

Zlata's Diary, by Zlata Filipovic. New York: Puffin Books,

Story Summary: This is a young girl's account of day-to-day living in war-torn Bosnia. Through her descriptions, we learn about her personal thoughts and feelings. Her entries capture experiences that are common adolescent concerns: worries about being popular, entertainment, and what will happen in the future. Before war broke out, Zlata Filipovic was a normal, happy twelve-year-old, but life changed in the spring of 1992 when Serbian artillery positions were placed on hills above her home, and the shelling of Sarajevo began. Zlata was forced to spend much of her time in a cellar protected from the bombings. Food, electricity, and water were scarce and friends and relatives were injured and killed in the gunfire and bombings. Zlata lost her innocence and childhood because of the war. When we read her diary, we read of her confusion, fear, and despair, but we also learn of her strength, love, and belief in basic human goodness.

Objectives: The students should be able to:

- build an awareness of current events and social issues in his or her own communities and elsewhere in the world;
- find examples of persecution and genocide in today's world;
- explain his or her own civic and social responsibility as members of society; and
- seek to find ways to make a positive contribution to the lives of others in his or her own communities and abroad.

Topics for Discussion:

- What similarities can you find between Zlata's life and your own?
- Explain why you believe Zlata's diary was chosen for publication, rather than the writings of an adult, journalist, or professional writer?
- Does Zlata understand why there is a war? Explain the reason for your answer.
- Who are "the kids?"
- Tell why Zlata decides to name her diary.
- Many of Zlata's friends are leaving Sarajevo. Explain how this makes Zlata feel. Why does her family decide to stay?
- Zlata uses the word "horrible" over and over to describe what is happening in Sarajevo. Why does she use this word? What "horrible" things are happening?
- Explain how Zlata's life changed from the beginning of her diary till the end.
- What is Zlata's parents' reaction to the war? Tell how they are changing both emotionally and physically. Find diary entries that support your answers.
- Why was the decision to stay or leave Sarajevo a difficult decision for Zlata's mother? Why don't they leave?
- Describe other characters in the diary, such as her mother, father, aunts and uncles, or friends. What characteristics do they share?
- What three groups are involved in the conflict? How does Zlata explain the political situation in her country?
- Explain the similarities and differences between Zlata's diary and Anne Frank's diary. Why do you think they are so similar?

Suggested Activities:

- Collect current events about the war in Bosnia. Display news articles that describe events in the area.

- Create a relief map of the Balkan Peninsula. Include the republics of the former Yugoslavia, surrounding countries, mountain ranges, rivers, and the Adriatic Sea.
- Research the history of Bosnia and Yugoslavia. Write a paper which includes information on Marshal Tito, the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in 1914, the Olympics in Sarajevo, the Slavic ethnic groups, and other pertinent information.
- Work in pairs to conduct a mock interview of Zlata. One student should create questions based on a reading of the book. The other student should answer the questions as if he/she is Zlata. Do a prewar and a postwar interview. Compare the two interviews.
- Create a chart that compares *Zlata's Diary* with *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl*.
- Prepare an advertising promotion for *Zlata's Diary*. Include a script for a thirty-second radio spot, design a billboard, and videotape a thirty-second television commercial.
- Create a Venn Diagram of Zlata comparing her before and after the war.

Related Resources:

- Adams, P. (1992). *The Helping Hands Handbook: A Guidebook for Kids Who Want to Help People, Animals, and the World We Live in : Over 100 Projects Kids Can Really Do!* New York: Random House.
- Arrick, F. (1983). *Chernowitz!* New York: Penguin.
- Bar-Lev, G. (1992). *Jewish Americans Struggle for Equality*. Vero Beach, FL: Rourke.
- Duvall, L. (1994). *Respecting Differences: A Guide to Getting Along in a Changing World*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.
- Greenburg, K. (1997). *Children in Crisis: The Middle East Struggle for a Homeland*. Woodbridge, CT: Blackbirch Press.
- -----(1997). *Children in Crisis: Bosnia: Civil War in Europe*. Woodbridge, CT: Blackbirch Press.
- -----(1997). *Children in Crisis: Rwanda: Fierce Clashes in Central Africa*. Woodbridge, CT: Blackbirch Press.
- -----(1997). *Children in Crisis: Vietnam: The Boat People Search for a Home*. Woodbridge, CT: Blackbirch Press.
- Hoose, P. (1993). *It's Our World Too!: Stories of Young People Who Are Making a Difference*. New York: Little, Brown.
- Kallen, S. (1995). *Holocaust in Other Lands*. Austin, Texas: Raintree/Steck-Vaughn.
- *Zlata's Diary: Teacher's Guide*. (1995). New York: Scholastic/NBC News.

