

# Holocaust Memorial Day Book Club Activity



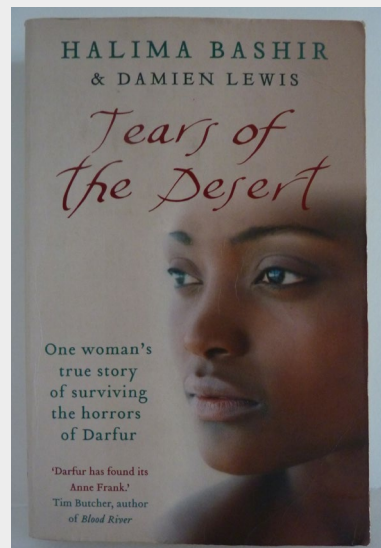
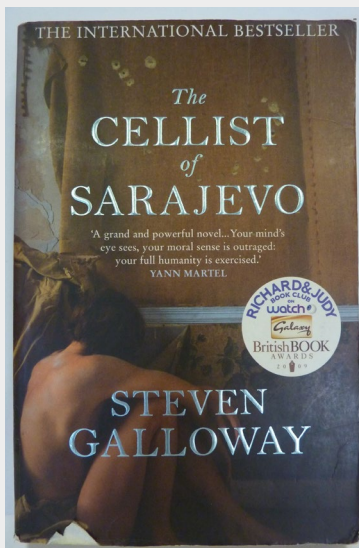
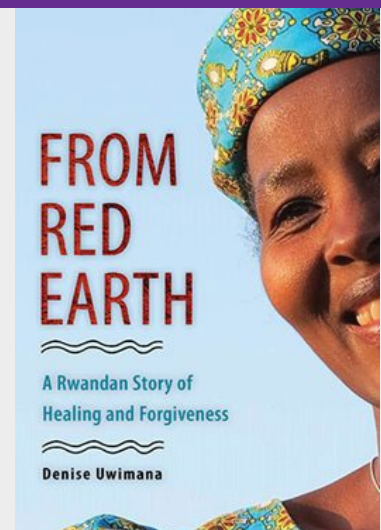
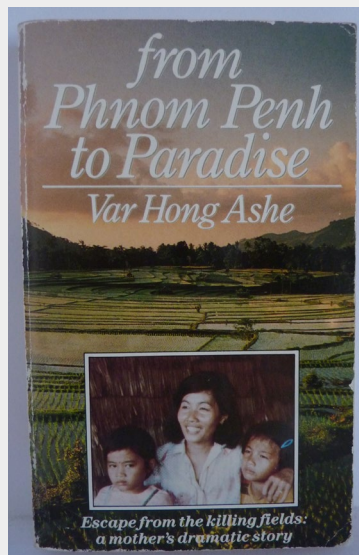
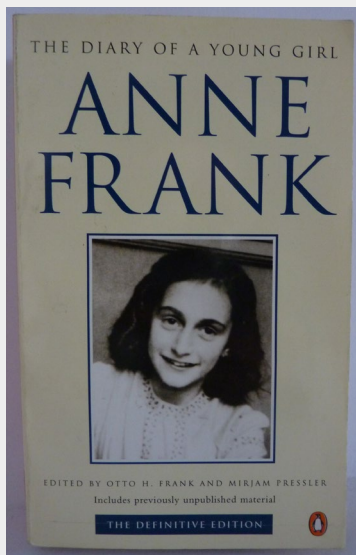
HOLOCAUST  
MEMORIAL  
DAY TRUST

Gather a group of friends, neighbours, colleagues or interested members of your community to mark Holocaust Memorial Day by choosing to read and discuss a book about the Holocaust or more recent genocides.

This resource is for people interested in leading a book club activity, and includes a number of fiction and non-fiction options for exploring the Holocaust, Nazi Persecution and the genocides that followed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. You could combine your book discussion with a minute of silence or a candle lighting as an act of remembrance.

Books can be useful for finding out more about, and discussing the impact of, genocide. If you choose a fictional text, we recommend you bear in mind the story may not provide a factually correct account of the genocide it explores. We provide key information on each genocide on our website [here](#). It may be helpful for your group to explore this prior to your discussion.

We suggest allowing between 45 minutes and one hour for your discussion.



## Suggested books

This list is designed as a starting point and is by no means exhaustive. Please note that some of these books are not suitable for younger readers. If you have younger readers in your group, we suggest that you read the book chosen first, to check it is suitable for everyone, as you will know your group best.

### Fiction

### Memoir

## The Holocaust and Nazi Persecution

### ***The Book Thief*, by Markus Zusak**

A 9 year old girl in WW2 Germany steals books to defy the Nazi regime while her foster family hides a Jew in their basement.

### ***The Diary of a Young Girl*, by Anne Frank**

Beginning on her thirteenth birthday, Anne's diary traces her experiences of persecution and hiding from the Nazis in WW2.

### ***Schindler's Ark*, by Thomas Kineally**

Historical fiction based on the true story of businessman Oskar Schindler's efforts to save the lives of over a thousand Jews in Nazi occupied Poland.

### ***Night*, by Elie Wiesel**

An account of the author and his father's experiences in Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps.

## Cambodia

### ***Children of the River*, by Linda Crew**

A young Cambodian refugee in America struggles with her grief for her lost family, and her cultural identity, as she enters a relationship with an American boy.

### ***When Broken Glass Floats: Growing Up Under the Khmer Rouge*, by Chanrithy Him**

Chanrithy Him tells of the struggle she and her family faced to survive between 1975-1979 under the Khmer Rouge, which left only five of her immediate family members alive.

### ***In the Shadow of the Banyan*, by Vaddey Ratner**

Seven year old Raami's world is shattered when the Khmer Rouge takes over. Amid forced labour, death and starvation she clings to her father's legends and poems to survive.

### ***From Phnom Penh to Paradise*, by Var Ashe Houston**

Var and her two daughters relate how they managed to survive disease, starvation and threatened execution for four years under the Khmer Rouge.

## Rwanda

### ***A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, by Gil Courtemanche**

An expatriate journalist starts a love affair with a local waitress in his hotel, in the run up to and during the genocide.

### ***From Red Earth: A Rwandan Story of Healing and Forgiveness*, by Denise Uwimana**

Account of how Denise survived the genocide while giving birth to her son, then decided to devote the rest of her life to work for reconciliation and healing.

### ***Baking Cakes in Kigali*, by Gaile Parkin**

Set in modern day Rwanda, Angel's cake business draws people from all walks of life to share their stories.

### ***Left to Tell*, by Immaculée Ilibagiza**

The only one of her entire family to survive, Immaculée recounts the 91 days she spent in hiding.

## Bosnia

### ***The Cellist of Sarajevo*, by Steven Galloway**

The story of three people trying to survive the seige of Sarajevo in the 1990s, while a cellist plays in their midst.

### ***Surviving the Bosnian Genocide: The Women of Srebrenica Speak*, by Selma Leydesdorff**

Leydesdorff brings together the testimonies of 60 women who survived the genocide.

### ***A Star Filled Spoon (short story)*, by Edin Krehic**

A tale of love, learning and loss between a father and child.

### ***Bosnia's Million Bones*, by Christian Jennings**

How a team of international forensic scientists pioneered new technology to identify the bodies of thousands of the genocide's victims.

## Darfur

### ***Poor mercy*, by Jonathan Falla**

A tale of forbidden love - Mogga and Leila, from the black and Arab communities, build their relationship as violence in the region mounts.

### ***Tears of the Desert*, by Halima Bashir with Damien Lewis**

Halima Bashir saw her village attacked during the genocide - before she was forced to flee when she spoke out against the authorities.

### ***What is the What*, by Dave Eggers**

A novel exploring a boy's dangerous journey to safety with thousands of others after his village is attacked.

### ***The Translator: A Tribesman's Memoir of Darfur*, by Daoud Hari**

Daoud recounts his childhood, surviving the attack that destroyed his village, and how he risked his life to guide reporters and aid agencies afterwards.

## Discussion questions

Whichever book(s) you read and discuss, some suggested questions are provided below for your group to discuss. Some points to consider are provided under each question to help extend and deepen the discussion.

### 1. Who has written the book?

Does it matter whether the author was a survivor or witness to the events they describe, or not? Why do you think this?

### 2. Is the book based on a true story? If not, does it matter?

### 3. What is this book about?

Here you could try an activity where each member of the group attempts to summarise the book in a sentence, a few words – or even a single word.

### 4. Why did the author write the book?

You could ask members to highlight some examples/phrases/literary devices here that they think show a reason the author had to write.

### 5. How did the book make members of your group feel?

Do you think this was intended by the author?  
Which scene or part of the book had the strongest impact on you, and why?

### 6. Who is the book aimed at, if anyone?

Think about how this may be influenced by the author's reasons for writing - which you may have discussed in Q4.

### 7. Why do (some) authors fictionalise the events of the Holocaust or subsequent genocides when there are so many true stories to tell?

You could ask how this links to your discussion of the emotional reaction to the book in Q5, and refer back to points raised from discussing Q2.

### 8. How can works of fiction help convey aspects of genocide?

What are the key differences between fiction and non-fiction which may influence this?

### 9. How can autobiographies and memoirs help convey aspects of genocide?

### 10. What do these books actually tell us about the Holocaust or genocide which they are set in? Are they informative enough?

You can use our website's pages on **The Holocaust, Nazi Persecution**, and the genocides in **Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia** and **Darfur**, to look at what the book has included or not, to help with discussion.  
You can also link this to points raised when discussing Q8 & Q9.



## 11. What have you learned about the Holocaust or a subsequent genocide through reading this book?

An extension to this question could be to ask how have members' perspectives changed as a result of reading the book?

## 12. How has reading this book and discussing it helped you to learn about genocide and Holocaust Memorial Day? What could you do as a result of your learning?

Once your group have finished their discussion, you could conclude your HMD activity with a minute of silence, a candle lighting, or reading a poem aloud as an act of remembrance.

If you would like to know more about other ways to mark Holocaust Memorial Day after your book club discussion, you can find a variety of resources and suggested ideas [here](#). In particular, you may find both our film club resources (on *The Book Thief*) and [a variety of other films](#) complement your discussions about the book(s) you chose. You could compare and contrast your book with a film about the same genocide, or a different one.

**Let us know about your activity** by adding it to our activity map:

[hmd.org.uk/letusknow](http://hmd.org.uk/letusknow)



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Find out more...

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust: [hmd.org.uk](http://hmd.org.uk)  
Discover resources for educators and other materials for  
your activities: [hmd.org.uk/resources](http://hmd.org.uk/resources)