

CLASSROOM COMPANION

Educator Guide

Three adaptable sessions for grades 11-12, college, and adult education. The unit examines evidence, memory, historical fiction, and the ethics of giving narrative life to a real person.



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Official companion resource - craigahart.com/book-clubs

Unit at a glance

Recommended use

- Grades 11-12, college, and adult or community education.
- Literature, journalism, modern history, writing, ethics, and interdisciplinary humanities courses.
- Three 50-75 minute sessions, adaptable for a full-novel study or selected passages.

Learning goals

- Distinguish documented fact, family account, plausible inference, and fictional invention.
- Analyze how a dual timeline creates meaning across generations.
- Evaluate the ethical choices involved in fictionalizing a real person's inner life.
- Use historical notes and a glossary as evidence rather than treating them as ornamental back matter.
- Develop a defensible interpretation supported by details from the novel and its notes.

Content considerations

Wartime violence, prisoner deprivation and starvation, Nazi persecution, death, threats, captivity, and references to property taken from victims. Preview assigned passages for the needs of your learners.

Session 1 - History as evidence

Essential question: What happens to a life when its official record disappears?

- 01 Launch: Present the fact that the 1973 National Personnel Records Center fire destroyed millions of service files. Ask students what kinds of evidence might remain after a record is lost.
- 02 Read: Pair the author's note with the early David chapters and selected wartime passages.
- 03 Sort: Place details into four categories - documented history, family account, historical inference, and invention.
- 04 Discuss: Which category feels most trustworthy? Which can reveal something the others cannot?
- 05 Exit: Write a claim about whether an incomplete record is the same thing as an unknowable life.

Evidence ladder

Level	Example	Question to ask
Documented context	Campaigns, camps, equipment, conventions	What source establishes this?
Family account	Capture, train, psalm, deer, lost Bible	Who remembered and transmitted it?
Plausible inference	Conditions where a specific fact is unknown	What known facts make it plausible?
Invention	Courier, map, ledger, gold	What narrative purpose does it serve?

Session 2 - History as narrative

Essential question: How does structure make the past present?

- 01 Map: Trace Billie's route from Lorraine to New York and David's movement through the modern landscape.
- 02 Compare: Choose one transition between timelines. Identify the image, object, question, or pressure that links the chapters.
- 03 Analyze: Discuss how readers know more, less, or something different because the narratives alternate.
- 04 Workshop: Rewrite a short moment from a single linear timeline. What disappears when the second timeline is removed?
- 05 Reflect: Identify one place where the landscape itself seems to hold memory.

Craft lenses

- Parallel journeys: captivity and investigation both move east, then west.
- Objects as evidence: the Testament, map, ledger, military records, and recovered remains.
- Repetition with transformation: trains, borders, archives, and WELCOME HOME.
- Narrative pressure: the modern thriller plot makes historical recovery physically urgent.

Session 3 - History as responsibility

Essential question: When does imaginative recovery honor a life, and when does it overtake it?

- 01 Read: Examine the author's admission that writing the novel is an 'act of trespass.'
- 02 Debate: A novelist should never invent the inner thoughts of a real person who cannot consent. Assign or choose positions, then require evidence and a counterargument.
- 03 Test: Apply the debate to David Hart, the fictional conspiracy, and the scenes based directly on Billie's account.
- 04 Revise: Write a brief ethical rule for historical fiction. Then revise it after hearing the opposing argument.
- 05 Create: Draft an author's note for a hypothetical family-history story, clearly naming evidence, inference, compression, and invention.

Discussion extensions

- Journalism: Compare David's methods with standards of verification, independence, and minimizing harm.
- Archives: Investigate what institutions do when a collection is incomplete or destroyed.
- Law and war: Examine what a convention can accomplish when enforcement weakens.
- Memory studies: Compare public memorials with family storytelling and physical objects.

Research pathways

- 01 The Lorraine Campaign and the 'iron harvest' that continues in former battlefields.
- 02 Stalag XII-A near Limburg and Stalag VII-A at Moosburg.
- 03 The 1929 Geneva Convention and Western Allied POW treatment.
- 04 The National Personnel Records Center fire and methods used to reconstruct service histories.
- 05 Red Cross parcels and the rail network on which they depended.
- 06 Allied attacks on unmarked prisoner transports.
- 07 POW labor detachments and the wartime German agricultural economy.
- 08 Liberated prisoner processing, Camp Lucky Strike, and Operation Magic Carpet.

Assessment options

- Evidence map: visually distinguish fact, inference, and invention in one chapter pair.
- Analytical essay: explain how the dual timeline changes the novel's argument about memory.
- Research brief: verify and contextualize one historical note using credible sources.
- Reflective commentary: defend an ethical choice in a short piece of historical fiction.

Key vocabulary

ARBEITSKOMMANDO

A POW work detachment assigned outside the main camp.

STALAG

A base prisoner-of-war camp for enlisted men and noncommissioned officers.

WEHRMACHT

The regular German armed forces, distinct from the SS.

WAFFEN-SS

The combat arm of the SS, separate from the regular Wehrmacht.

MARSHALLING YARD

A rail facility where freight cars are sorted and reassembled.

GRAVES REGISTRATION

Army units responsible for recovering, identifying, and reburying the dead.

RAMP

A recovered Allied military person, used for liberated prisoners.

CAMP LUCKY STRIKE

A major staging camp where returning prisoners were processed and fed.

Invite the author

Craig A. Hart is available for selected classroom conversations about research, historical fiction, journalism, and transforming a family account into a novel. Visit craigahart.com/contact.