
CREATING REMEMBRANCE IN ALICE HOFFMAN'S *WHEN WE FLEW AWAY: A NOVEL OF ANNE FRANK BEFORE THE DIARY*

John Franklin
Pittsburg State University

Abstract

The reviewer addresses the middle grade novel *When We Flew Away* (2024) by Alice Hoffman, including explication and justification for including the book in a middle school English Language Arts curriculum.

Keywords: Amsterdam, Anne Frank, Anne Frank House, concentration camps, deportation of Jews, diary, Holocaust, Otto Frank, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Published sixty years after the author first read Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, and written with the cooperation of The Anne Frank House, *When We Flew Away* (2024) by Alice Hoffman lovingly, authentically and respectfully imagines Anne's life for the two years before she and her family fled their apartment at number 37 Merwedeplein to hide away in the Annex. The history is spot-on accurate; the dialogue is realistic; the events, setting and relationships smack of verisimilitude. The writing is poignant and powerful, laying the groundwork for Anne's life in concealment. Themes of ambition (to be a writer); family (of conflict with her sister Margot and her mother Edith as well as her father Otto's efforts to escape the Nazis, with a bonus being life with Oma: her maternal grandmother); friends; and love (both ideal and romantic) are presented so skillfully that re-reading Anne's diary will no doubt reveal further insight, illumination and pleasure for any age reader.

The novel will speak to the same audience to whom *The Diary* appeals: those of us interested in the atrocity-and-prevention of genocide, particularly World War II's Holocaust; and, those interested in Anne as a personification of that genocide. Middle schoolers will recognize themselves in Anne's friends and their activities: group outings for ice cream and ice skating, birthday parties, school.

This novel would fit easily into a curriculum focused upon the Holocaust, alongside time-honored titles such as Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars*, Elie Wiesel's *Night* and, of course, Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*.

Challenges to teaching this book could be met with information from sites both actual and virtual such as The Anne Frank House (<https://www.annefrank.org/en/>) in Amsterdam and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (<https://www.ushmm.org/>) in Washington, DC. Each is well worth a visit. Each is powerfully affective.

The best part of the book is in the author's Afterword, which I believe should be read first.

In her essay the author explains the effect that reading *The Diary* had upon her as she realized “that a young Jewish girl [like Anne; like me] could be a writer.” Later, she proclaims: “*Remember us*, the diary tells us, in every single line, which is why it should be required reading for every child in America and throughout the world.”

And, *When We Flew Away* should be right there beside it.

Author Biography

John Franklin (BA Rice, MA Miami of Ohio, PhD Florida; certified to teach English and economics) began his career at Jones High School in Houston. During that time, he combined his love for literature with a love of travel, spending 12-week summers biking or backpacking to visit the settings of the drama, fiction and poetry he loved to teach: Scotland for *Macbeth*; London for Dickens; Canterbury for Chaucer; and, the Lake District for Wordsworth. One Fourth of July he ventured further abroad, discovering himself atop the Acropolis in Athens, thinking, “Here I am at the birthplace of democracy on the birthday of the greatest democracy that has ever existed.” He has spent his life since then appreciating and sharing his good fortune. John Franklin (pronoun he) is a Professor of English and Director of English Education at Pittsburg State University in Southeast Kansas where he teaches Literature for Middle and Secondary Schools. He may be reached at jfranklin@pittstate.edu.



National Council of
Teachers of English®



Penguin
Random House
EDUCATION

ANNE FRANK FONDS®
FOUNDED BY OTTO FRANK

NCTE, Penguin Random House, and the Anne Frank Fonds are partnering to provide the Anne Frank Award for Teaching Memoir. English language arts educators from middle to postsecondary levels have the opportunity to apply for funding to advance the teaching of memoir and support student writing in their classrooms. Ten English teachers will receive a \$1,000 grant to teach memoir across language arts education—especially texts focused on children’s voices and experiences during times of war, such as *The Diary of a Young Girl*. Application deadline is August 1, 2025. Learn more and apply at <https://ncte.org/awards/educator-awards/anne-frank-award-for-teaching-memoir/>