Examining the Historical Representation of the Holocaust within Trade Books

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Abstract

State and national education initiatives provide students with opportunities to engage in close readings of complex texts from diverse perspectives as they actively construct complicated understandings as they explore complex texts. Opportunities for interdisciplinary units emerge as the role of non-fiction in English/language arts and informational texts in history/social studies increase dramatically. Trade books are a logical curricular link between these two curricula. The initiatives, however, do not prescribe specific curricular materials so teachers rely on their own discretion when selecting available trade books. Scholarship indicates that historical misrepresentations emerge within trade books to varying degrees, yet only a few empirical studies have been conducted. We empirically evaluated trade books centered on the Holocaust, a curricular topic that appears in U.S. history, world history, and English/language arts. We report various misrepresentations within the trade books regarding the Holocaust’s origins, targeted victims, victim totals, contributors, and recognition of other genocidal acts. We provide ancillary primary sources for teachers interested in addressing or balancing the historical misrepresentations.

Keywords

Holocaust; Trade books; Primary Sources; Common Core

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In other words, any representation of the Holocaust in literature or art can never adequately convey the reality of a lived experience; it will always be bound to convey a representation of that experience particular to the situation in which it (the representation) was produced.