Teaching tolerance is one of the most important roles that a teacher can assume. The influence of a teacher on student attitudes should not be underestimated, and we know that moving students from fear to tolerance can have a long-term impact on them and those whose lives they touch. Myriad young adult (YA) literature books address this important topic and provide ways to approach it.

Through examination of instances of intolerance, students can deepen their understanding of issues relating to human rights while discovering their personal beliefs. Exposing the conditions, causes, and consequences of human intolerance is one way to reduce fear—a common impetus for intolerance. Reading and discussing books about the Holocaust, the civil rights movement, and GLBT rights promote such examination.

The Holocaust

Terazin was a model camp for the Nazis between 1941 and 1945. *Terazin: Voices from the Holocaust* (Thomson, 2011) is a meticulously researched book told through the words of camp survivors and archival documents, including Nazi records and photographs, inmates’ cartoons, drawings, prints, and more. Extraordinary artwork by actual inmates employed as artists, like Bedrich Fríta, illustrates the official camp photos, but also contains secret drawings revealing the camp’s true conditions. Artifacts include savings books for the camp’s nonexistent bank, children’s drawings, transport tickets, identity cards, and many more.

Traditional wisdom holds that Holocaust victims went to their deaths like lambs to the slaughter. Doreen Rappaport’s (2012) *Beyond Courage: The Untold Story of Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust* dispels this notion in a convincing way. She argues that while some dramatic examples of resistance, like the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, did exist, resistance took many other forms, including the continuation of religious practices, the smuggling of children out of danger, and the maintenance of personal diaries and other records of the Nazi atrocities. This book recounts little known examples of sabotage as well as clandestine escapes from the concentration camps. It describes Jewish resistance in the forests, in the ghettos, and in the camps.

One of the most dramatic accounts describes how 270 Jews in the Novogrudok Labor Camp in Poland dug an escape tunnel from the camp into the middle of a wheat field. They burrowed into the ground 3 feet a day, one man at a time. An engineer designed the tunnel and an electrician wired it with electricity. More than 170 Jews escaped safely to the forest through the tunnel. Because of the short chapters focused on different examples of resistance, this book is ideal for jigsawing. Students can share different chapters with their peers and reflect upon the forms of resistance represented, the roles of non-Jews in

Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.

—Marie Curie
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Supporting the resistance, the role of Jews who sabotaged their peers, and the price of resistance. Intolerance does not always occur on a grand scale; the banality of evil exists on a smaller one as well. Jack Pool was a 16-year-old Jewish boy who lived in Massena, New York, in 1928. He loved playing the cello and daydreamed about a beautiful Christian girl named Emaline. He knew that their relationship could not be, but this didn’t stop his feelings for her. On his birthday, he walked Emaline’s younger sister home. When she later disappeared, he was accused of murder, based upon the town’s horrific notion that Jews murder Christian children as blood sacrifices on holidays. Though this Sidney Taylor Honor Book, *The Blood Lie: A Novel* (Vernick, 2011) is historical fiction, it is based on a true incident that actually happened to the author’s family in Massena, New York. An easy read for middle graders, this title reminds us and our students that the US is not immune from prejudice against Jews and that ignorance and intolerance can destroy innocent lives.

After reading these three titles on the Holocaust, students can compare them, considering questions like: What were the differences in structure, format, and tone in these three books? What were the roles of “bystanders” in each book? Could something like the Holocaust happen today? Why or why not? How were the townspeople in *The Blood Lie* like the Nazis? How were they different?

**Civil Rights**

Books about the civil rights movement can demonstrate human progress toward tolerance over time. Emmett Till was 14 years old in the summer of 1955 when he went to visit his uncle in Mississippi. Born and raised in Chicago, Emmett, in the words of his mother, “didn’t know how to be humble to white people” (p. 35). He bragged to his friends in the South that he had white girlfriends. When his friends dared him to ask an attractive white female clerk for a date, he could not resist. This action ultimately cost him his life. *Getting Away with Murder: The True Story of the Emmett Till Case* (Crowe, 2003) is a nonfiction title that recounts how racist attitudes allowed his two white murderers to get away with the crime. It is also the story of how nationwide
outrage over his killing and its aftermath created the spark that lit the fire of the civil rights movement.

Two other titles, *Birmingham Sunday* (Brimner, 2010) and *Kizzy Ann Stamps* (Watts, 2012), are set in the 1960s. The first is a nonfiction title about the Birmingham Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing that killed four young black girls. Illustrated with primary source photographs, it provides background on Birmingham, which experienced so many racially related bombings that it was called Bombingham. The book also provides extensive detail about the era; it describes the impact of the Ku Klux Klan, the resistance of city fathers to integration, and the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr. and various groups in furthering the cause of civil rights. *Kizzy Ann Stamps* is easy-to-read historical fiction that uses the civil rights era as a backdrop to the story. It is about an African American girl about to attend a newly integrated school in the South. Kizzy’s positive relationship with her compassionate teacher helps her navigate the frequent challenges of racism in her new school.

Combating intolerance of LGBTs is an important civil rights issue for today. *Gay America: Struggle for Equality* (Alsenas, 2008) presents this issue in the larger historical context. For older middle grade students, *Gay America* chronologically details the evolution of LGBT life over the past 125 years, outlining key events that have influenced the gay community, such as the AIDS epidemic, the coming out of Olympic athletes like Greg Louganis and Billie Jean King, the campaign for gay marriage, and hate crimes against gays and lesbians.

*October Mourning: A Song for Matthew Shepard* (Newman, 2012), on the other hand, is a work of “poetic imagination” that recounts one of the worst hate crimes of the modern era—a horrific, specific example of the violation of human rights. This heartbreaking book of 68 fictional monologues relates the impact of the crime from the point of view of various observers, both animate and inanimate, using poetic forms such as haikus, found poems, concrete poems, list poems, and acrostics. It is a beautifully written but unsparing account of a brutal murder, as well as a tribute to the short life of Matthew Shepard.

These titles, in addition to the film *Bullied: A Student, a School and a Case That Made History* (described below), offer a starting point for classroom or schoolwide discussions about an issue of great concern to teachers, parents, and students throughout the country.

Nonfiction books about cultures and people of the Middle East introduce students to countries they hear about on the news but may know little about. These titles promote understanding of the different cultures in this area through varied perspectives. Rafał Gerszak (2011), Canadian photojournalist, brings the sights and sounds of Afghanistan alive in *Beyond Bullets: A Photojournal of Afghanistan*. The author has worked in this country as a journalist embedded with the military and as a private citizen. His photographs and commentary reveal the dangers and joys of daily life in this war-torn region, along with an insider’s perspective into the unique customs and religious observances of the people in four different provinces. Sidebars provide in-depth information on the Muslim religion. For example, one photograph depicts a cow that will be sacrificed for the celebration of Eid al-Adha (the Festival of Sacrifice), a holiday marking the end of hajj, the ritual pilgrimage to Mecca. Families who can afford to buy an animal to sacrifice share it within the family, with neighbors, and with the poor. The hardships of life in this land are realistically and sympathetically portrayed in this well-written title.

Another photo-essay entitled *Sharing Our Homeland: Palestinian and Jewish Children at Summer Peace Camp* (Marx, 2010) features two children, Alya, a Palestinian Muslim boy, and Yuval, a Jewish boy from Israel, who attend Summer Peace camp in the Holy Land, where they work and play together. The camp is designed to develop an understanding of conflicting cultures in the region, and the camp director’s goal is to build tolerance among the campers. He states: “We don’t expect them to become friends, but
we do expect them to learn respect for each other” (p. 17). Activities include those typical of summer camp anywhere in the world, with some exceptions. For example, during one day of camp, personnel demonstrate emergency rescue procedures employed after bombings, in this way reflecting daily life in this part of the world. The book includes depictions of cultural and religious customs in Palestine and Israel, and includes websites, a glossary, and additional resources.

“We heard the camps were bad, but nothing prepared us for this hell on earth” (Wilkes, 2010, p. 19). With these words, Shehab, a 12-year-old Palestinian boy from Iraq, describes his life in a refugee camp in Syria. His story and those of artists, journalists, teachers, and many more torn from their homeland by war and religious and political persecution comprise Out of Iraq: Refugees’ Stories in Words, Paintings, and Music (Wilkes, 2010). This book, which reveals the stories of just a few of the hundreds of thousands of refugees forced to flee from Iraq, also includes a map, index, glossary, resources, and suggestions for classroom use.

Designed to inspire social action, the author outlines the role of the UN Refugee agency’s role in providing food, medical care, and education to refugees. Proceeds from sales of the book go to the United National Refugee Association. Discussion questions focused on these titles might explore questions like: Why should Americans be concerned about events in the Middle East? Is conflict inevitable in the Middle East? Why or why not? Will democracy ever become a reality in these countries? Why or why not?

Teaching Tolerance (www.teachingtolerance.org) is a wonderful online resource for teachers. A project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, it is designed specifically for teachers interested in helping their students develop respect for differences. Print subscriptions are free to educators; you can sign up at the website. Articles in the most recent issue of the online magazine (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2012) focused on LGBT issues, size bias, and civil rights; it also contained lesson plan ideas for teaching tolerance at different grade levels. The “What We’re Reading” column recommends books for teachers along with selected children’s and young adult books related to tolerance themes.

In addition, the Southern Poverty Law Center distributes free teaching kits on topics related to tolerance. Each kit contains a high-quality DVD (several have won Academy Awards) and accompanying teaching materials. The acclaimed documentary Bullied: A Student, a School, and a Case That Made History portrays a victim of anti-gay bulling who took action against his school district. A kit containing the 40-minute documentary film (DVD), with closed captioning and Spanish subtitles, a viewer’s guide with lesson plans and activities, and additional online support materials can be ordered through the website (http://www.tolerance.org/bullied). This kit is available free of charge to every school in the United States, as are several additional kits, including, Mighty Times: The Children’s March (a perfect companion to Birmingham Sunday, reviewed above), and Viva La Causa, a kit about the Cesar Chavez grape boycott.

Another kit, One Survivor Remembers, focuses on Gerda Weissman Klein’s harrowing tale of survival during the Holocaust. This kit is an ideal companion to the Holocaust-related books reviewed in this column as well as Klein’s All but My Life: A Memoir (Klein, 2010), which recounts her six-year ordeal at the hands of the Nazis during which she loses everything—her happy home, her parents, her siblings—all but her life. Her story is one that every older middle grader should hear; it is without a doubt a story of intolerance, but more important, it is the story of her abiding faith in humanity after experiencing the worst that it has to offer. Her life provides a model for tolerance that we can all aspire to achieve.

References
Crowe, C. (2003). Getting away with murder: The true
**Call for the Secondary Section High School Teacher of Excellence Award**

Each NCTE affiliate is at liberty to select a person for this honor in the manner of its choice. An affiliate’s governing board might acknowledge someone who has previously won an award within the affiliate, thus moving that person’s recognition to a national level, or the affiliate might advertise for applications for nominations before choosing a winner.

**Deadline:** Documentation should be sent to the Secondary Section Steering Committee administrator/designee by **May 1** of each year. Materials should be sent to the address on the current nomination form. For more information, go to [http://www.ncte.org/second/awards/hste](http://www.ncte.org/second/awards/hste).