The Bosnian War and Life under Siege in Sarajevo

Format and Suggested Sequencing

The unit is primarily designed for English Language Arts, but there is a great deal of crossover with Social Studies as well. Many of the lessons are perfectly suitable for Social Studies classes and may be paired with English Language Arts as an interdisciplinary two-week unit. For example, Lessons One, Two, and Three provide historical understanding of the events and can easily fit within a Social Studies curriculum to support subsequent lessons that are more specifically structured to address Language Arts skills. Lessons Four, Five, Six, and Seven are shared in content but utilize excerpts from the novel *The Cellist of Sarajevo*. Lesson Eight provides students with practice in close reading of non-fiction while Lesson Nine fosters creative writing through poetry. The lessons are designed to accommodate classes of 45-50 minutes in length, but time suggestions are included with each activity and can easily be modified to work within myriad schedules.

**Lesson One: Introduction to the Bosnian War**

- Note, the history of Yugoslavia and Yugoslav Wars is complex and may be quite complicated for students to initially understand. It is worth explaining to students that they may first feel frustrated with the assignment, particularly the first phase of watching the documentary. Reassure them that following the video, the content will be revisited in a mini-lecture slide presentation. Also, there are many documentaries on the break up of Yugoslavia available online, but many are either too detailed for an introductory lesson or too vague to build the bigger picture. I have attempted here to provide the best option, but teachers should preview the videos to ascertain the appropriateness for their own classes.

Warm Up (approximately 5 minutes) – define 'federation' and 'republic'. Follow up with a quick discussion to ensure students understand both words and the key concepts behind them.

Video Worksheet and Quick Write Responses (approximately 30 minutes) - Distribute the Feature History – Fall of Yugoslavia video worksheet. First ask students to respond to the initial Quick Write question: what do you know about Yugoslavia and the Bosnian War? Next, share the documentary videos and pause the videos as needed so students can sufficiently answer the worksheet questions.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mxJjstwqMk

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEUXC0wRSL8

Mini-lecture Slideshow (approximately 25 minutes) - Revisit key content using the slideshow as a prompt. Explain the core issues and answer student questions as they arise.

- Note, both the video and slideshow may take longer that the suggested time allotted depending on students need for clarification.

**Lesson Two: Overview of the Bosnian War**
Warm Up (approximately 3 minutes) - Direct students to share with a neighbor three things they remember from yesterday's lesson

Documentary with Interactive Worksheet (approximately 45 minutes) - Quickly recap yesterday's lesson leading up to the Yugoslav republics declaring independence. Reiterate that both Croatia and Serbia wanted parts of Bosnia to themselves. Distribute the National Geographic Bosnian War worksheet and begin playing the documentary. Pause the video as needed for students to adequately respond to the worksheet questions.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SekiqsjSeUc

- Note, this lesson may exceed the suggested time allotment depending on students' response time and writing abilities.

Lesson Three: Sarajevo under Siege

Warm Up (approximately 4 minutes) – Direct students to define 'siege'.

Activate Schema (approximately 15 minutes) - Direct students to stand around the perimeter of the room and then ask them a series of questions. If the student can answer the question affirmatively, have him or her walk to the middle of the room. Instruct students to carefully observe and to mentally note how many of the experiences students have in common.

Have you ever felt attacked?
Have you ever been afraid for your life?
Have you ever had a problem that lasted more than a week?
Have you ever been truly hungry?
Have you ever had to walk to find water?
Have you ever lost a loved one?
Have you ever been so miserable at home that you actually wished you could go to school?
Have you ever been bullied?
Have you ever felt helpless?
Have you ever been so angry you thought you could kill someone?
Have you ever been discriminated based on your religion?
Have you ever been taunted because you had something another person wanted?
Have you ever been at the wrong place at the wrong time?
Have you ever argued with someone who simply refused to compromise?
Have you ever been wrongfully accused of something?
Have you ever given up hope?
Have you ever wished you were somewhere else?
Have you ever thought that maybe the future is hopeless?
Have you ever felt like someone was watching you?
Have you ever felt unsafe?
Have you ever been disliked for the way you look?
Have you ever been mistreated because of your beliefs?
Have you ever been so stressed that you couldn't eat?

Direct students to take their seats and get out a sheet of paper. Ask them to quickly start a list of adjectives to describe the feelings attached to all the "have you ever" questions. Solicit responses from students and
make note of the adjectives. Then, ask students to imagine what it would be like to be under siege. Remind them that Sarajevo was under siege 3 years, 10 months, 3 weeks, and 3 days (1,425 days).

Documentary with Response Worksheet (approximately 25 minutes) - Distribute the worksheet for the Siege of Sarajevo documentary. Show the documentary and pause the video as needed to allow students ample time to respond to questions.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3nGxUwOn-o&t=58s

Lesson Four: Introduction to The Cellist of Sarajevo

Warm Up (approximately 5 minutes) - Share the video with students and pose the question: what do you think The Cellist of Sarajevo is about? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jr5ysZEIx3M

Quick Write (approximately 20 minutes) - Pose students with the question: have you ever felt under pressure? Solicit a few verbal responses and the segue to the video. Ask students to listen and read the lyrics to David Bowie's Under Pressure: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ro_bLjhhEco

Next, allow students about 7 minutes to write about a time they felt under pressure. Then, ask students to share their stories with a shoulder partner. Revisit yesterday's lesson; remind students that the citizens of Sarajevo lived under siege for 1,425 days. Ask them to imagine what life must have felt like under that sort of pressure, cut off from the world, without resources, risking one's life to simply find water. Remind students that Sarajevo was full of snipers and that moving about the city was done under constant threat of gunshot, regardless whether one was a soldier or civilian. Finally, ask students to add to their quick write response based on the following: what do you think was the most stressful aspect of being in Sarajevo during the Bosnian War?

Introduce The Cellist of Sarajevo (approximately 5 minutes) - Revisit the Warm Up question and solicit a few verbal responses. Share with students the following information:

The Cellist of Sarajevo is a fictional account of a real man – Vedran Smailovic. On May 26, 1992, twenty-two people were killed when a mortar struck the marketplace where the people were standing in line for bread. To honor the twenty-two victims, Smailovic, a cellist, played Adagio in G Minor for twenty-two days. Under grave threat of snipers, he played in the ruined square of the marketplace. The Cellist of Sarajevo fictionalizes Smailovic and three other citizens of Sarajevo who are affected by the cellist's memorial "concerts".

https://ghcdsapenglish.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/the-cellist-of-sarajevo.pdf

Oral Reading (approximately 20 minutes) - Post the epigraph as it appears in the book: "You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you." Leon Trotsky. Ask students what that quote means and why they think it might be appropriate to set the theme of The Cellist of Sarajevo. Next, distribute the prologue "The Cellist". Read it aloud to students and ask that they follow along with the reading. After the reading, ask students if they have any questions or reactions to the passage. Did it sound as they imagined? How does the scene compare to the "have you ever" activity? Explain to students that they will continue to read chapter one in jigsaw reading groups.

Lesson Five: Continue The Cellist of Sarajevo
Lesson Six: Continue The Cellist of Sarajevo

Warm Up (approximately 7 minutes) - Play the music video of the Adagio in G Minor, performed by the actual "cellist of Sarajevo," Vedran Smailovic. Instruct students to listen and then in writing state their opinions on whether or not the musical piece was fitting for the circumstance: commemorating the twenty-two lost lives of the market massacre. Solicit a few students to share their conclusions.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fj9BILgs3zo

Jigsaw Reading (approximately 35 minutes) - Direct students to reconvene in their jigsaw reading groups and continue working on the response worksheet. Circulate around the room to monitor the groups' progress and answer any questions.

Lesson Seven: Jigsaw Satellites

Warm Up (approximately 3 minutes) - Pose the question for students: Do you think your character (Arrow, Kenan, or Dragan) is typical of a person living through a war? Why or why not? What makes him or her unique? What makes him or her typical?

Jigsaw Satellites (approximately 20 minutes) - Direct students to form new, mixed groups of three or four. Each group should have at least one student to represent the passages of Arrow, Kenan, or Dragan. Instruct students to now share with the others a general summary of the passage they read. Offer guidelines on key ideas they should share: what is the character's main conflict? What is the character doing throughout the passage? What is the character's age and gender? Next, direct students' attention to questions 18, 19, and 20 on their response worksheets. Have them share their conclusions with the new, mixed group members. How do their answers compare? What insights did their respective characters offer in regards to the questions?

Comparative Analysis and Gallery Walk (approximately 20 minutes) - Direct the new, mixed groups to create a three-circle Venn Diagram on a sheet of paper. For each character, Arrow, Kenan, and Dragan, students will write aspects in which the characters are similar and different. Next, instruct students to find textual evidence from their respective passages that reflect the similarities characters possess. Distribute
Post-it notes to each group and have them label each Post-it with the character trait Arrow, Kenan, and Dragan share. For each character, students must produce a Post-it with the trait heading, the character’s name, and a quote from the passage that shows evidence of the trait. Each group should produce at least three character traits that Arrow, Kenan, and Dragan have in common. When the groups have completed the Post-it note task, have them display them in a designated area of the room. Allow time for students to conduct a gallery walk and read the other groups’ findings. Conclude with a summary discussion of their conclusions.

Lesson Eight: "The Virtues of Sarajevo," Margaret O'Brien Steinfels (Gale Group Academic One File)

Warm Up (approximately 5 minutes) - Pose the question for students: How might wartime be different in cities versus rural areas? When students have responded to the prompt, solicit a few to share their responses.

Close Reading, "The Virtues of Sarajevo" Team Competition (approximately 45 minutes) - Assign the students groups of three to four or let them form their own groups. Distribute copies of the article "The Virtues of Sarajevo." Explain to students that they will be reading the article twice – the first time they will follow along as the teacher reads it out loud, the second time they will read independently. When students have finished the second, independent reading, direct them to work as a cooperative group to answer the multiple choice questions. The team with the most correct answers wins a prize of the teacher’s choosing.

ANSWER KEY:

1) D
2) B
3) A
4) D
5) C
6) D
7) D
8) B
9) C
10) A
11) C
12) B
13) B
14) D
15) A
Variation 1: Conduct questions as whole class and set a time limit of two minutes per question. Have teams log their on dry erase boards or pre-arrange an online buzzer system on Kahoot.

Variation 2: Preview the questions and choose some to be bonus point questions based on level of difficulty. The team that then has the most points wins.


As each team reveals its answer to a question, remove from the envelope one square for each incorrect answer. When the teams have answered all eighteen questions, give the team its designated envelope (which may now have fewer than eighteen squares). As a bonus round, explain to students that they must unjumble the letter squares to form a name. (Additional clues may be given at the teacher's discretion.)

Lesson Nine: Is there hope in Sarajevo under siege?

Warm Up (approximately 5 minutes) - Ask students if they believe people can maintain hope while living in Sarajevo during the siege. If so, what can people do to inspire and maintain hope for a better future? What would the student do in the same situation? Allow time for students to respond in writing and then solicit a few students to share their responses.

Documentary Excerpt (approximately 7 minutes) - Show the excerpt of the documentary Miss Sarajevo. As students watch, instruct them to note examples of hope as manifested by the citizens of Sarajevo. Follow up with a brief discussion of the examples of hope that students observed. How did their own warm up responses compare?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnnrznJ7mJg&list=RDLnnrznJ7mJg#t=78

Note, viewing the entire documentary, Miss Sarajevo, is seriously worth consideration. It is a poignant juxtaposition of both the terror of war and humans' will to survive. It is particularly valuable in the classroom as the documentary chronicles the lives of various youth over years of living under siege. The transformation of the featured teens is palpable in their appearances, emotions, and outlooks. The film is available for purchase on the director's website for $25.00. http://www.billcarter.cc/films

Poetry Reading and Discussion (approximately 15 minutes) - Distribute copies of Ken Victor's poem, The Pageant, 1993: During the Siege of Sarajevo. Begin by allowing students time to complete an initial, silent reading of the poem. Follow up by then administering an oral reading of the poem, conducted by the teacher, so that students may catch any necessary intonation or emphasis in the poem. Draw students'
attention to the epigraph that appears just after the title. Explain to students that it is not Ken Victor's writing, rather it is a quote. Ask students why they think the author included it in his poem.

Next, ask students to underline three words that stand out to them in the first stanza. Likely responses may include 'decipher,' 'carnage,' 'carnal,' and 'impotent.' Encourage students to talk about the importance of the words they selected. Why did the author choose those specific words? Would the poem be as powerful had the author selected different words with similar meanings? What else is associated with those particular words?

For the second stanza, generate a discussion as to why it is a "foolishness" to have a beauty pageant during wartime. Is the author being sarcastic or does he really believe the women are foolish? Why might the women see matters differently?

In the third stanza, direct students' attention to the word 'idiocy.' Ask, "if you were the poet, would you have chosen the same word? What other word might be more accurate?" Continue to examine the stanza be re-reading the lines "One hunger appearing irresponsible / in the presence of the other." To what is the poet referring? Clarify for students that the lines are alluding back to the epigraph. Are the lines, "Or a reminder. To suppose our / appetite for self-destruction could ever / eclipse our longing for beauty" evidence of hope or the author's emphasis on foolishness?

For the fifth stanza, again ask students to select three words that stand out to them. Repeat the same line of questioning as done for the first stanza.

Finally, explore with students the final message suggested in "forgives us." Who is being forgiven, the women in the contest or the purveyors of the siege?

Poetry Writing (approximately 15 minutes) - Share with students the photo and biographical profile of Meliha Varesanovic at https://www.quora.com/How-was-life-in-Sarajevo-during-the-1992-96-siege.

Direct students to use the photograph as visual inspiration to write their own poem about beauty in time of war. Suggest that they use Victor's poem as a template, mimicking the same number of stanzas and same number of words per line.

- Note, the poetry writing assignment will likely need more time to be completed with diligence and should be given additional time for completion, perhaps as homework. Also, it is worthwhile to allow time for students to share their completed poems, time permitting.

Lesson Ten: Final Assessment

Warm Up (approximately 5 minutes) - Allow students time to review all previous work from the unit as a means of studying for the final test.

Assessment (approximately 45 minutes) - Distribute the final assessment and direct students to complete it.

ANSWER KEY:

1) D
2) C
3) A
SHORT ESSAY RUBRIC:

25 points – essay is well written with fewer than five grammatical errors, vocabulary is interesting and varied, examples are accurate and relevant, writing reflects articulate understanding of the Bosnian War and the siege on Sarajevo

21 points – essay is mostly well written with fewer than ten grammatical errors, vocabulary is somewhat interesting and varied, examples are mostly accurate and relevant with a few lapses, writing reflects general understanding of the Bosnian War and the siege on Sarajevo

17 points – essay is fairly well written with fewer than fifteen grammatical errors, vocabulary is average and not varied, examples are vague with little direct connection, writing reflects a basic understanding of the Bosnian War and the siege on Sarajevo

13 points – essay is poorly written with sixteen or more grammatical errors, vocabulary is basic and often flawed, examples are random and inaccurate, writing reflects little understanding of the Bosnian War and the siege on Sarajevo

• Suggested follow-up and additional resources:

  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpnHhQdgirA (Return to Sarajevo – a twelve minute news story reflecting back on Sarajevo during the siege and showing the city's current status)

  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnQ1ITAVjhw (Frontline's Romeo and Juliet in Sarajevo – 1:28 minutes documentary featuring a tragic love story of a young couple in Sarajevo, she a Muslim and he a Serb; this makes an excellent pairing with Shakespeare's classical, West Side Story and a myriad of other "forbidden" love stories. It is also an excellent example of Sarajevo's tolerant, mixed culture.)