Grading Practices**
All coursework and assessments are judged based on the level of student learning from “below basic” to “advanced.” This course will provide multiple opportunities to achieve at the “proficient” to “advanced” levels. Students are evaluated based on a proficiency scale or project rubric. Proficiency scales for this course are available upon request (teacher will identify location such as portal, teacher website, attached, etc.)

There are three types of coursework:

- **Practice** – assignments are brief and done at the beginning of learning to gain initial content (e.g., student responses on white boards, a valid sampling of math problems, keyboarding exercises, and diagramming sentences, checking and recording resting heart rate). Practice assignments are not generally graded for accuracy (descriptive feedback will be provided in class) and are not a part of the grade. Teachers may keep track of practice work to check for completion and students could also track their practice work. Practice work is at the student’s instructional level and may only include Basic (2) level questions.

- **Formative (35% of the final grade)** – assessments/assignments occur during learning to inform and improve instruction. They are minor assignments (e.g., a three paragraph essay, written responses to guiding questions over an assigned reading, completion of a comparison contrast matrix). Formative assignments are graded for accuracy and descriptive feedback is provided. Formative work may be at the student’s instructional level or at the level of the content standard. Formative assessments/assignments will have all levels of learning – Basic (2), Proficient (3), and Advanced (4), which means that for every formative assessment/assignment, students will be able to earn an Advanced (4). Teachers will require students to redo work that is not of high quality to ensure rigor and high expectations. The students score on a formative assessment that was redone will be their final score.

- **Summative (65% of the final grade)** – assessments/assignments are major end of learning unit tests or projects used to determine mastery of content or skill (e.g., a research paper, an oral report with a power point, major unit test, and science fair project). Summative assignments are graded for accuracy. Summative assignments assess the student’s progress on grade level standards and may not be written at the student’s instructional level. Summative assessments/assignments will have all levels of learning – Basic (2), Proficient (3), and Advanced (4), which means that for every formative assessment/assignment students, will be able to earn an advanced (4).
To maintain alignment of coursework to content standards, which is a key best practice for standards-based grading, teachers will utilize a standardized naming convention for each of the standards within a course. The content standard will be marked on each assignment entered into Infinite Campus (District Grading Program) using all capital letters followed by a colon. After the colon will be the title of the coursework.

At the end of the grading period, scores are converted to a letter grade using this grading scale:

- A = 3.26-4.00
- B = 2.51-3.25
- C = 1.76-2.50
- D = 1.01-1.75
- F = 0.00-1.00

Redoing/Revising Student Coursework*

1. Students are responsible for completing all coursework and assessments as assigned.
2. Students will be allowed redos and revisions of coursework for full credit as long as they are turned in during that unit of study while a student still has an opportunity to benefit from the learning. When time permits, teachers should allow the redoing or revising of summative assessments.
3. Students are expected to complete assessments when given to the class, or if a student was justifiably absent, at a time designated by the teacher.
4. Redoing, retaking or revising will be done at teacher discretion in consultation with the student and parent(s). Teachers may schedule students before, during, or after school to address needed areas of improvement if not convenient during class. The time and location for redoing, retaking or revising will be done at the teacher’s discretion in consultation with the student and parent(s).
5. Scores for student work after retaking, revising or redoing will not be averaged with the first attempt at coursework but will replace the original score.

Make-up work

Make-up work – and redos or revisions – will only be accepted until the end of the unit in which it was assigned. Late work will only be accepted if it is accompanied by a completed and signed late work application form (attached). It is your responsibility to make up any work you miss. As always, see me for help.

Final Note

It is a privilege for me to teach this class, and it is equally a privilege for you to take it. It would be wonderful if we did not have such things as genocide even to discuss in school, but given the world we live in, we do have them to discuss, and in them we find an opportunity to better understand ourselves, as well as our fellow human beings and the world that we all share. Most of all, we find in this study a hope, a very real hope for a better tomorrow and the world as we might imagine it to be. It’s in understanding our world and those we share it with that such imagining can be made into reality. By you. I’m glad you’re here.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mark R Gudgel
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*Indicates standardized language

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