

CURRICULUM SCOPE & SEQUENCE

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ABOUT THE BOOK:

Inspired by a real-life incident, *The Assignment* explores discrimination and antisemitism and reveals their dangerous impact.

Would you defend the indefensible?

That's what seniors Logan March and Cade Crawford are asked to do when a favorite teacher instructs a group of students to argue for the Final Solution—the Nazi plan for the genocide of the Jewish people.

Logan and Cade decide they must take a stand, and soon their actions draw the attention of the student body, the administration, and the community at large. But not everyone feels as Logan and Cade do—after all, isn't a school debate just a school debate? It's not long before the situation explodes, and acrimony and anger result.

Based on true events, The Assignment asks: What does it take for tolerance, justice, and love to prevail?

HONORS:

- Georgia Peach Book Award nominee
- State of Illinois Read for a Lifetime Book
- Little Free Library "Read in Color" Recommended Read
- TAYSHAS Recommended Read (Texas Library Association)
- Sakura Medal Award nominee (Japan)
- Sydney Taylor Notable YA Novel
- A Bank Street College of Education Best Book of the Year
- YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults nominee
- Milwaukee County Teen Honor Book
- Wisconsin State Reading Association Recommended YA Novel
- Nerdy Book Club Best Young Adult Novel winner

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Liza Wiemer is a writer and an award-winning educator with over twenty years of teaching experience. She is the author of two adult nonfiction books, as well as a young adult novel. Liza lives in Wisconsin. Website: lizawiemer.com | Email: lizawiemerauthor@gmail.com

NOTES FOR EDUCATORS:

- —Readers are encouraged to keep a journal or designated section of a notebook where they can respond and reflect while reading *The Assignment*.
- —Provide content warnings when necessary to ensure a safe, brave, and trauma-informed space for all students to engage with hard history.

BEFORE READING (PRE-READING):
Observe the cover of <i>The Assignment</i> and discuss:
What do you see? What do you think? What do you wonder?
What do you think the title of the book and the tagline mean?
 Make a prediction about the book's storyline based on the cover.
Read the book's synopsis (inside flap/back) and expand on the discussion.
• Read the true story that inspired this book on the author's website: http://lizawiemer.com/the-story-behind-the-assignment
 Share this helpful terminology and discuss it with students. Unless noted, these come from the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) "Education Glossary Terms."
TERM DEFINITION
Nazi Racism: Racism fueled Nazi ideology and policies. The Nazis viewed the world as being divided up into competing inferior and superior races, each struggling for survival and dominance. They believed the Jews were not a religious denomination, but a dangerous non-European "race." Nazi racism would produce murder on an unprecedented scale.
https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/nazi-racism-an-overview Antisemitism: "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred
toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or
non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious
facilities." https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/about-the-ihra-working-definition-of-antisemitism
Bigotry: An unreasonable or irrational attachment to negative stereotypes and prejudices of
individuals and groups belonging to one or more social identities. Propaganda: Information that is intended to persuade an audience to accept a particular idea or
cause, often by using biased material or by stirring up emotions.
Upstander: A person who speaks or acts in support of an individual or cause, particularly someone
who intervenes on behalf of a person being attacked or bullied.
Terms sourced from the Anti-Defamation League and Facing History:
www.adl.org/education/resources/glossary-terms/education-glossary-terms (website)
www.adl.org/media/4663/download (PDF)
www.facinghistory.org/upstander
www.facinghistory.org/topics/holocaust/propaganda
Educators: Read aloud the first chapter of <i>The Assignment</i> while students listen. Then, students write and/or discuss their initial impressions, thoughts, and questions:
What does Mr. Bartley's assignment ask students to do?
Why is Logan upset by the assignment? Is her anger justified?
What questions do you have about the characters and storyline?
Build background knowledge:

O Discuss the question: "What was The Holocaust?"

0	Read and explore the "Introduction to The Holocaust" from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's (USHMM) website:
	encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/introduction-to-the-holocaust
0	Read the "Wannsee Conference and 'The Final Solution'" from the USHMM: encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/wannsee-conference-and-the-final-solution and
	"The Wannsee Conference" from Facing History: www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior/chapter-9/wannsee-conference
0	The film <i>Conspiracy</i> (HBO, 2001) shows a portrayal of the Wannsee Conference. Share the trailer, which includes actors noting that playing Nazi roles was extremely challenging. For comparison, imagine how students would feel if asked to take on those same roles and debate the merits of the Final Solution for the purpose of a class assignment: https://youtu.be/vWLvq0jC-c0
0	Visit "Why the Jews: History of Antisemitism" and watch the 13-minute film about the history of antisemitism. Nazis relied on fear and prejudice to target Jewish people: www.ushmm.org/antisemitism/what-is-antisemitism/why-the-jews-history-of-antisemitism
0	To understand why this assignment is harmful, familiarize yourself with the term, cognitive dissonance: https://www.simplypsychology.org/cognitive-dissonance.html Of course, there is nothing wrong with learning about what Nazis believe and what transpired during the Holocaust. However, asking students to advocate for or justify Nazi beliefs or actions in any way creates cognitive dissonance, opening the door to the possibility that there is validity to their actions and mass murder. In this, we must draw a
	clear moral line. During the Nuremberg Trials, Nazi defendants used the argument that they were only following orders. However, that argument was denied. Morality supersedes an order. They committed crimes against humanity. Helpful sources:
	https://www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior/chapter-10/obeying-orders https://echoesandreflections.org/wp-
	content/themes/twentysixteenechoes/fileview.php?source=1&file_nm=2018/03/09-02-
	01 StudentHandout WarCrimesTrials_ver2.pdf

DURING READING:

The following questions may be used for discussions and journaling. They appear in the order of reading with page and/or chapter numbers noted for reference.

- Throughout the book, notice each chapter's character point of view. The author writes certain characters/chapters in <u>first person</u> (narrator is a person telling the story from their point of view using the pronouns "I" and "we") and others in <u>third person</u> (narrator exists outside the events of the story and refers to characters by name or pronouns "he," "she," "they"). Why do you think the author chose to write in varying points of view? Which characters are written in first person? Third person? Why does that matter? What does it signify?
- Page 25: Logan mentions white supremacy and its role in the Charlottesville, Virginia, rally in August 2017, during which one woman was killed. What connections is she making between that event and her class assignment that causes her concern?
- Page 27: At the end of Chapter 5, Cade and Logan decide they need to push back on the assignment, but question how they should do that. In Logan's words, "What do you think we should do?"
- Pages 46–47: Logan theorizes that the assignment is actually a morality test. Cade's theory questions Mr. Bartley's motivations and core beliefs. Do either of these theories seem plausible, or do you have a theory of your own about why Mr. Bartley gave the assignment?
- Page 51: Before Mr. Bartley shows the film *Conspiracy*, he asks students to "take notes—pros and cons—on how the Nazis propose to deal with the Jewish problem." Read this entire paragraph of dialogue, reflecting on his specific use of the words "pros and cons," "deal with," "Jewish problem," and "modern perspective." Notice and discuss how each of these words and phrases carries biases and ideological connotations that reinforce harmful beliefs as truth.

\bigcirc	From whose perspective are words like "deal with" and "problem" spoken?
\bigcirc	A "pro" or "con" for whom? The Nazis? Jewish people? Mr. Bartley?
\bigcirc	How does Mr. Bartley expect a "modern perspective" to change the way the students
	should view the film?

- Page 52: Do you agree with Mr. Bartley when he says "[I]t's important for you to examine their [Nazis'] arguments," as a standalone statement? Will this assignment accomplish that goal effectively, or will it cause harm? Is reenacting the Wannsee Conference a way to critically evaluate "their arguments" or is there another way for students to engage in this learning?
- Page 53: Logan wonders if the "assignment is symbolic of how easy it is to persuade us to follow orders?" Read the paragraph about the Milgram experiment, which measured peoples' "obedience to authority figures" through receiving direct orders and inflicting physical pain.

\bigcirc	Understand the Milgram expe	eriment: <u>youtu.b</u>	oe/PJFzqfLMBIw	(Khan Academy)
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○ Watch the official movie trailer for *Experimenter*, a biopic on Milgram and his experiment: youtu.be/5nyvFO5zZim (The full film is available on several streaming

platforms.)	
	f the experiment and the assignment: Why is it so hard to njustice? Create a brainstormed list.
	of the assignment ("Genocide takes place every single day gnment justified or flawed? How would you respond to what
refugees. What do we learn about w perspectives? Does this make you fe	ning at Fort Ontario centers on the experiences of World War II what it was like to be a refugee, through the refugees' own eel differently about the assignment? How so? If the Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum: 1.000
passively did nothing during the Hol	ow was it that millions of people either actively participated or ocaust?" He responds, "I don't know and I have no answer, an's question? What questions do you have?
incident comparable to Cade's and L Gestapo (Nazi police force). To addr	ector at Humanity for Peace and Justice (HPJ), refers to an logan's class assignment in which students role-played as the ess the harm, HPJ facilitated restorative justice practices. ce and how could it help repair harm in schools?
■ What Teachers	Need To Know About Restorative Justice
<u>www.weareteac</u>	chers.com/restorative-justice
	s Restorative Justice? <u>www.edutopia.org/article/what-heck-</u>
<u>restorative-justi</u>	ce-heather-wolpert-gawron
	liscusses how <u>propaganda</u> was used as a tactic to manipulate motional influence (see definition above). //ill Follow You!"
https://www.ushmm.org/propaganda/a	
	it it? https://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3g01656/
·	opaganda used by the Nazis in World War Two, then connect it
to ways propaganda continues to be util	
What is Nazi propagand	
	da and Censorship" (USHMM):
	hmm.org/content/en/article/nazi-propaganda-and-censorship
•	aganda Exhibit (timeline, themes, artifacts gallery):
www.ushmm.or	
- ,	resources on propaganda:
<u>www.tacingnist</u>	ory.org/topics/holocaust/propaganda
	r for <i>The Social Dilemma</i> , a documentary about the impacts ing social media and the Internet (spread of

disinformation/propaganda, mental health, dependence). Reflect on the trailer and connect to their own social media usage: youtu.be/uaaC57tcci0

Read this paragraph aloud. Ask students to share their reactions. Do you see anything similar happening today?

"How did propaganda and censorship work together?

Textbooks are a good example of how propaganda and censorship worked together in the Nazi regime. The Nazis used both propaganda and censorship to control what students read in school. Nazi censors removed some textbooks from classrooms. New textbooks taught students to obey the Nazi Party, love Hitler, and hate Jews (USHMM)."

- Page 130: When the Lake Towns Journal article is published, it immediately gains traction (views, shares, comments). In response, Mrs. Stoke cancels her reservations at the inn for her daughter's bridal shower and wedding guests. Cade speaking out to the media had financial and social consequences for his family and their business. Was Cade right to speak to the media? Do you think it was worth the individual risks? What would you have done differently or the same?
- Pages 132–134, 135, 146–148, 156: Several chapters include social media posts and comments, which allow information and misinformation to spread quickly and exponentially. Notice the handles/usernames, number of likes, and comments on the original post. What stands out? What feels important? Reflect on the impact of social media that gains traction or goes viral. Are there potential positive impacts? Negative impacts? How do these impacts show up in your life or the lives of your peers?
 - What is YOUR responsibility as a creator, responder, and amplifier on social media? How do you interact on social media?

CREATOR

- Original poster (OP)
- Makes memes, gifs, other visuals

RESPONDER

- Comments on others' posts
- Reactions (like, favorite) and rankings (upvote, downvote)

AMPLIFIER

- Retweets
- Sharing on your page/wall/profile
- Tags others
- Page 135: What happens when social media users are anonymous? Is anonymity an important option to have, or should social media platforms require identification? How would social media be different if no one could be anonymous?
- Page 140: Heather dyes her hair blue. What message is she intending to send? What does the
 drastic change in her appearance represent? Brainstorm real life examples of people embedding
 messaging (protest, support, information, etc.) in their physical appearance (clothes, hair,

	accessories, makeup).
•	Page 147: Logan's cousin Blair said, "A good teacher would never give that assignment." Following that logic, is Mr. Bartley a "bad" teacher for giving the assignment, still a "good" teacher who made a mistake, or is it more nuanced than that? Discuss Logan's internal conflict about Mr. Bartley, who she refers to as her "ideal" teacher.
•	Page 149: Holocaust survivor and Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel said in his Nobel acceptance speech: "I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented." Is neutrality a choice? In what ways does neutrality help an oppressor? Recall a time when you or someone you know chose to take action (upstander) to help
	a family member, friend, classmate, or stranger.
•	Page 171: Do you agree or disagree with Mr. Lane when he tells Logan, "There were so many other ways you could have handled this." Support your position.
•	Chapter 39 (Pages 175–183): What is your reaction to Nana's big reveal? Does her story change your perspective or thinking? What does her story mean in terms of identity and survival?
•	Chapter 46 (Pages 210–212): After reading Reg's letter to the editor published in the <i>Lake Towns Journal</i> , would you choose to remain silent or be an upstander? If you choose to be an upstander, use the power of your words to write your own letter to the editor in response to his statements. Do you agree with anything Reg wrote? With what do you disagree? Which parts of Reg's letter do you feel responsible to speak up about and push back on because leaving them unchecked allows the harm to be perpetuated?
•	Pages 227–229: The vandalism at the inn is an example of a hate crime. In 2019, the FBI reported 8,812 hate crimes. Of the 1,715 considered "Anti-Religious Hate Crimes," 60.2% were anti-Jewish, a greater percentage than any other religious group. Use the following resources to learn more about the nature of anti-Jewish hate crimes:
	O 2019 Hate Crime Statistics (FBI) <u>ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2019/topic-pages/victims</u>
	 ADL's Tracker of Antisemitic Incidents <u>www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resource-knowledge-base/adl-tracker-of-antisemitic-incidents</u>
	ADL H.E.A.T. Map (Hate, Extremism, Antisemitism, Terrorism) <a display="" encourages="" folks="" front<="" here!"="" href="https://www.adl.org/education-news-add-o</th></tr><tr><th></th><th>and-resources/resource-knowledge-base/adl-heat-map</th></tr><tr><th>•</th><th>Chapter 56 (Pages 248–253): The crowd of supporters at the inn hold up signs that say:</th></tr><tr><th></th><th>" humankind="" in="" logan="" signs="" th="" the="" these="" to="" welcome="">
	windows of their homes and businesses. If you were to see this sign, how would it make you feel? How would it make you feel about the business or people who displayed it? Do you see signs like this displayed anywhere in your community? Or signs with an opposite or very different message?

What is your reaction to seeing them?

- Chapter 59 (Pages 260–263): Mr. Bartley admits he made a mistake, apologizes to Cade and Logan, and says "I will fix this." Do you feel this is an acceptable means to repair the harm, or should Mr. Bartley face other consequences?
- Chapter 61 (Pages 266–267): Why is Daniel's perspective as an LGBTQIAP+ person important to the story overall? In what ways is his letter an act of an upstander? What does Daniel's letter reveal to readers and how does it deepen our understanding of the Holocaust's impacts?
- Page 276: Why do you think Heather chose to sing the song "Hallelujah" by Leonard Cohen?
- Page 279: Mr. Bartley cancels the debate portion of the assignment. Is this action sufficient from Mr. Bartley or should he do something more?
- Chapter 66 (Pages 284–292): Reflect on Lieutenant Peter Franklin's stories of being in a concentration camp as a prisoner of war (POW) and the atrocities he witnessed and lived through himself.
- Page 285 and 291: Mr. Bartley introduces Lieutenant Peter Franklin as a "hero." "The word 'hero' makes Peter flinch." After sharing his story, he addresses the word "hero," saying:

"Mr. Bartley called me a hero, but I don't see it that way. Survival doesn't make me a hero. Doing the right, moral, responsible thing doesn't make me a hero. It makes me a decent human being."

- O Define and differentiate between the concept of a "hero" versus "a decent human being." Who gets to be a hero? How is that earned? Who gets to decide? Is being called a "hero" beneficial to those who are called heroes? Could it be detrimental?
- Brainstorm individuals or groups of people who are referred to as heroes. Upon reflection, what makes them a hero, or would you recategorize them as "a decent human being?"
- Chapter 67 (Pages 293–298) Should Mr. Bartley have been fired?

AFTER READING:

The following questions may be used for discussions and journaling.

- Reflect on characters and their arcs (their growth, change in roles they served or beliefs they held).
 Which characters changed the most? The least? How have you changed?
 - Characters to consider: Cade, Logan, Mr. Bartley, Heather, Daniel, Reg, Mason
- One of the essential themes of *The Assignment* is speaking up and being an upstander. Revisit the list that students previously brainstormed and ask again: Why is it so hard to speak up in the face of injustice? Have any answers changed? Anything to add? Amend?
- We see friendships and relationships grow and change over the story. There are two references to girls who experienced sexual violence and manipulation. Kerrianne vulnerably recalls sending revealing photos to Reg, which he has been using as blackmail to control her (pages 218–219). Jesse violated Heather's boundaries more than once, groping her and touching her physically without her consent (Chapter 44). How do these secondary stories fit in overall with the main storyline of *The Assignment*? Why did the author include these details in the book? Do Reg and Jesse deserve forgiveness? What further conversations could students engage in on this topic?
- Lieutenant Peter Franklin (Chapter 66) was inspired by a real-life World War II US Navy Lieutenant named Jack Taylor. He survived Mauthausen concentration camp as a POW and gave his account once the camp was liberated. Watch his testimony here: youtu.be/fprly2bffEo
- Read "A Note from the Author" (page 307). Here, she reveals that she is Jewish and has experienced various forms of antisemitism and bias since she was a little girl. How does being Jewish and experiencing hate firsthand influence her storytelling? Is it important that a Jewish person told this story?
- In her research, the author came across the story of Gerda and Kurt Klein. Gerda was a Polish Jew, forced to work in labor camps. When they were liberated by the US Army, she met Kurt, one of the troops. Here is their love story, a testament to humanity, dignity, and seeing oneself in the experiences of others: youtu.be/35k-xrJyOL8
- What did The Assignment teach you about the Holocaust, injustice, upstanders, humanity, history? Which parts or characters resonated with you in a way that will stay with you?

BEYOND THE BOOK ACTIVITIES:

BEAR WITNESS— SURVIVOR STORIES: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has numerous resources to read, listen to, and watch the many stories of Holocaust survivors.

 Explore the collection as a class, then have students select an individual to learn about and
share with the class. Options for these collections can be found at "Survivor Reflections and
Testimonies": www.ushmm.org/remember/holocaust-reflections-testimonies

	testimonies/behind-every-name-a-story
\bigcirc	Oral History: www.ushmm.org/collections/the-museums-collections/about/oral-
	history
\bigcirc	Echoes of Memory: www.ushmm.org/remember/holocaust-reflections-
	testimonies/writing-workshop
\bigcirc	Evewitness to History—Holocaust Survivor Testimonies:

Behind Every Name a Story: www.ushmm.org/remember/holocaust-reflections-

- Eyewitness to History—Holocaust Survivor Testimonies:
 www.ushmm.org/remember/holocaust-reflections-testimonies/eyewitness-to-history
- O Identification Card Summaries: encyclopedia.ushmm.org/landing/en/id-cards
- Attend a "First Person: Conversations with Holocaust Survivors" program live and or watch archived recordings: www.ushmm.org/information/visit-the-museum/programs-activities/first-person-program
- Watch One Survivor Remembers featuring Gerda Weissmann Klein:
 www.ushmm.org/remember/holocaust-reflections-testimonies/one-survivor-remembers
 ***Content/Trigger Warning: graphic Holocaust imagery, historical violence, trauma, death

<u>DESIGN YOUR SIGN:</u> Community members showed up to support Cade and his family when they became the target of a hate crime. They held up signs that read "HUMANKIND WELCOME HERE!" If you were to design a HUMANKIND sign, what would it look like? Think about colors, imagery, letters, art medium, etc. Design your own signs and display them around the classroom and school.

CREATIVE WRITING: Choose one of the following creative writing prompts and craft a piece.

- Write an epilogue following one of the characters from the story. For example, Cade explores his Jewish heritage, Logan participates in activism on her college campus, Mr. Bartley takes a new career path.
- Write a poem entitled "HUMANKIND" inspired by the book and your own beliefs and experiences.
- Write a letter to an authority figure (principal, mayor, alderperson, governor, President, etc.) in which you speak up about an issue that matters to you. Subject could be hyperlocal, like healthier

lunch options at your school, or global, like climate change. Aim to be persuasive and factual.	

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH & LEARNING:

READ:

Holocaust-related books:

- The Children of Willesden Lane. Beyond the Kindertransport: A Memoir of Music, Love, and Survival by Mona Golabek and Lee Cohen
- Hidden: A Child's Story of the Holocaust by Loïc Dauvillier, Marc Lizano (Illustrations), Greg Salsedo (Ink), Alexis Siegel (Translator)
- All But My Life: A Memoir by Gerda Weissmann Klein
- Night by Elie Wiesel
- White Bird: A Wonder Story by R.J. Palacio
- We Must Not Forget: Holocaust Stories of Survival and Resistance by Deborah Hopkinson
- What the Night Sings by Vesper Stamper
- The Nazi Hunters: How a Team of Spies and Survivors Captured the World's Most Notorious Nazi by Neil Bascomb

Books that encourage others to speak up against bigotry, hatred, and injustice:

- This Is My America by Kim Johnson
- Dear Mr. Dickens by Nancy Churnin illustrated by Bethany Stancliffe
- Dear Martin by Nic Stone
- The House in the Cerulean Sea by TJ Klune

WATCH:

Films:

- Conspiracy (2001)
- The Experimenter (2015)
- Safe Haven: A Story of Hope (2000) www.pbs.org/video/wxxi-documentaries-safe-haven/

TED Talks:

- "How The Magic of Kindness Helped Me Survive The Holocaust" by Werner Reich (TEDxMidAtlantic)
- "The Secret Student Resistance to Hitler" by Iseult Gillespie (TED-Ed)
- "Behind The Lies of Holocaust Denial" by Deborah Lipstadt (TEDxSkoll)

WEBSITES & ORGANIZATIONS:

- Liza Wiemer, Author Website lizawiemer.com
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) ushmm.org
- American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) aclu.org
- Anti-Defamation League (ADL) adl.org
- Human Rights Campaign (HRC) <u>hrc.org</u>
- Restorative Justice and Community Circles, <u>restorativejustice.org</u>
- The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, civilrights.org

 Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) <u>splcenter.org</u> Yad Vashem, yadvashem.org Holocaust Education Resource Center (HERC) holocaustcentermilwaukee.org Historic Fort Ontario, historicfortontario.com Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum, safehavenmuseum.com Facing History, facinghistory.org "Antisemitism & Religious Intolerance" www.facinghistory.org/topics/antisemitismreligious-intolerance ○ "The Wannsee Conference" www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-humanbehavior/chapter-9/wannsee-conference "Upstander" www.facinghistory.org/upstander "Propaganda" www.facinghistory.org/topics/holocaust/propaganda PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Professional Learning for Educators www.ushmm.org/teach/opportunities-for-educators ADL Educational Programs & Training: www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-foreducators-parents-families/educational-programs-training Holocaust Education Resource Center (HERC) Teacher Professional Development: www.holocaustcentermilwaukee.org/education/professional-development/ Restorative Justice: Resources for Schools (Edutopia) www.edutopia.org/blog/restorativejustice-resources-matt-davis Ending Curriculum Violence (Learning For Justice) www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/spring-2020/ending-curriculum-violence This curriculum guide was created by educator Aliza Werner, with guidance from the author.