

The Parnas

A Scene from the Holocaust

by **SILVANO ARIETI**



Curriculum Guide by Marguerite McGlenn

THE PARNAS

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 A NOTE TO THE TEACHER

The curriculum guide for *The Parnas* offers choices on class activities and assignments. Many of the activities use a cooperative model in which students do something individually, then meet in a cooperative group to share and to integrate information, and finally either report to the whole class or engage in a whole group discussion. The cooperative model allows students to check their own understanding and to increase their ability to think critically since they have many opportunities to engage in discussion and to produce a product relevant to their reading and discussion. Furthermore, in studying a work like *The Parnas* that presents a microcosm of the Holocaust, students need to express their reactions and to receive guidance in interpreting the narrative. Some of that guidance should relate to the obligations of citizenship and the moral vision required to live in difficult times.

Because the unit has an historical and moral dimension, the teacher might want to invite parents to be involved. Perhaps the web sites and the results of the web quest could be shared with parents. If the unit includes research, parents might be resources for their children or might recommend someone who might be. Perhaps, a grandparent is a Holocaust survivor or a World War II veteran. If so, maybe he or she would like to be a guest speaker. Parents might have other connections to issues of justice and could share those experiences with their sons or daughters.

Both the English Standards published by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association in 1996 and the *Guide to Teaching the Holocaust* published by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum were influences in creating this curriculum guide.

Stephen Lehmann, Humanities Bibliographer at the University of Pennsylvania Libraries, checked the guide for historical accuracy. Sister Mary Dacey, S.S.J., President of Mount Saint Joseph Academy in Flourtown, Pennsylvania, and Dr. James Lee, Assistant Professor of Education at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, assessed the guide for usefulness and clarity. Kate Early, my longtime colleague and friend, read many drafts, contributed some of the special project concepts, and made the initial suggestion that a curriculum guide be prepared for *The Parnas*. I want to thank each of them for their contribution to this project.

OBJECTIVES FOR THE UNIT

- ❑ Students will actively engage with the text.
- ❑ Students will connect prior knowledge to new knowledge.
- ❑ Students will see the connection between the personal and the political, between the personal and the historical, and between the individual and the community.
- ❑ Students will engage in discussions with classmates and those in the larger community on the historical, psychological, and moral aspects of the Holocaust.
- ❑ Students will use writing and other forms of expression to explore questions and to present both critical and creative responses.
- ❑ Students will examine the use of language both to represent reality and to falsify reality (for example, propaganda).
- ❑ Students will extend their knowledge beyond the assigned text by posing questions and by doing research on the web and in print sources.
- ❑ Students will explore the creation of character in a text that blends fact and fiction.
- ❑ Students will utilize various methods to communicate their understanding of and their questions about the Holocaust to an audience beyond their classrooms.

SUMMARY *The Parnas*

The Parnas: A Scene from the Holocaust tells the story of Giuseppe Pardo Roques, the parnas or lay leader of the Jewish community in Pisa during World War II. The writer, Silvano Arieti, grew up in Pisa and found both spiritual and intellectual enrichment in the parnas's home. Arieti's graduation from medical school and the outbreak of World War II coincided. He left Italy for America and became a psychiatrist and a writer.

Giuseppe Pardo Roques remained in Pisa and continued his life as a scholar and a benefactor to the poor of Pisa, both Jewish and Christian. Arieti's story focuses on July 31 and August 1, 1944. Pardo's home has become a refuge for several Jewish families. Three Christian women work in the household and will not desert Pardo in spite of his urging them to leave. On August 1, the Nazis invade the house and kill everyone including two Christian neighbors who have come to take water from the well.

Silvano Arieti became a psychiatrist because of the parnas. He learned from him, admired him, and empathized with him because Pardo suffered from a phobia relating to animals. This fear was so extreme that it narrowed the focus of his life and subjected him to humiliating incidents in Pisa. Arieti struggled to reconcile the strength of Pardo with his disabling fear. As a writer, he is as reverent in examining Pardo's mental illness as he is in examining his spiritual enlightenment; moreover, he sees a connection, which elevates his notion of humanity.

Arieti constructs his narrative from his own knowledge of Giuseppe Pardo Roques and from interviews with those who witnessed the events narrated. He dramatizes the final scenes using the devices of reportage and narrative. As Arieti says in his introduction, "When the people in my story speak, I have put into their mouths the words I thought they would be likely to say."

Timeline WORLD WAR II IN EUROPE

January 1933	Hitler becomes chancellor of Germany.
March 1933	Dachau concentration camp is established.
September 1935	First Nuremberg Laws, which codified Nazi racial ideology, are passed.
March 1936	The German army occupies the Rhineland, a de-militarized zone in Germany established by the Treaty of Versailles.
October 1936	Hitler and Mussolini create the Rome-Berlin Axis.
March 1938	<i>Anschluss</i> : Germany annexes Austria.
September 1938	Munich Conference awards the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia to Germany and other Czechoslovakian territory to Russia.
November 9 and 10, 1938	<i>Kristallnacht</i> : Nazi stormtroopers and Hitler Youth burn synagogues, wreck Jewish homes and businesses, and murder Jewish men.
March 1939	Germany occupies the “free” area of Czechoslovakia.
August 1939	Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact is signed.
September 1, 1939	Germany invades Poland.
September 3, 1939	England and France declare war on Germany. World War II begins.
1939–1940	Russia invades Finland. Germany invades Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France.
1940	Russia claims territory in Romania. Russia occupies Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia.
June 22, 1940	France surrenders to Germany.
September 27, 1940	Germany, Italy, and Japan create the Axis alliance.
1940	Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Greece fall to the Axis Powers. Italy controls Albania. Britain, Northern Ireland, and Iceland remain in Allied control. Sweden, Ireland, Spain, Switzerland, and Turkey are neutral throughout war.

June 22, 1941	Germany invades Russia.
July 10, 1941	Battle of Britain begins.
December 7, 1941	Japan attacks Pearl Harbor.
December 8, 1941	America enters the war.
January 20, 1942	Wannsee Conference: The Third Reich plans the “Final Solution.”
1942	Auschwitz-Birkenau first operates as an extermination camp.
January 31, 1943	German forces surrender at Stalingrad.
	Allies invade Sicily and Italy.
March 1944	Germany occupies Hungary.
June 6, 1944	D-Day: Allies land at Normandy, France.
September 8, 1944	Italy surrenders to Allies. Fighting continues with Germans in Italy.
December 1944	Bergen-Belsen, formerly a prisoner-of-war camp, is designated a concentration camp. As Allies advance on German territory, Germany evacuates prisoners from camps close to the front and moves them to Bergen-Belsen.
December 16, 1944 to January 16, 1945	Battle of the Bulge: Allies achieve access to Germany.
April 15, 1945	British forces liberate Bergen-Belsen camp.
May 7, 1945	Germany surrenders.
May 8, 1945	V-E Day marks the end of World War II in Europe.

 **TEACHER NOTE** **Introducing *The Parnas***

The Parnas tells a story of death, but not tragedy, because the evil of the Nazis is contrasted to the spirituality and humility of Giuseppe Pardo Roques, the parnas. The pre-reading activities focus on the twin aspects of the book: the death at Nazi hands of all the people in Pardo's home and his psychological affliction.

The teacher might want to adapt the pre-reading journal prompts to suit the school community. If a recent community or national event touches on the issues which the book raises, perhaps that is a good place to begin. If students have read other works that deal with the Holocaust or with a character with a disabling trait, the teacher might want to include references to those other classroom experiences in the journal prompts.

Keeping a record of student responses will provide a frame for the unit. Students will begin with their personal and school experience as it relates to the subjects of the book. They will move on to the knowledge conveyed through *The Parnas*. After reading and discussing the book, they can assess what they have learned. If it suits the teacher's timeline, students can generate questions based on the study of this book and continue to research the history and the issues which *The Parnas* has introduced.

 **STUDENT ACTIVITY** *Introducing **The Parnas***

Students keep a journal during their reading and discussion of *The Parnas*. Before reading the book, they respond to several of the following prompts:

- ❑ What does the term “hate crime” mean?
- ❑ The Holocaust occurred in Europe during World War II. What do you know about the Holocaust?
- ❑ What are your sources of information about the Holocaust—courses, films, books, family conversations, visit to a Holocaust museum?
- ❑ The author of *The Parnas*, Silvano Arieti, was a psychiatrist. Have you read other books by scientists? If so, list the titles and note your reactions to the books. If you have not read a book by a scientist, what expectations do you have about a scientist’s approach to writing?
- ❑ What is the difference between a fear and a phobia? List some examples of each.
- ❑ How is mental illness perceived in America?
- ❑ Write about someone, not a family member, who helped you be a better person.

After writing in their journals, students meet in cooperative groups to share their journal writing. One student records the group’s thoughts and posts key points on newsprint, a PowerPoint presentation, or the chalkboard. An advantage of newsprint or computer-notation is that the information can be accessed later when students have finished reading the book. After students see the posted information, there can be a time for discussion and questioning.

If the class does not use journals, students can discuss the prompts in cooperative groups or as a whole class. A student still records key points for use later in the unit.

 **TEACHER NOTE** **What Is Evil?**

Both the story and the narrative approach of *The Parnas* invite deliberation about important issues. The following activity (adapted from Jim Burke. *The English Teacher's Companion*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1999) sets the stage for the kind of thinking which the book invites.

► HANDOUT 1 *The Parnas*

Name _____

Date _____

What Is Evil?

► Directions: In your cooperative group discuss the following actions. Which ones are evil? The whole group must agree on the decision. At some point in the discussion, you will have to define evil. It might be possible to arrive at a definition before you consider the acts, or you might discuss some of the acts and then have a clearer idea of the definition. At the end of this activity, your group will present a report to the class which includes a definition of evil and an explanation of why the activities that you have so designated fit that definition.

1. An airplane manufacturer continues manufacturing a certain model of a plane even though an engineer has alerted the company about a potential malfunction.
2. The engineer accepts the company's decision to continue manufacturing the plane.
3. A soldier follows the lieutenant's orders and opens fire on a village in which the women and children are suspected of helping the enemy.
4. A lieutenant orders the soldiers in the command to open fire on a village in which the women and children are suspected of helping the enemy.
5. A major league pitcher in a World Series game throws a wild pitch at the other team's best hitter in order to take him out of the game.
6. A professional boxer hits his opponent, killing him.
7. A team of scientists design an atomic bomb that can kill thousands. It is later used against the people of Hiroshima.
8. A person with AIDS has sex with many partners.
9. A nurse prepares the intravenous line for a prisoner who will be executed by lethal injection.
10. During World War II, a non-Jewish neighbor of a Jewish family will not provide shelter for them because he fears reprisal from the Nazis.

 **TEACHER NOTE** **Starting the Book**

Because *The Parnas* presents a philosophy of life through the narrative of Giuseppe Pardo's final days, it would help students to read the foreword by Rabbi Harold S. Kushner and the introduction by the author together in class.

Rabbi Kushner's foreword provides an overview of the story and of the two insights which the story offers. In the first paragraph Kushner notes, "Only when the uniqueness of one of the victims can be captured does the Holocaust take on a human, rather than a statistical, character." At the end of his essay, he makes the connection between the rational and irrational, between the sane and the mentally ill. "As a psychiatrist, he [Silvano Arieti] has used the confrontation of Giuseppe Pardo and the Nazis to tell us something about the human soul, how allegedly rational people can be cruel and unfeeling, and how 'mentally ill' people can be immensely compassionate and even heroic, not despite but as a dimension of their neuroses."

Arieti's introduction details the research methods involved in writing the story and his belief that "mental illness may hide and express the spirituality of man."

The foreword and the introduction should be re-visited after students have finished reading the book. At this point, however, the teacher only wants to help the students connect with the materials of the book and the author's approach.



STUDENT ACTIVITY **Starting the Book**

Students read the foreword and the introduction aloud or silently. They meet in cooperative groups and discuss what they have read. They make a record of what they understood from the reading and of what questions they have. As cooperative groups report to the class, questions and areas of understanding could be listed on the board or on newsprint and provide guidance for a brief discussion at that time. If the questions and statements remain posted in the classroom, they can be referred to as students continue with the book.

 **TEACHER NOTE** **Reading Journal**

Students keep reading journals during the reading and discussion of *The Parnas*. The teacher can direct the students to use their existing journals, to adapt a section of their notebooks, or to create a journal for this unit. The following handout explains the process to the students. The final section of the handout titled “Notes on the Reading Journal” provides a space for the students to write down the teachers’ directions for the length of the entries, the standard for assessment, due dates, etc.

➤ **HANDOUT 2** *The Parnas*

Name _____

Date _____

Reading Journal for *The Parnas*

➤ **Directions:** During the reading of *The Parnas*, you will keep a reading journal. You should vary the approach taken in each entry. Either use suggestions from the list below or take a different approach after receiving approval from your teacher.

Keep a running list of questions that occur to you as you are reading.

Keep a list of characters and note important details about each. Focus on one character and explore his or her role in the story. How does the character connect to the two “insights” which Kushner notes in his essay?

Write your response to a chapter with your classmates in mind. What do you want to tell them about this chapter? What issues or questions would you like to discuss with them?

Imagine that you are one of the characters staying in Giuseppe Pardo’s house. Write about your experience.

Write to one of the characters whose insights moved or troubled you.

Have a reading partner with whom you share your journal. You could arrange to do the sharing via email or at some time during the school day—homeroom, lunch, etc. Write to him/her about your impressions and questions. You can incorporate any of the approaches on this handout.

Write a poem or vignette in response to a scene from the story or to the insights which the story offers.

Consider the quotes from scripture which various characters use. What dimension do they bring to the story?

Consider the quotes from scripture which various characters use. Focus on the words. Look them up in a good dictionary. Note the etymology of the words. What more do you understand from this close reading?

Imagine you are Silvano Arieti. Write a letter to one of the townspeople or to a relative of a character in the story. You could ask for information, explain your purpose in writing the book, or share the experiences you had in researching the story.

Write about one of the conflicts in the story. How does this conflict appear to a character? How does he or she resolve it? How do you see the conflict?

List ten details from the chapter and speculate on them. Why are they meaningful?


In *The Parnas*, Silvano Arieti weaves historical data into scenes which are produced by his imagination. Look at a section of the story from this point of view. What parts came from research or personal knowledge? What parts were created by the author's imagination?


- **Notes on the Reading Journal:** List the class guidelines for the journal entries.


 **TEACHER NOTE** “A Special Community”


The Parnas fits into many areas of school curriculum: history, English, science, theology, Holocaust studies, etc. Another important name, Leonardo Fibonacci, who brought the concept of zero into Western thought, is mentioned in a later chapter. The approach which the teacher takes regarding the chapter “A Special Community” would depend on curriculum needs. A few suggestions follow.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES “A Special Community”

 **Student Activity 1** Make a list of the terms and names in the chapter titled “A Special Community” which the students do not know or use Handout 3. This can be a whole class activity. Then divide the list among cooperative groups and conduct an Internet search to find more information on the subject or person. Students share the information in an informal roundtable session. The following handout can be provided, and students can fill in information as it is presented.

 **Student Activity 2** A variation of this activity uses knowledge which students already have. Students might know the history of World War II. If so, they could put the information about World War II from this chapter into a context by creating a timeline. This activity can be extended throughout the reading of the book as details about the war occur in other chapters, particularly in the chapter which follows.

 **Student Activity 3** Another variation involves dividing the list of names and terms into categories: Information Students Know, Information Students Have Some Knowledge Of, and Information Students Do Not Know. The Internet search then would be focused on categories two and three.

 **Student Activity 4** In a Holocaust studies course, students research Emperor Titus and the destruction of the Temple, the Spanish Inquisition, the Jewish Diaspora, the Golden Age, Sephardic Jews. One topic is assigned to each cooperative group and students are directed to find the important details relating to their topic and to be able to connect the details to Arieti’s portrait of the Pisan community.

► HANDOUT 3 *The Parnas*

Name _____

Date _____

“A Special Community”

Pisa

Talmud

Martin Buber

Existentialism

Freud

Galileo

Immanuel Kant

Spanish Inquisition

Sephardic Jews

Risorgimento

Garibaldi

Fascists

Mussolini

Anschluss


Ethiopian War


Vito Volterra


 **TEACHER NOTE** “Afternoon and Early Evening of July 31”

In the introduction to *Who Loves You Like This* by Edith Bruck (Paul Dry Books, 2001), Nelo Risi quotes Adolf Eichmann: “One hundred dead are a catastrophe. Five million dead are a statistic.” [In reality six million Jews died in the Holocaust in addition to millions of people of other ethnic backgrounds.] Any study of a Holocaust-related story has to prove Eichmann wrong by redeeming the people and their stories from the statistics. As Kushner says in his introduction to *The Parnas*, focusing on the uniqueness of the victims gives a “human, rather than a statistical, character” to the numbers. The numbers, though, are presented here in the chapter, “Afternoon and Early Evening of July 31,” and they deserve some attention. One of the following activities might help students see that the huge numbers are made up of individual people. When students bring in the results of their research or after the numbers are compiled in class, the teacher can direct students to pages 26 and 27 of *The Parnas* to consider the numbers related there. The teacher can add the information about the six million killed in the Holocaust. Hopefully, the students will make the connection between their statistics and those relating to the Italian Jews and to all the Holocaust victims.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES “Afternoon and Early Evening of July 31”

 **Student Activity 1** For homework students brainstorm with members of their households to determine how many people they know as (1) family, (2) friends, and (3) business or school associates. The teacher can suggest that students think about an opportunity to have a big family and friends party—cost is not an issue. How many people would they invite?

 **Student Activity 2** The teacher borrows an almanac from the school library or finds a demographic site on the Internet. The class researches the population of various locales: a hometown, a suburb, a small city, etc. If the teacher does not want to use class time for the research, each student could discover the population of his/her suburb, town, etc. This concept, of course, does not work as well in big cities unless there is a listing of population by neighborhoods.

 **Student Activity 3** For homework each student researches one question relating to cause of death. For instance, how many American soldiers died in World War II? How many people died of heart disease in 1999 in America?

 **TEACHER NOTE** “Afternoon and Early Evening of July 31”

On page 30 Arieti explains that the Allies waited on the south bank of the Arno River rather than invade the part of Pisa held by the Nazis because they did not want the city destroyed. He mentions Italian and English poets who wrote about Pisa including Byron, Shelley, and Browning. His allusion to the “controversial poet of our own day” refers to Ezra Pound, the American poet who supported Mussolini. The chapter also talks about Leonardo Fibonacci, who introduced the concept of zero to Europe, and Galileo, “the greatest of all Pisans,” who dropped a feather and a stone from the Leaning Tower of Pisa. If *The Parnas* is part of an interdisciplinary curriculum, the teacher can explore these references, either by building on knowledge the students have or providing the opportunity for students to learn more than is included in the book.

Some of the other concepts from this chapter are explored in the following handout, which could be the basis for a roundtable discussion or for cooperative learning groups. The quotes could also be cut up and divided among the students. Each student would then look up one quote and prepare an explanation of the quote’s place in the story and its importance.

► HANDOUT 4 *The Parnas*

Name _____

Date _____

“Afternoon and Early Evening of July 31”

Quote from Mussolini: [he] “needed a few thousand dead so that he could sit at the peace table.” (24)

The Germans captured and deported 7,495 Italian Jews. (26)

Many people refused to believe that such atrocities were possible among humans and thought that the rumors they heard about the tortures and massacres were Allied propaganda. (29)

Its architectural harmony [reference to the Leaning Tower of Pisa] combines with its imperfection to create an unpremeditated miracle. (33)

Quote from Ernesto Levi: “Because of the Shekhinah that rests in you! The Shekhinah!” (40)

Quote from Pardo: “I live, trembling, with a totally irrational fear of animals, especially of dogs. I also have a fear of the fear itself. This is what prevents me from facing the real danger.” (41)

“It was not an ideal time,” replied Pardo, “but think again of the little child. Everybody loved him, everybody wanted all of him, body and soul; everybody was willing to accept him, everybody was eager to save him . . .” (47)

Pardo continued. “Whether we shall be the last to suffer or the first to enjoy freedom, we cannot know now; but one thing we know: The days of Fascism are numbered.” (48)

What hiding place could they find? The night, the war, the Fascists, the Nazis, the police, the collaborators with the oppressors, the hostility of the world—too much to contend with. (51)

 **TEACHER NOTE** “Angelo’s Questions”

The question-and-answer rhythm of this chapter opens up many classroom possibilities. In a humanities or theology class, students can write the series of questions they might ask or have asked during a crisis. In a literature class students can consider other works they have studied that deal with serious conflict. What questions did the characters in those stories ask—either directly or implicitly? In a history class students can consider the biographies of people they have studied or read on their own. They can include historical fiction in their consideration. What questions were important to the people in the biographies or stories?

The handout on “Angelo’s Questions” provides a different approach to the chapter. The teacher can use the handout as the basis for a discussion. Another possibility—for homework students can take ownership of one question and either be ready to explain the circumstances of the question to the class or be ready to explain how Giuseppe Pardo answered the question and what the answer reveals about his character.

► HANDOUT 5 *The Parnas*

Name _____

Date _____

“Angelo’s Questions”

But can *I* accept the situation? [reference to his wife’s arrest by Nazis] (54)

Why do many of us Jews let ourselves be captured, one by one, without any resistance? (55)

Is any cause worthwhile? (55)

Giuseppe, why this wide conspiracy against us, a tiny, inconspicuous segment of humanity? (56)

Giuseppe, can you get at my personal sorrow? (57)

The king opened up a series of events, a chain of crimes, leading to the capturing of my Bice, my poor Bice. [implied question about the value of his father’s belief in the king] (58)

Giuseppe, how can it be that Pius XII has remained silent about the persecution of the Jews? (60)

Did any other pope in the past dare to defend the Jews in similar circumstances? (60)

. . . what about the silence of God? (61)

Where is the direct voice of goodness? Where is the direct voice of God? (62)

Wouldn’t a cloud of darkness always surround the earth, even if only as a memory of what happened in our time? (63)

How will new generations react to this knowledge? (64)

 **TEACHER NOTE “Pardo and Ernesto”**

In this chapter Pardo discusses his phobia with his friend in an attempt to understand his life. The “Fishbowl” activity outlined below allows students to focus on a few of the philosophical statements in the chapter. (The Fishbowl adapted from Lynda Balouche, Marilyn Lee Mauger, Therese M. Willis, Joseph R. Filinuk, and Barbara V. Michalsky. “Fishbowls, Creative Controversy, Talking Chips: Exploring Literature Cooperatively.” *English Journal*. October, 1993: 43–48.) The teacher should also discuss Pardo’s interpretation of his phobia, a concept pivotal to the climax of the book.

STUDENT ACTIVITY “Pardo and Ernesto”

The Fishbowl

The teacher divides the class in half. One group of students receives one of the quotes listed below, and the second group of students receives another. Only two quotes are used. The students have thought about the quote and responded to it in their journals before returning to class.

One group of students with the same quote sits in an inner circle. The second group sits in an outer circle. The inner circle (those in the Fishbowl) discuss the quote. Each student must participate and support what she/he says with evidence from *The Parnas* and another relevant source (including life experience, other literature, history, etc.). A subsequent speaker either agrees or disagrees and adds evidence for either point of view. The teacher might ask every speaker after the first to summarize what the previous speaker said.

Each student in the outer circle is assigned one of the “fish” in the discussion group. The outer circle student notes her/his fish’s participation by taking notes on what is said, what supporting evidence is offered, methods by which the participation of others is encouraged, etc. The teacher can add to this list any type of behavior that he/she is trying to encourage.

Students then shift places.

After the second round, students share their observations with their “fishes” and then turn notes into teacher. The teacher asks students to reflect on the manner and content of the discussion.

Quotes for the Fishbowl

The world is not friendly. *We have to make it friendly*; [italics in text] it is up to us. (74)

At the price of becoming ill, you tried to save the image of man. (76)

The triumph of evil is temporary. (78)

The lack of freedom caused by an illness stems from the limitations of the human state and is to be overcome eventually by science. The lack of freedom imposed by others comes from the free will of man and indicates man’s limitless capacity to choose evil. (78)

To the extent that my will is unfree, I am unknown to myself and others. (78)

But a tragedy is not tragic, or only apparently so, if through the course of the sad events, it leads to a rise of the spirit. (78)



TEACHER NOTE “The Guests . . . During the Night of July 31”
“Pardo in the Night of July 31”
“Angelo in the Pinewood”

These chapters contain important concepts and character development, which build on earlier chapters. If the teacher wants students to investigate the philosophical concepts, she/he could use the quotation approach and either schedule a roundtable discussion or a cooperative learning activity. Another suggestion is the Socratic Seminar, which is explained in *Teaching in the Block* (Robert Lynn Canady and Michael D. Rettig. *Teaching in the Block*. Princeton: Eye on Education, 1996). In the chapter “Pardo in the Night of July 31,” Pardo confronts his fear and experiences a liberation. “He was not a helpless spectator of cosmic events. He had decided; he had chosen. The greatness of his ability to choose seemed to him attuned to the greatness of the universe” (91). Students need a discussion opportunity to explore the meaning of that liberation.

Pardo and Angelo discuss the concept of the “remnant.” Angelo later alludes to it when he thinks, “But then why should a Jew let hope grow like roses in a garden?” The remnant motif builds in importance and is the subject of a student activity later in the book.

The following handout focuses on the concept of weakness and strength that is a reoccurring motif in the book. Because the second half asks students for examples, the teacher might want to caution students not to use examples that would embarrass other students or family members.

► HANDOUT 6 *The Parnas*

Name _____

Date _____

Weakness and Strength: The Leaning Tower of Pisa

► Directions: Silvano Arieti sees the Leaning Tower of Pisa as a symbol of an imperfection combining with a strength to create the unique. He calls the tower “an unpremeditated miracle.” He sees similar combinations in the lives of people, and, indeed, it is the fundamental thesis of his book. In the first part of this handout explain how Arieti applies this concept to the following people. In the second part of the handout, apply Arieti’s concept to three people you know through history, literature, or personal experience.

Beethoven

Moses

Angelo

Pietro

Parnas

Your examples:

1.

2.

3.

**TEACHER NOTE****“Dawn of August 1”****“Early Morning of August 1”****“The Confrontation”**

These chapters focus on the concepts of the remnant and metamorphosis. The following activities allow students an opportunity to explore their importance in *The Parnas*.



STUDENT ACTIVITIES

“Dawn of August 1”**“Early Morning of August 1”****“The Confrontation”**

The Remnant: In the chapter “Angelo’s Questions” Pardo says to Angelo, “Isaiah once compared Israel to an olive tree beaten by a storm. Many olives fall and perish, but some remain on the uppermost bough or on the branches. Those few that do not yield to the wind remain on the tree and eventually become new olive trees.” Pardo was explaining the Hebrew idea of the remnant, the small group saved from catastrophe who become the source of new life. Trace the use of this idea in *The Parnas*. Find at least three other places where this concept occurs.

Metamorphosis I: The teacher directs students to fill in the following handout on metamorphosis, to share the responses in cooperative groups, and then to report to the class. The teacher might direct students to fill in the handout as a homework assignment if students have a good grasp of the issues in the book. On the other hand, if the teacher anticipates that students might have trouble with this concept, students could work in cooperative groups to fill in the handout.

► HANDOUT 7 *The Parnas*

Name _____

Date _____

Metamorphosis

1. In a good dictionary look up the word *metamorphosis*. Include the definition and the etymology of the word.
2. Explain the metamorphosis that takes place in *The Parnas*.
3. List examples and details from other stories that you know that use the idea of metamorphosis.
4. Speculate on the concept. Why would a psychiatrist, a scientist, use a mythological approach in explaining the mystery and tragedy of *The Parnas*? Why does this idea have a powerful hold on the human imagination?



STUDENT ACTIVITIES **Metamorphosis**

Metamorphosis II Read a selection from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or from another source that has stories of metamorphosis. Prepare a report on the story for your class. Make a connection between the metamorphosis in the story you chose and Arieti's use of the concept in *The Parnas*.

Metamorphosis III Write a story of metamorphosis in which the action corresponds to an ethical or spiritual problem.



TEACHER NOTE **“In Sant’ Andrea Street”**
“Conclusion”
“Epilogue”

The teacher’s use of the final chapters depends on the curriculum needs of the course. If *The Parnas* is used in an interdisciplinary unit or in a science/math curriculum, the teacher can focus on Arieti’s application of psychoanalytical knowledge to the events of the story. In a social studies curriculum the details of the end of World War II in Europe can be emphasized. The teacher could direct students to find more details about the final months of the war. In any curriculum one of the following activities would be relevant.



STUDENT ACTIVITIES

**“In Sant’ Andrea Street”
“Conclusion”
“Epilogue”**

Student Activity 1 Re-read the foreword and the introduction to *The Parnas*. Review your journal entries on *The Parnas* as well as the statements and questions generated by the class at the beginning of the unit. Then write a letter to Silvano Arieti expressing an appreciation for his book and listing the questions which reading *The Parnas* creates.

Student Activity 2 Re-read the foreword and the introduction to *The Parnas*. Review your journal entries on *The Parnas* as well as the statements and questions generated by the class at the beginning of the unit. Choose several quotes (at least three) from the foreword and the introduction. Connect these quotes to incidents in the book.

Student Activity 3 Re-read the foreword and the introduction to *The Parnas*. Review your journal entries on *The Parnas* as well as the statements and questions generated by the class at the beginning of the unit. Choose three statements and/or questions which either you or a classmate stated at the beginning of the unit. Write a response to them.

 **TEACHER NOTE** **Web Quest**

After reading *The Parnas*, students will have many questions about the Holocaust, World War II, and Italy. A class activity could be framed around helping students list questions they have and guiding them to limit their focus to one important question. Depending on the time allotted, students could pose questions that will lead to a major investigation or pose questions that will allow data to be compiled for a class discussion. There are many possibilities in between these two approaches, and the web quest might be a first step in a research project that will expand to include periodicals, books, films, and interviews.

The web quest provides a good opportunity to review computer etiquette and the guidelines for research that have been established in your school. In addition, the teacher can help students in choosing their own sources by stressing that the ones provided on the handout are maintained by reputable organizations and updated regularly.

➤ **HANDOUT 8** *The Parnas*

Name _____

Date _____

Web Quest

The Parnas presents events at Giuseppe Pardo Roque's house at the end of World War II. The web quest is an opportunity to learn more about the historical events surrounding the book. Start with a question to guide your quest.

Question _____

Resources: The following web sites should provide the information needed to answer your question. Follow the correct protocol for taking notes and/or printing data, and for documenting information that you glean from these web sites.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<http://www.ushmm.org>

The Holocaust Memorial Center

<http://www.holocaustcenter.org>

Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the University of Minnesota

<http://www.chgs.umn.edu>

The History Place

<http://www.historyplace.com>

Holocaust World Resource Center

<http://www.hwrc.org>

Holocaust History Project

<http://www.holocaust-history.org>

Use the checklist below to be sure that you have accomplished the goals of your web quest.

_____ Consulted a minimum of two sites.

_____ Retrieved relevant data.

_____ Analyzed data to make appropriate connections to my question.

_____ Documented data and sources.

 **TEACHER NOTE** **The Student and History**

Students write about a political event that affected them personally. They will write in first person and include many specific details of the event. The writing assignment will involve research whose aim is to find information to enrich the students' writing rather than to amass a collection of data and sources. For example, if a student worked for a political candidate, he/she includes data about that candidate's position and her/his success in the campaign. If a student's family member served in a war, the student includes information about the war.

The Parnas actually fits the model of the "I Search" paper which Ken Macrorie recommends for student research. Arieti wants to understand his childhood teacher and the evil of the Holocaust. He interviews people, researches in published materials, and integrates what he learns with his own experience.

 **TEACHER NOTE** **The Museum Exhibit**

Students create museum exhibits that connect to their study of *The Parnas*. Each student or cooperative group creates both a visual and a written text that illuminate some aspect of the experience of the book. Masks are an intriguing idea in the context of Pardo's story since he could not create a mask for himself. His fear and his goodness were transparent to his community. A caution applies here to the students' approach to this assignment. Any activity or object that trivializes the subject should be avoided. Class time would be needed for students to brainstorm on the possibilities and to establish a mission statement about appropriate content. The museum exhibit could be open for visits by other members of the school community or be shared with a wider audience through a web site. The mission statement should be publicized with the exhibit.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment involves checking the students' understanding and progress so that the teacher can guide the students as individuals in reaching the objectives of the unit. Assessment should also focus on the curriculum itself. The teacher can then evaluate what activities help students and what areas require more instruction.

The teacher needs to keep students on task, and assessment helps the teacher to do so. Finally, the teacher needs an objective evaluation of students' progress so that grades can be published that reflect both student learning and involvement. Ideally, the assessment tools match the objectives for the unit.

Daily Assessment

To translate the activities in this unit into a grade, consider the following:

Cooperative learning activities can be evaluated. A student in each group can turn in a check list to the teacher on the goals for the activity, the group's approach to the goals, and their success in reaching them. A standard checklist can be used or a student could be chosen to write up the results for each group. This need not take long for either the students or the teacher. The teacher can have a point value assigned to the activity and return the checklist to students with a notation—8/10, for instance. This method allows the teacher to consider both students' behaviors and the work they produced. Students can get used to this method very quickly, and the almost-instant feedback reinforces the class standards.

The reading journals can be assessed on a daily basis. The teacher can randomly ask students to read from their journals. The teacher can use a "reading journal quiz" which asks students to reproduce a part of the journal written for that lesson. A cooperative activity could be designed around the journal writing done for homework. This also allows the teacher the opportunity to "eyeball" the students' work as she/he visits the cooperative groups.

Included in the student activities are handouts and activities that can be used for homework assignments.

If sections of the book are assigned for reading, a quick "reading quiz" can be used. Write down three facts in the chapter, "A Special Community." Write down the major understanding you gleaned from reading the chapter, "A Special Community." Write down a discussion question that relates to the chapter, "A Special Community." Write down three questions that the teacher can use to make sure everyone read the chapter, "A Special Community." (The teacher can then, of course, use the questions.) The reading quiz prevents one class from getting a benefit from another class telling that there is a "pop" quiz. If students own their copies of the book, and the teacher has encouraged students to mark their texts as they read, their notations could be the basis of a quiz.

Unit Assessment

The museum exhibit can be evaluated as both a writing assignment and as a visual presentation. The class can create a rubric together. Some elements to consider: truth to theme and tone of story, complexity of design and intent, orientation to audience, connection to the mission statement.

The web quest can be an element of a research project that includes interviews and text-based information. Such a project would have many components, and aspects of the project would be evaluated separately. The “I Search” format devised by Ken Macrorie lends itself to such a project and allows students to use both narrative and expository skills.

A service project suits a unit on the Holocaust. The teacher can set parameters for the project. For instance, students will work in groups. The project should involve outreach beyond the school. The project should be connected to a concept or question that relates to *The Parnas*. The project should benefit someone—not just be an informational project. Students will report on the project or create a web site about the project. The students can brainstorm on the possibilities. Projects that connect to tolerance, mental illness, the handicapped are only a few possibilities. The teacher would need to provide a checklist/rubric on the elements of the project, which could be designed with the help of the students.

The unit test connects to the methods and philosophy used during the unit. Ideally students would use their copy of *The Parnas* and their notes in answering the questions.

► HANDOUT 9 *The Parnas*

Name _____

Date _____

Unit Test**Choose one of the following prompts:**

1. “He [Giuseppe Pardo Roques] had reached the point at which the mysteries of life required a metaphysical rather than a psychological explanation.” Explain the meaning of this quote from *The Parnas* and support your explanation by reference to incidents in the book.
2. “The lack of freedom caused by an illness stems from the limitations of the human state and is to be overcome eventually by science. The lack of freedom imposed by others comes from the free will of man and indicates man’s limitless capacity to choose evil.” Giuseppe Pardo Roques says this to his house guest Ernesto when he discussed his phobia with him. Explore the meaning of Pardo’s assessment and support your answer by reference to incidents in the book.
3. Pardo tells his guest the story of a Jewish child who was baptized by a Christian medicine woman. Briefly recount the story. What is Pardo’s aim in telling the story. How does the attitude displayed through this story connect to other incidents or revelations in the book?

AN INTERVIEW WITH EVA BRANN "On Teaching the Holocaust"

Eva Brann is a member of the senior faculty at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, where she has taught for more than forty years. Dr. Brann holds an M.A. in Classics and a Ph.D. in Archeology from Yale University. Her most recent book, *Homeric Moments: Clues to Delight in Reading the Odyssey and the Iliad* was published by Paul Dry Books. Other books include *The Ways of Naysaying: What, Then, Is Time?*; *The World of the Imagination*; and *The Past-Present*, a volume of her selected essays. As someone who has spent her life with students and with the great books, she offers her thoughts on teaching the Holocaust and on the value of reading *The Parnas*.

What is the place of the Holocaust in school curriculum?

I'm not at all sure that the Holocaust should be a school study, especially for young students. But if it's going to be, *The Parnas* is the perfect book for the purpose because it is a story of individuals rather than masses, of a graspable situation rather than of an event beyond all understanding (which children should not be burdened with), and with a hopeful rather than a desperate message.

What does the blend of fact and fiction in The Parnas contribute to students' understanding?

In considering the Holocaust seriously with students, it seems to me of the essence to engage in some reflection on the way these events are spoken of. *The Parnas* is not fiction; the people and their names are factual as is the event of the death of the Parnas, and the Jews and Christians he harbored in his house, at the hands of the looting German Army. Yet there are certain fictionalized elements and imaginative reconstructions of thoughts and conversations. The book stands, therefore, between reports of brute fact and Holocaust fiction. It provides the best imaginable opportunity for students to think about the possible ways of memorializing what as fiction may lose the effect of real fact, and as real fact will be beyond imagining.

What does a study of Italian Jews bring to our understanding of the Holocaust?

In treatments of the destruction of European Jews, they are too often regarded as the Nazis regarded them—as a racially distinguishable group. In *The Parnas* the Jews are an indefeasibly *religious* people, and the Holocaust is seen in a theological light by the men and women of the Pisan congregation, who thus cease to be new victims. The book is consequently remarkably, broadly humane, meaning that the real Christians, the ones who act as Christians, are not only fully appreciated, but are accorded the honor (or, rather, are shown as having chosen the honor) of a common fate.

Also, the Italian Jews were the best integrated, best established, most ancient of the European Congregations, not assimilated religiously but fully at home in Italy. *The Parnas* shows the Nazi persecution in its full outrageousness because not even the Nazi's own argument of the "foreign body" applied here. From that point of view the destruction of these small north-Italian congregations has a special pathos.

*Do you think a reader who has never suffered from a phobia might find *The Parnas* interesting and helpful?*

The story is told by a well-known psychiatrist of the psychoanalytic school. The Parnas is mentally ill; he has an insuperable phobia that haunts and constricts his life. It is the author's sense that this illness has a close relation to the disease of Nazism, and a psychoanalytic explanation of the Parnas' phobia in terms of the evil of the world is in fact provided. But this explanation also turns the illness into a kind of unconscious wisdom. Arieti writes in the same spirit as Oliver Sachs; both regard mental illness, debilitating though it may be, as revelatory of the human condition.

The Parnas is cured in the last days of his life, and gains full insight into his condition at the hour of his death. The remarkable point here is that it is a self-cure, spiritually achieved.

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EXPANDING A STUDY OF THE HOLOCAUST

Who Loves You Like This by Edith Bruck (Paul Dry Books, 2001) can be combined with a study of *The Parnas*. A complete curriculum guide is available for *Who Loves You Like This*, and the following questions and answers relate to materials available in both books.

Combining the two books allows students to see historical events from the perspective of an interested observer (*The Parnas*) and from the perspective of one directly involved (*Who Loves You Like This*). In 1944 the Nazis arrived at Edith Bruck's Hungarian village and deported her family to Auschwitz. Only twelve, Edith eventually was forced to move to Dachau and finally to Bergen-Belsen. Liberated by the Allied forces at age thirteen, she faced life as a refugee with little education and no parents. She wandered through Europe seeking refuge with various family members, was pressured to marry so that the family could emigrate to Israel, and finally left Israel for Rome where, in another foreign land and in a foreign tongue, she found the strength to tell her story.

In a curriculum that includes *Who Loves You Like This* and *The Parnas: A Scene from the Holocaust*, the teacher will start with questions. The following overview anticipates some of those questions and offers ways of thinking about the answers. The teacher knows the school and the students, and she/he will bring that indispensable knowledge to the curriculum.

Questions and Answers

Q. Which book should I do first?

A. *Who Loves You Like This* is the easier book to read. The vocabulary is simple, and the story telling is straightforward. The sophistication comes through in the persona which Edith Bruck creates and in the irony which various narrative devices create. The book is meaningful and accessible without students' understanding all the nuances of the story. On the other hand, students who are sophisticated in reading narrative can explore the writer's technique. A reading of *Who Loves You Like This* raises questions about the historical context, which is why supplemental information is provided for the teacher. In a classroom questions raised through the reading of a book can be a wonderful motivation to learn more, to go beyond the book.

The Parnas supplies a good deal of information to the reader. There is no need to go outside the book to understand its historical context. The author's voice is gentle and inclusive even when he is presenting psychological interpretation. Intellectually, the book offers students a scaffold for seeing a broader world. Most readers do not have experience, though, in reading a book in which a narrative is interpreted by a psychiatrist. Most likely, this will be a new experience for students as they will have to respond to the Holocaust and to Arieti's benign view of mental illness.

Q. How much time should I allot to each book?

A. If students have never read any Holocaust literature besides *The Diary of Anne Frank*, they will need support in reading the books. It is not a good idea to assign either book as an out-of-class assignment at the start, but when one of the books has been read, students could take more out-of-class responsibility for the second book. This would depend on students' reading level, their emotional maturity, and curriculum needs. By selecting among the student activities, teachers can control the time devoted to the unit. It would be ideal if students could read both books fairly quickly, so that class activities would focus on both.

Q. Which activities suit both books?

A. The following activities suit both books.

The Pre-reading Journal Prompts The prompts about hate crimes and the Holocaust apply to both books. The teacher can select from among the other prompts.

The Reading Journal In reading the second book, students should include responses that relate to both books.

The Web Quest A web quest combined with more extensive research is an even better curricular match if both books are read. More questions will be raised. The different emphasis of each book allows students to explore subjects that connect to their interests.

Creating the Scapegoat Students can see both the personal and historical implications of making scapegoats of an ethnic or religious group.

Discussion and Cooperative Learning Approaches Teaching and learning in an active, student-centered classroom is the philosophy guiding the activities throughout this guide.

Assessment The suggestions match the activities in both courses of study.

The I-Search Approach to Research If students finish reading these books full of questions, what a wonderful opportunity to engage in research fueled by the students' need and desire to know. *The Parnas* provides a very good model for research in that it begins with a question and seeks out information to answer that question. In the final step, Arieti integrates the information with his own life experience and professional training.

Statistics in the Holocaust The teacher can direct students to Nelo Risi's essay in *Who Loves You Like This* for information on Hungary and the Holocaust.

Fishbowl Quotes from both books could be used.

Q. What activities can be combined?

A. The following activities can be combined.

L'Chaim and The Leaning Tower of Pisa Both activities seek the leavening in the stories.

Visual Representations and The Museum Exhibit The Museum Exhibit could encompass the visual representations. Again, students would have more concepts and topics to work with.

Q. What other activities and assignments would suit a curriculum which includes both books?

A. The following additional activities and assignments suit a curriculum which includes both books.

The Foreword Students write a foreword to either book. To prepare for this assignment they re-read the introductory material for both books and the foreword to other books. Then students adopt a stance—an expertise or perspective that they are bringing to the writing. The teacher can help students see that introductory material offers both information and analysis to the reader.

Feature Story Students pose philosophical questions prompted by the study of these books. For instance, how can people witness evil and do nothing? What does being a good citizen of the world require? Students then interview members of the community—either the school community or a larger community to collect responses to their question. A mix of students and adults would be ideal. Students write up the results of their interviews in a feature format. They read published examples of feature stories and model the characteristics. The stories can be published on a web site.

A Memorial Students research an act of heroism that is local or relatively unknown. They create a memorial to the person or the people involved as the town of Pisa did for those who were murdered in the Parnas's house. (See pages 146–7 of *The Parnas*.) The memorial could be part of the museum exhibit, a web site, or a physical monument if the subject relates to the school or local community. This activity allows students to

consider the importance of names and memory. They can consider the Vietnam Memorial in Washington and share stories if they have visited the monument.

Newsletter Students create a newsletter for in-school circulation. The content connects to the significant questions which the unit raises. The newsletter includes a survey which asks students to share their understanding of the Holocaust and similar events and to state their views on individual responsibility in the face of community evil. Students publish the results of the survey.

Innocence and Experience The concepts of innocence and experience resonate throughout these books. Guiseppe Pardo Roques suffers from a phobia as a protection against the evil that experience tells him exists. He does not want to alter his image of man by acknowledging the evil that has stalked the Jewish people through several millennia. Edith Bruck's life as a child stops at age twelve. Coming-of-age in the midst of war and persecution, forced to sexual intimacy, bereft of parents, separated from her schooling and youthful companionship, she must leap from the protected world of childhood into the resources of her own unformed character. Students can read several of William Blake's poems from *Innocence and Experience*. "The Chimney Sweeper" poems alone offer a way into these themes and can easily be applied to the circumstances of the books. In turn, students compose poems inspired by the theme of innocence and experience.