

The Inside, Out: Diaries as entry points to historical perspective-taking

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The historian, investigating any event in the past, makes a distinction between what may be called the outside and the inside of an event. By the outside of the event I mean everything belonging to it which can be described in terms of bodies and their movements... ..By the inside of the event I mean that in it which can only be described in terms of thought... R.G. Collingwood

Diaries can serve as meaningful entry points for advancing historical consciousness and develop historical thinking (Seixas, 2002) because they can connect readers/learners with the diverse emotions, thoughts and motivations of the people who wrote them in particular times and particular places. According to philosopher and historian, R.G. Collingwood (1994/1946), historical thinking and meaning-making involves exploration of both the ‘outside’ (that which would have been observable: “bodies and their movements”) and the ‘inside’ (that which would have been unobservable: thoughts, emotions, motivations) of past human actions. One of the tasks and tensions of historical work is to get to the ‘inside’ – to bring out (reveal or reconstruct) and contextualize ways of thinking and feeling represented in documents and artifacts left behind, so that we can understand both the similarities and differences in how people viewed the world.

In this paper I will (a) briefly discuss the importance of historical perspective-taking as an aspect of historical thinking and the obligation of educators to assist learners in developing their capacity to engage; (b) outline why and how teachers could assist learners in using diaries as evidence for reconstructing historical perspectives; (c) layout excerpts from three published diaries to demonstrate how these provide evidence of classed, gendered, ethnic/religious points of view within the time periods they were written; and (4) provide some specific suggestions as to how teachers can use examples from these diaries to spark deeper probing of ideas and time periods.

The Importance of Historical Perspective-taking: Why Get ‘Inside’?

Schools need to assist learners in developing their capacities to think historically. Historical thinking involves both an understanding of concepts that underpin such thinking and the ability to use complex processes including: establishing historical significance; using primary source evidence; identifying continuity and change; analyzing cause and consequence; taking historical perspectives; and understanding the ethical dimension of historical interpretations (Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness, [http:// www. histori.ca/ benchmarks/concepts](http://www.histori.ca/benchmarks/concepts)).

As a historian and teacher educator with special interest in history and social studies education, I write with the underpinning assumption that teachers have the obligation to assist learners in developing their ability to critically reconstruct the past by

developing their capacities to engage with and in the processes outlined above. However, for the purpose of this paper, I will focus particularly on how teachers could assist students in understanding historical perspective so that learners might come to understand and reconcile differing and often conflicting accounts of the past that surface and become obvious in a multicultural society (Seixas, 2002). Children and youth need to be supported in learning and practicing how to interpret sources and use these as evidence to understand and discuss multiple historical perspectives because there is pressing need for them to learn to deal with the inconsistent narratives they will run into in their lives outside of the classroom. Seixas (2002) suggests, “This is the promise of critical *historical* discourse: that it provides a rational way, on the basis of evidence and argument, to discuss the differing accounts that jostle with or contradict each other” (http://www.quasar.ualberta.ca/css/Css_36_2/ARpurposes_teaching_canadian_history.htm)

Historical perspective-taking engages students in the effort to understand the ‘inside’ of events. But, understanding or reconstructing the thoughts, emotions, and motivations of people who lived in the past requires thoughtful and skilled engagement with, and critical questioning of a variety of sources. Historical perspective-taking means development of the ability to examine sources as evidence of worldviews that are not our own (Seixas & Peck, 2004). Developing such perspective consciousness assists children and youth in understanding that they hold a view of the world that is not universally shared and that this view of the world has been and continues to be shaped by influences that often escape conscious detection (Hanvey, 1976). Such awareness is vital for an empathic understanding of the past and for promoting respectful approaches to dealing with present-day concerns.

To help students engage in historical perspective-taking teachers must assist learners in developing understanding of the social, political, cultural and intellectual historical contexts in which people lived. Various accounts as told by historians and textbooks writers can be employed to assist learners in coming to understand the historical contexts and events that were unfolding during the time period under study. This reconstruction of the historical context can also include an examination of conflicting beliefs and ideologies that were in circulation at the time using accounts and textbooks and could involve examination of various opposing sources created in the time period, like political cartoons, paintings or newspaper editorials. However, if students are to more deeply understand the perspectives, thoughts and experiences of people in the past, there is no doubt that learners need to engage with sources like diaries and letters so that they can build more detailed, complex and nuanced understandings of how people lived their lives (Barton, 2005). The questions for many teachers are: How does this work; and what kinds of perspectives are revealed? In the remainder of this paper, I will provide examples and explanations to address these questions.

Diaries as Entry Points and Evidence for Historical Perspective-taking.

For the purposes of this paper I will focus particularly on dairies as rich sources of evidence and opportunities for insight. While arguments might be made that diaries are

‘unreliable’ sources because they are written from particular points of view, it is clear that coming to understand what people in the past thought and believed requires use of biased sources “...because that bias constitutes evidence of peoples' ideas” (Barton, 2005, p. 748). When diaries are used by teachers and learners in conjunction with other primary and secondary sources, students not only enrich their understanding of historical events, they also develop insight into the meaning these events held for the people who lived through them (Barton, 2005, p.753).

At the same time as teachers help students construct an understanding of contexts in which historical events unfolded, teachers can also work with students in developing their capacities to use diaries as evidence of thoughts, emotions and motivations of historical actors. Convinced that history is the study of both the inside and outside of human action, R.G. Collingwood (1994/1946), devised a critical questioning methodological approach to analyzing and interpreting historical documents that teachers can facilitate students in learning and practicing. At heart, Collingwood’s method involves close and careful reading of documents, focused and guided by an overall research question and sets of related critical questions. According to Collingwood (1994/1946) a document - or any other artifact created in the past - does not become ‘evidence’ until an inquirer approaches it with a question - “...nothing is evidence except in relation to some definite question” (p. 281). Because I have previously written about why and how Collingwood’s suggested approach can be adapted and used by teachers and learners (Lemisko, 2004), I will not detail this here. Rather, I will provide insight into the suggested questioning approach and show the kind of evidence that diaries can hold which teachers and students can use their efforts to engage in historical perspective-taking.

To demonstrate how diaries can be entry points for exploring historical perspectives, I devised a main inquiry question that could be used in examining three published diaries that were written by females during times of conflict in the twentieth century (specifically, between 1939 and 2004) – that is: What beliefs attitudes, biases and ideologies did the diary writers hold and did their perspectives (for example, but not limited to, class, gender, race and ethnic perspectives) influence their lived experiences of conflict? To address this main question, the following sub-questions can be used as an initial set to help students dig deeply into the dairies as they mine for evidence of the thoughts and beliefs of the diary writers:

- What do the diaries reveal about the concerns of the diary writers? Do they write about social, economic, political and/or intellectual worries or issues?
- What do the dairies reveal about women’s work (roles), men’s work (roles) both inside and outside of the family? And, what do the diaries reveal about the diary writers’ attitudes toward these roles?
- What do the diaries reveal about the wealth/poverty of the diary writers? And, what do the diaries reveal about the diary writers’ attitudes toward wealth/poverty?
- What do the diaries reveal about the ethnicity, religious beliefs, and/or cultural traditions of the diary writers? And, what do the diaries reveal about the diary writers’ attitudes toward their traditions, ethnicity, and/or religious beliefs?

- What do the diaries reveal about relationships between family members and between family members and other people? And, what do the diaries reveal about the diary writers' attitudes toward these relationships?

As indicated, these are only an initial set of questions. As students engage with the diaries as evidence, additional questions should arise and other critical questions can be posed by teachers to support learners in determining how the evidence revealed in these documents might mesh with or contradict interpretations of events and contexts of a time period which they learned about through other sources.

As indicated above, I examined three published diaries written by females during times of conflict in the twentieth century. I chose these diaries for this demonstration because teachers have easy access to these sources. I have included a brief description of each of the diaries, below.

While many teachers and students are familiar with the story of Anne Frank, I decided to include her diary as an example for this demonstration because I am not convinced that teachers and students have often engaged in critical reading of her diary as a piece of evidence to understand historical perspectives. The original version of her diary was published in 1947, but I chose to read the version titled, *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, published by Bantam Books (1993 edition), which is 283 pages in length. The diary covers the German occupation of the Netherlands during World War II, particularly the period of June 1942 to August 1944, through the eyes of Anne, who was thirteen years old when her Jewish family went into hiding to avoid Nazi incarceration.

For this demonstration, I also examined the writing of Zlata Filipović, whose diary was originally published in 1994. I read the version titled, *Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life In Wartime Sarajevo*, which was published by Penguin Books (1995 edition) and is 197 pages in length. This diary covers life in Sarajevo during the Bosnian War, particularly the period between September, 1991 and October, 1993, through the eyes of Zlata, who celebrated her eleventh birthday a few months before the conflict in Sarajevo became a full fledged war.

Finally, I read the writing of Thura Al-Windawi titled, *Thura's Diary: A Young Girl's Life in War-Torn Baghdad*, which was published by Puffin Books in 2004 and is 144 pages in length. (Another version was also published in 2004 by Viking, under the title, *Thura's Diary: My Life in Wartime Iraq*). This diary covers the American invasion of Iraq and the immediate aftermath, particularly the period between March and December, 2003, through the eyes of Thura, who was nineteen years old at the time of the invasion.

In the following sections of this paper, examples will be provided to demonstrate how close, careful and critical reading of these diaries using guiding questions, can provide evidence that allows students to engage in historical perspective-taking. Excerpts from the diaries will show that these sources can be used as entry points to explore classed, gendered and ethnic/cultural perspectives, as well as religious diversities. I have

also included some specific suggestions as to how teachers can use examples from these diaries to spark deeper probing of the evidence and ideas revealed.¹

Evidence of Class Perspectives

Excerpts drawn from the writings of Anne, Zlata and Thura demonstrate that all three belonged to families that were clearly members of the ‘middle classes’ – that is, their social ranking was based on mid-range levels of wealth/income and, generally, white-collar status.

Thura’s commentary about how the people in Baghdad reacted to rumours of invasion, and her family’s position in this, captures the idea of ‘mid-range’ nicely. Thura wrote, *“The affluent parts of the city are deserted – the people who lived there were among the first to go, either to neighbouring countries or else to their country houses. But the poor areas are still packed with people. My family aren’t rich or poor.”* (p. 60)

Anne’s family had enough wealth and status that they were able to move from Frankfurt (where Anne was born) to Holland, where her father was able to re-establish a business, and they were able to use their wealth and status to prepare a place of hiding. In her diary, Anne clearly indicates her family’s middle class status in comments like, *“We often discuss post-war problems, for example, how one ought to address servants.”* (p. 30)

Zlata’s family was wealthy enough to have a residence in the city of Sarajevo, as well as owning property in the countryside. We learn about Zlata’s family’s country property from a diary entry recorded before the outbreak of the war, when Zlata writes, *“We’re going to Crnotiana (our place about fifteen kilometers away) –it has a big orchard with a house that’s about 150 years old –a cultural monument under the protection of the state – Mommy and Daddy restored it. Grandma and Granddad are still there.”* (p. 4)

Using the initial guiding questions suggested above, these diaries provide evidence that diary writers were members of middle class families, therefore teachers can use these sources as entry points for exploring class perspectives. Teachers could help learners practice selecting evidence to support claims about socio-economic class, but perhaps more importantly, Anne, Zlata and Thura express particular ways of thinking that allow teacher to use their diaries as entry points into understanding classed attitudes. For example, teachers could help learners explore the idea embedded in Anne’s entry above, regarding appropriate ways to address servants. This represents the pre-World War II middle class assumption that certain kinds of work should be done by certain kinds of people and that class status should regulate forms of communication. When discussing the costs of acquiring medical treatment for her sister who had diabetes, Thura writes: *“It was very expensive, but we don’t care about the money we have to spend to get what my sister needs, because money comes and goes, but who will replace my sister if I lose her?”* (p. 21) Using this example, teachers could assist learners in exploring the notion

that monetary considerations are different for those who have a certain degree of wealth or reliable income, as compared to those who do not.

Overall, these diaries could be used to provoke interesting questions about class perspectives. For example, teachers might pose the question: In what ways did the diary writers' middle class perspectives contribute to their writing of diaries in the first place? For example, a quotation like this: *"That's my life!... ..A child without games, without friends, without the sun, without birds, without nature, without fruit, without chocolate or sweets, with just a little powdered milk. In short, a child without a childhood. A wartime child."* (pp. 61 -62), drawn from Zlata's diary, could trigger a question like: Did Zlata's middle class perspective affect her judgment about the harshness of her life during wartime? (After all, it is likely safe to say that children living in poverty or in lower class families in pre-war Sarajevo did not assume they should have continual access to fruit, chocolate and sweets before or after the conflict.)

Religious Diversity

These diaries could be used by teachers to inspire learners to explore questions about diverse religious perspectives. Evidence from these sources show how such perspectives influenced the lived experience of the diary writers.

It should not be surprising to discover that Anne's diary includes references to religious differences, considering that her family was forced into hiding because they were Jewish. What is intriguing is the variety of perspectives recorded in her writing that could spark for teachers and learners a variety of interesting questions about religious diversity. For example, in one instance Anne seems to express sarcasm and a degree of despair related to religious differences. Here, Anne records her thoughts about a copy of a bishop's letter to churchgoers that a visitor to the family's hiding place (Henk) brought for them to read. She wrote,

It was very fine and inspiring. "Do not rest, people of the Netherlands, everyone is fighting with his own weapons to free the country, the people and their religion." "Give help, be generous, and do not dismay!" is what they cry from the pulpit, just like that. Will it help? It won't help the people of our religion. (p. 67)

However, in another example, Anne demonstrates interest in and a sense of humor about religious differences when she wrote,

To give me something new to begin as well, Daddy asked Koophuis [another visitor to the family's hiding place] for a children's Bible so that I could find out something about the New Testament at last.

"Do you want to give Anne a Bible for Chanuka?" asked Margot [Anne's elder sister], somewhat perturbed.

“Yes—er, I think St. Nicholas Day is a better occasion,”
answered Daddy, “Jesus just doesn’t go with Chanuka”.
(p. 114)

With the revelation of these kinds of excerpts from Anne’s diary, students might be intrigued to discover more about perspectives on religious diversity in Europe during the Second World War.

In her diary, Thura provides insight into her own religious faith, writing, for example:

One thing that’s been happening lately is that whenever the bombing starts, dozens of people go to the mosques and call out Allah’s name and shout ‘God is great’ from the tops of the minarets right until the attacks are over. Everyone can hear them, and we all find it reassuring – it gives us the feeling that God’s watching over us. (p. 53)

In another example, Thura provides insights into her understanding of the practices of other religions, recording: *We usually sleep in on Friday, because for us it’s the start of the weekend. It’s also a special day for Muslims, because it’s the day when we go to pray in the mosque – like Christians go to church on Sundays, and Jews go to the synagogue on Saturdays. (p. 65)* Teachers could use such examples as an entry point into exploring contemporary Islamic religious perspectives, helping students pose questions about how Thura’s point of view fits within the broader ideological context.

Despite the notion that the Bosnian war was, at least in part, the result of religious differences, Zlata’s diary shows how, at least for her, and her family and friends, religious diversity was normalized. Zlata casually alludes to the multiple religions practiced in her country. For example, she writes about sending packages to family and friends using “*Caritas (The Catholic humanitarian aid and relief organization.)*” (p. 9); she indicates that her family and friends normally celebrate a Muslim holy day, writing “*Today is Bairam (a Muslim religious holiday). There aren’t many people in the streets. I guess it’s fear of the stories about Sarajevo being bombed*” (p. 29); and she talks about the plans of a family friend to escape the city using a Jewish convoy, writing, “*It looks like she’s really going to Zagreb. There’s a Jewish convoy leaving at the beginning of October and she’s trying to get on it*” (p. 84) Teachers could not only use Zlata’s diary as an entry point to explore religious diversity, but could also use her writing to show how people living within a particular circumstance can hold perspectives that are not well represented in media stories shared in other parts of the world.

Gender Perspectives

Three main ideas about gender emerged as I used the guiding questions above, in the critical examination of the three diaries. All three diary writers wrote about (1) parental/family attitudes toward gender equity; (2) societal opinions regarding gender differences; and (3) personal ‘gendered’, beliefs, hopes, and dreams. Each diary writer

addressed these ideas out of her particular historical and cultural context, so it makes sense to examine examples drawn from each diary separately.

Evidence from Zlata's diary reveals an almost nonchalant attitude about gendered roles. The notion that males and females are capable in both the private and public spheres seems normalized within Zlata's family. For example, Zlata wrote, in an offhand fashion, "*Mommy goes to work at her new office. ... Daddy doesn't go to work. The two of us stay at home, waiting for Mommy. When the sirens go off we worry about how and when and if she'll get home. Oh, the relief when she walks in!*" (pp. 62-63) In terms of her personal beliefs, hopes and dreams, Zlata writes about her "*responsibilities — school, music lessons, I study, practice the piano*" (p. 24), without comment about gender expectations. When she discusses 'unfairness', or the disruption of her hopes and dreams, her main complaint is about the war, writing comments such as, "*I just know that the war is stealing years of our life and childhood from us.*" (p.118). However, Zlata's diary does make it clear that there are societal opinions in circulation in Sarajevo about the proper behaviours expected of girls. In describing her attendance at a United Nations Protection Force Christmas show, Zlata wrote: "*...they gave out the Christmas presents and sweets. The children stared pushing, almost fighting over them. I wasn't one of the lucky ones to get anything, because I didn't elbow my way through. What can I say? A nice little girl from a nice family. The "little lady" didn't get her present.*" (p. 106) The contrast between Zlata's family's perspectives related to gender and her society's opinions, could be used by teachers and learners as an entry point for exploring diverse gendered perspectives.

Thura's diary expresses a fascinating blend of progressive and traditional perspectives on gender. For example, on the one hand, her parents were willing to pay large fees to support Thura's education, which seems to indicate a positive attitude toward gender equity (or at least support for enhanced status for women). On Saturday, 17 May 1001, Thura wrote, "*All the students at my college have to pay fees, and Mum and Dad have sacrificed a lot to pay for me to go there. For a girl like me, studying at a place like that will give me a much more secure future.*" (p. 126) On the other hand, Thura's commentary goes on to indicate that a good education might be more about securing a good marriage than enhancing gender equity. In the diary entry recorded on 17 May 2001, Thura continues, "*...a much more secure future. Being a chemist is seen as a respectable job for women in my country, and lots of women prefer to go to chemists run by other women too. And as well as all that, girls who've been to the College of Pharmacology have better chances of making a good marriage.*" (p.126).

Societal perspectives related to gender are also complicated. For example, women living in large urban centres during Saddam's regime appear to have had quite a bit of freedom in the public sphere, while women living in rural areas did not. Thura wrote about her experience when her family stayed with cousins in a village during the bombing of Baghdad. The excerpt clearly shows that Thura, a 'city girl', is not used to living with the restrictions now imposed upon her in the village, demonstrating the complexity of gender perspectives that exist(ed) within Iraqi society.

Here in the village I have to dress differently when I go out. My whole body has to be covered and I have to walk in a way that is not natural to me. Usually I walk with my head held high, not like I'm hiding. But here I can't lift my eyes to somebody's face – I have to behave like someone who is shy or embarrassed. And I find it odd that women are expected to stay indoors looking after the children, rather than going out. This is a way of killing a woman's personality, but I have no choice, I have to do it. (pp. 81-82)

Thura's personal perspectives on gender are also fascinating blend of progressive and traditional. On the one hand she expresses the belief that women should be free and indicates some resentment toward the patriarchy in her country: "...we do want freedom for women – they shouldn't have to just stay at home. But we haven't got any choice – a man's opinion always counts for more than a woman's. In my country there's no such thing as women's liberation – even though women make up half of society. (p. 115). At the same time, Thura questions the notion that women should serve in the armed forces. She expressed her astonishment at seeing female American soldiers, asking "How could the Americans send women to fight in a war?(p. 50) and then later wrote:

We have heard about two women who have sacrificed themselves for their country. For us, this is a new thing. We've never heard of that before - women sacrificing themselves, fighting for their country, their land, their people. I believe that in a war, women must be strong if they lose a son or husband. But I don't believe women should fight. I have never understood why women go into the military in other countries. Women are best at giving love and kindness, not killing. (P. 72)

The notions expressed in Thura's diary, including the idea that women should be free, but not free to chose to fight for their country - that it is somehow 'okay' for men to fight while women should not - can provide intriguing divergences that can become entry points into the exploration of gendered perspectives.

Anne's parents appear to have a fairly progressive view of gender equity, especially considering the general point of view of their contemporaries. This is demonstrated in the following excerpt where Anne's mother stands up to one of the bossier members of the group who went into hiding with the Frank family. Anne recorded this conversation:

There is a great difference, Mrs. Van Daan," said Mummy, "between Margot and Peter [Van Daan's son]. In the first place Margot is a girl and girls are always more grownup than boys, secondly, Margot has read quite a lot of serious books and does not go in search of things that are forbidden her, and

thirdly, Margot is far more developed and intelligent, shown by the fact of her being in the fourth form at school. (p. 26)

However, Anne's diary also includes examples demonstrating the more usual societal opinions about gender differences. In another instance, Anne records an attack on her by Mrs. Van Daan, and Dussel [another resident of the Secret Annex], which demonstrates their opinion about what young women should want. Anne wrote: "*Now Dussel and Mrs. Van Daan continued together: 'You know much too much about things that are unsuitable for you, you've been brought up all wrong. ...You had better make haste, if you want to get a husband or fall in love.'*" (pp. 93-94) Examples such as these can prove to be interesting points of entry for learners to question the variety of ways in which girls were viewed and treated in mid-twentieth century Europe.

In her diary, Anne records her determination to have a life different from the women who are her role models. In one example, she wrote, "*I want to get on; I can't imagine that I would have to lead the some sort of life as Mummy and Mrs. Van Daan and all the women who do their work and are then forgotten. I must have something besides a husband and children, something that I can devote myself to!*" (p. 197). In another statement of her personal gendered goals and dreams, Anne expresses her hopes with passionate and heartbreaking clarity:

I am becoming still more independent of my parents, young as I am, I face life with more courage than Mummy; my feeling for justice is immovable, and truer than hers. I know what I want, I have a goal, an opinion, I have a religion and love. Let me be myself and then I am satisfied. I know that I'm a woman, a woman with inward strength and plenty of courage. If God lets me live, I shall attain more than Mummy ever has done, I shall not remain insignificant, I shall work in the world and for mankind! (p. 208)

Anne was clearly a feisty individual who wrote eloquently about goals she set for herself as a female living in mid-twentieth century Europe. Reading her diary was often heartbreaking because we know what she did not – that the fates would not let her live. With both its humor and its tragedy, Anne's diary also provides a powerful entry point that teachers can use for helping learners pose questions about the gendered perspectives in circulation during this time period.

...ETHNIC/CULTURAL DIVERSITIES

The three diaries I examined provide insight into perspectives on ethnic/cultural diversities in two ways - they provide insights into family/cultural traditions and practices; and insights into views about how ethnic/cultural difference caused, or was manipulated to cause, conflict.

Family/Cultural Traditions & Practices

Each diary writer I examined provides evidence for intimate insights into family and cultural practices. This evidence can act the basis for teachers and learners in ethnic/cultural perspective-taking. For example, Anne tells about how her family celebrated St. Nicholas Day (usually considered a Christian holiday) for the first time while living in the Secret Annex:

We didn't make much fuss about Chanuka: we just gave each other a few little presents and then we had the candles. Because of the shortage of candles we only had them alight for ten minutes, but it is all right as long as you have the song... ...Saturday, the evening of St. Nicholas Day, was much more fun. ...A large basket decorated with St. Nicholas paper stood in the corner and on top there was a mask of Black Peter. ...There was a nice little present for everyone, with a suitable poem attached. ...as none of us had ever celebrated St. Nicholas, it was a good way of starting. (pp. 57-58)

On the surface, this excerpt provides description of the 'observable' part of the Frank family's ethnic/cultural practices. However, teachers can use this to spark questions about beliefs that lie behind the traditions – for example, What beliefs lie behind Chanuka? - as well as questions that ask learners to ponder the 'unusual' aspects of the event – for example: Why did the Jewish families decide to celebrate St. Nicholas Day and why did they choose to do this for the first time while in hiding?

Zlata recorded family practices around birthday celebrations, which can be used as an entry point for young learners to compare and contrast personal practices/perspectives with those of other people. Zlata wrote: *It's my birthday tomorrow. Mommy is making a cake and all the rest, because we really celebrate in our house. One day is for my friends, that's December 3, and the next day is for family friends and relatives. Mommy and I are getting a tombola [a basket of party favors] together, and thinking up questions for the children's quiz. This year we have birthday cups, plates and napkins all with little red apples on them. (p. 12)*

Thura described a game familiar to members of her culture, which she played with friends to ease tension as they dealt with fears about the coming attack on Baghdad: *I sat with some of my friends and played beatha – a name game played with fast-moving hands and strips of papers – so we could forget our pain. In the game, our hands end up stacked one upon the other, so we took this as a sign that we would always be together. (p. 17).* Again, along with attending to the description of the 'observable' aspects of this game (perhaps comparing it to games played in other cultures), teachers can use this to spark conversations about beliefs and values - for example, about the meaning of 'hands stacked together'. Thura also provides insight into Iraqi cultural practices related to family good fortune. When her aunt and uncle, who had been out of touch for several days, join Thura's family in the village to which they had fled in the days leading up to the bombing of Baghdad, Thura wrote: *"...we decided to celebrate and give thanks to God by killing a lamb and giving the meat to the different families. In my culture,*

sacrificing a lamb in the name of God is a tradition after something good has happened to a family.” (pp. 75-76) This description offers another entry point into exploring diverse ethnic/cultural perspectives.

Ethnic/Cultural Differences as Cause of Conflict

One of the most poignant aspects of the diaries written by these girls as they lived through conflict is the insights they provide into their feelings about the ways in which ethnic/cultural difference caused or was manipulated to cause, conflict. Evidence drawn from their diaries provides powerful commentary to demonstrate this, so I include the following excerpts to exemplify this point, without much elaboration from me.

Expressing her sorrow and frustration about the conflict and persecution resulting from ethnic/cultural differences, Anne Frank wrote these entries in her diary:

Wednesday, 13 January, 1943

It is terrible outside. Day and night more of those poor miserable people are being dragged off, with nothing but a rucksack and a little money. On the way they are deprived even of these possessions. Families are torn apart, the men, women, and children all being separated. Children coming home from school find that their parents have disappeared. Women return from shopping to find their homes shut up and their families gone.

The Dutch people are anxious too, their sons are being sent to Germany. Everyone is afraid. ... And every night hundreds of planes fly over Holland and go to German towns, where the earth is plowed up by their bombs, and every hour hundreds and thousands of people are killed in Russia and Africa. No one is able to keep out of it, the whole globe is waging war and although it is going better for the Allies, the end is not yet in sight. (p. 63)

Tuesday, 11 April 1944

We have been pointedly reminded that we are in hiding, that we are Jews in chains, chained to one spot without any rights, but with a thousand duties. We Jews mustn't show our feelings, must be brave and strong must accept all inconveniences and not grumble, must do what is within our power and trust in God. Sometime this terrible war will be over. Surely the time will come when we are people again, and not just Jews. (p. 207)

Even at her young age, Zlata eloquently expresses her puzzlement, anger, and frustration over the politics of ethnic/cultural conflict. (Please note: when Zlata uses “kids” with quotation marks, she is referring to politicians and military decision-makers.)

Thursday, November 19, 1992

Nothing new on the political front. They are adopting some resolutions, the "kids" are negotiating, and we are dying, freezing, starving, crying, parting

with our friends, leaving our loved ones. I keep wanting to explain these stupid politics to myself, because it seems to me that politics caused this war, making it our everyday reality... It looks to me as though these politics mean Serbs, Croats and Muslims. But they are all people. They are all the same. They all look like people, there's no difference. They all have arms, legs and heads, they walk and talk, but now there's "something" that wants to make them different.

Among my girlfriends, among our friends, in our family, there are Serbs and Croats and Muslims. It's a mixed group and I never knew who was a Serb, a Croat or a Muslim. Now politics has started meddling around. It has put an "S" on Serbs, an "M" on Muslims and a "C" on Croats, it wants to separate them....

Why is politics making us unhappy, separating us, when we ourselves know who is good and who isn't? We mix with the good, not with the bad. And among the good there are Serbs and Croats and Muslims, just as there are among the bad. I simply don't understand it. Of course, I'm "young," and politics are conducted by "grown-ups." But I think we "young" would do it better. We certainly wouldn't have chosen war.

The "kids" really are playing, which is why us kids are not playing, we are living in fear, we are suffering, we are not enjoying the sun and flowers, we are not enjoying our childhood. WE ARE CRYING. (pp. 96-97)

Thura expressed her fears and puzzlement about conflict and political wrangling, and provides powerful insights into her fears about colonization, in the following excerpts from her diary.

Tuesday, 1 April 2003

They are showing films on the TV about the war between the Iranians and the Iraqis. They show how people get killed, and how they lose their arms and their legs and how they suffer. They show the bodies in the desert. All these are innocent people who get involved in war. They die because of people with big egos who are looking for power. Innocent people have to kill each other for this reason; this stupid reason. (p. 52)

Wednesday, 9 April 2003

Today's been a really exceptional day: the biggest statue of Saddam in Baghdad was pulled down. I had a kind of empty feeling inside, and tears in my eyes. I watched as an American soldier climbed up on top of the statue and wrapped the American flag round its head. No, I thought, it can't be true: Iraq an American colony.The end came on Wednesday 9 April 2003. I'll never forget it. It had a huge impact on the rest of the world too, like 11 September 2001 did, when the Twin Towers fell in New York. And just like the Americans will never forget that day, no Iraqi will ever forget 9 April, either. The strange thing is that there's a nine in both dates, which is one thing the Iraqis and the Americans have in common. (pp. 84-85)

Saturday, 12 April 2003

We saw plenty of Americans close up. One was around my age. He had beautiful sunglasses, and when I got close I could see he was really handsome. I don't know why this soldier in particular caught my eye - it wasn't just the colour of his skin, it was something about him, his way of standing. I had all sorts of questions I wanted to ask him, to do with the way we saw him and the way he saw us. Will we and the Americans ever come to understand each another? Will I be able to talk to that soldier one day - that soldier, who's free to go wherever he likes in my country now? Are they more afraid of us than we are of them? (p. 91)

In this last excerpt, Thura provides compelling and intriguing questions. Teachers and students could use these as ponder points for students to contemplate comparing Thura's Iraqi perspective with other contemporary ethnic/cultural perspectives. .

Pondering the circumstances that generated the fear, frustration, anger, and puzzlement expressed by Anne, Zlata and Thura will certainly assist teachers and learners in entering into historical perspective-taking. Questions can be raised about the power of differing ideologies and ethnic/cultural perspectives in causing conflict and students can explore the degree to which evidence indicates that such perspectives influenced how the diary writer experienced the conflicts occurring around them.

CONCLUSION

I believe these examples demonstrate that diaries can offer powerful insights for teachers and learners. But thoughtful and skillful de- and re-construction of the thoughts, emotions and motivations of diary writers is necessary if learners are to develop meaningful understanding of historical perspective. Teachers will need to spend time helping learners develop critical knowledge construction skills. Teachers can utilize the adaptation of Collingwood's method, mentioned above (Lemisko, 2004), or other similar inquiry approaches can be used.

Teachers must also help learners come to understand the tensions involved historical work. While it is the case that in trying get to the 'inside', readers/learners need to link to that which is familiar in diaries to feel some sense of relationship with the document creator (Collingwood, 1993/1946; Reeves, 1980), readers/learners cannot let familiarity blind them to that which is different. Wineburg (1999) cautions "On the one hand, we need to feel kinship with the people we study, for this is exactly what engages our interest and makes us feel connected. [On the other hand we must recognize] the strangeness of the past" (p. 490) so that we can acknowledge differences. This is a tricky balance which requires explicit recognition of contextual and cultural similarities and differentiations so that learners can develop perspective consciousness – that recognition that our personal view of the world is not universally shared (Hanvey, 1976). As Wineburg (1999) notes, it is the strangeness of the past that "offers the possibility of surprise and amazement, of encountering people, places, and times that spur us to

reconsider how we see ourselves as human beings. An encounter with this past can be mind-expanding in the best sense of the term” (p. 490).

Diaries can be examined using critical inquiry processes to explore classed, gendered, religious and ethnic/cultural perspectives through the eyes of the diary writers. When used thoughtfully and skillfully diaries help us gain access to the inside of human actions, helping us develop empathetic understandings of people in all our glorious complexity.

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Notes

¹ Please note: rather than using formal APA style repetitively for citing examples drawn from the three diaries, I have simply included the page number on which the quotations can be found.