

Designing a Metaphor-Oriented Holocaust Fiction Lesson in a Critical Reading Course for Thai English Majors

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Abstract

Conceptual metaphors shape how people use language and make sense of human experience. Holocaust fiction, in particular, offers a metaphor-rich context for cultivating empathy and critical thinking, which are widely regarded as essential 21st-century skills for global citizenship. Drawing on a lesson originally designed for secondary-school learners, this article proposes a metaphor-oriented Holocaust-fiction lesson for a university critical reading course and situates it within a 15-week syllabus for Thai English-major undergraduates. The planned lesson includes careful text selection, trauma-sensitive scaffolding, and activities that guide students from metaphor noticing and mapping to reflective discussion and short analytical writing. To make the design usable for other practitioners, the article also explains how the lesson connects with earlier and later course units, especially work on fact versus opinion, tone and stance, and inference. Rather than reporting empirical classroom data, it offers a practitioner-researcher's forward-looking reflection on anticipated pedagogical affordances such as increased metaphor awareness, deeper critical reading, and enhanced ethical engagement with historical atrocity as well as likely challenges related to linguistic difficulty, historical distance, emotional sensitivity, and institutional constraints. The article concludes with suggestions for implementing and systematically investigating Holocaust-fiction-based critical reading lessons in Thai ELT higher education.

Therefore, critical reading and ethical literacy contribute to learners' social awareness, empathy, and global citizenship, which are important dimensions of social well-being and quality of life.

Keywords: Conceptual metaphor / Critical reading / ELT pedagogy / Holocaust fiction / Thai higher education

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Introduction

Numerous Thai universities continue to prioritize examination-oriented approaches in English language teaching and assessment. As a result, classroom instruction frequently emphasizes grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension exercises designed to prepare students for standardized tests rather than higher-order interpretive skills such as critical reading and critical literacy. This examination-driven orientation has been widely recognized as a continuing challenge in Thai ELT contexts (Ratanaruamkarn et al., 2023). Grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension exercises that simulate standardized tests consume significant classroom time. While these methods may assist students in navigating high-stakes assessments, they provide minimal direct engagement with critical reading, metaphor, or intricate literature. In the curriculum, literary works are often employed for linguistic input rather than for examining ethical dilemmas, historical consciousness, or global citizenship.

Despite increasing recognition of the importance of critical reading in higher education, many Thai English-major students have limited opportunities to engage with texts that require higher-order interpretation, evaluation, and critical reflection. Recent studies indicate that Thai EFL learners tend to rely on lower-order reading strategies while experiencing difficulties in interpreting complex academic texts, evaluating arguments, and constructing critical responses. Vocabulary limitations and insufficient exposure to analytically demanding texts remain major obstacles to developing critical reading competence. As a PhD researcher specializing in Holocaust fiction conceptual metaphors and an English language lecturer at a Thai university, my research has analyzed how *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* and *The Librarian of Auschwitz* employ metaphors of light and darkness, enumeration, journey, and knowledge to illustrate pain, survival, and resilience. My daily observations indicate that numerous Thai English-major students possess limited opportunities to engage with texts that compel them to contemplate moral and historical dilemmas. The integration of these two roles has prompted me to thoughtfully contemplate the incorporation of metaphorical Holocaust narratives in a critical reading course for English majors.

Students in my class find it challenging to analyze tone, stance, connotation, implicature, and metaphor beyond merely identifying the main idea. They may identify explicit information but find it challenging to articulate how an author positions readers, conveys perspectives, or influences emotional responses through figurative language. There is little Thai ELT literature that offers concrete frameworks for using challenging texts such as

Holocaust fiction in ways that are both linguistically productive and ethically responsible. Although recent studies have explored various approaches to teaching critical reading in Thailand, including literature-based instruction and multimodal pedagogies, relatively few studies provide explicit pedagogical frameworks for teaching historically sensitive and linguistically demanding literary texts such as Holocaust fiction within Thai university ELT classrooms. Consequently, practical guidance for integrating metaphor analysis, critical literacy, and trauma-sensitive pedagogy remains limited. This gap compels practitioner-researchers such as myself to formulate Thai ELT classes that integrate critical reading, metaphorical understanding, and nuanced historical content.

A lesson utilizing excerpts from Holocaust fiction can help address that deficiency. The lesson will be incorporated into a 15-week Critical Reading course for Thai English-major undergraduates at a juncture in the syllabus when students have addressed text structure, claim reason evidence, fact versus opinion, and AI literacy and are beginning to concentrate on meaning, tone, stance, and the author's intent. The author elucidates the text selection, scaffolding, and classroom activities of the lesson, demonstrating their connection to other curriculum units. The author subsequently examines the anticipated pedagogical advantages and obstacles of such a lesson in a Thai university and propose future classroom-based research. This paper presents a practice-oriented methodology and reflection from a Thai ELT practitioner-researcher intending to integrate Holocaust fiction into a critical reading curriculum.

Conceptual and Pedagogical Background

This manuscript presents a practitioner-researcher design study that proposes the integration of metaphor-oriented Holocaust fiction into a university-level Critical Reading course for Thai English-major undergraduates. Grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1993; Kövecses, 2010, 2021), the study outlines a two-week instructional unit embedded within a 15-week syllabus and considers its potential pedagogical affordances and constraints within Thai higher education.

Importantly, this article does not report empirical classroom data. Rather, it offers a forward-looking pedagogical design and theoretical reflection, aiming to bridge insights from metaphor research with ELT classroom practice. This orientation is particularly relevant in contexts where reading instruction remains predominantly exam-oriented and focused on surface-level comprehension, with limited emphasis on critical interpretation, metaphor awareness, and ethical engagement with texts.

Within this framework, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) is used as a pedagogical lens to support students' engagement with figurative language and deeper meaning-making processes. The proposed lesson design draws on Holocaust fiction as a metaphor-rich genre that may facilitate exploration of themes such as trauma, survival, and resilience. At the same time, the study adopts a cautious stance: it does not claim that CAT-based instruction directly enhances students' critical thinking ability. Demonstrating such effects would require a systematic empirical design, such as pretest and post-test measures.

Instead, this article seeks to illustrate how CMT informed pedagogy can be used to support and scaffold the development of critical reading and thinking processes. Specifically, it explores how metaphor-oriented instruction may guide students from recognizing figurative language to interpreting tone, stance, and underlying assumptions within texts. In doing so, the study contributes a theoretically grounded and pedagogically explicit model that connects metaphor analysis with critical literacy practices in ELT contexts.

The Planned Critical Reading Course and Syllabus

Course context

This critical reading course is for second-year Thai English-major students at a private university in Thailand (hereafter University A). The approximated CEFR level of students ranges from A2 to B1. This course is about essential reading competencies, including differentiating between facts and opinions, formulating interpretations, and making deductions. This course focuses on making judgments and articulating understanding through written analysis. It also aims to achieve five course learning outcomes (CLOs), which are as follows:

- CLO1: Identify and distinguish facts and opinions across genres, citing linguistic cues (evaluatives, modals, and attributions) and giving a brief justification.
- CLO2: Analyze text structure using Claim–Reason–Evidence (CRE) and argument mapping, and produce a focused analytical paragraph.
- CLO3: Interpret meaning, tone, stance, connotation/implicature, and writer's purpose with text-based evidence.
- CLO4: Make inferences from textual cues (bridging vs. elaborative coherence) and from data/graphs/tables accurately.
- CLO5: Evaluate headlines, framing, bias, and source credibility (including basic AI-literacy checks) to make a justified judgement.

CMT lessons can strengthen students' critical reading and thinking skills by helping them distinguish facts from opinions through attention to language cues like evaluatives, modals, and attribution (CLO1). They also support structured reasoning by guiding students to break down arguments into Claim–Reason–Evidence and develop clear analytical writing (CLO2). Through close reading, CMT promotes deeper interpretation of tone, stance, and purpose using textual evidence (CLO3), while also building inference skills from both written texts and visual data (CLO4). Finally, CMT equips students to critically evaluate media by analyzing headlines, bias, framing, and source credibility, including basic awareness of AI-generated content (CLO5).

Instructional Pathway for Developing Critical Reading through Conceptual Metaphor

Building on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2021), this study proposes a pedagogical framework that explains how metaphor-oriented instruction facilitates the development of students' critical thinking ability in EFL contexts. Rather than treating metaphor as a purely linguistic feature, this framework conceptualizes metaphor as a cognitive entry point into deeper layers of meaning-making, interpretation, and critique.

Specifically, critical thinking is understood not as an isolated skill but as an emergent outcome of a structured progression of interpretive processes, which can be scaffolded through classroom instruction. The framework proposes the following developmental pathway:

Core Progression of Meaning-Making

Metaphor structures meaning → shapes emotional tone → reveals authorial stance
→ exposes ideological assumptions → enables critical thinking

Metaphor structures meaning suggests that metaphors are not merely decorative language but cognitive tools that organize abstract experiences and guide readers' understanding of a text (Kövecses, 2021). As meaning is constructed through metaphor, it subsequently shapes the emotional tone of the text, influencing how readers perceive emotions such as hope, fear, despair, and resilience (Huynh & Nguyen, 2024). Metaphorical expressions help create feelings such as hope, despair, fear, resilience, or uncertainty, allowing readers to perceive the emotional atmosphere embedded in the discourse. This emotional tone further reveals the author's stance, reflecting evaluative positions and communicative intentions encoded through metaphorical language (Huynh & Nguyen, 2024).

By examining how metaphors influence mood and evaluation, readers can identify the author's attitude, perspective, and intention toward the subject matter and the audience. The authorial stance then exposes underlying ideological assumptions embedded in discourse, allowing readers to recognize values, power relations, and cultural perspectives represented in the text (Jiang & Zhao, 2024). Through deeper analysis, readers can uncover the values, beliefs, power relations, and cultural assumptions embedded in the text. In this way, metaphor becomes a means of revealing how ideology operates beneath the surface of language. Finally, tracing the progression from metaphor to ideology enables critical thinking by encouraging readers to question assumptions, evaluate evidence, and construct independent interpretations, which are central goals of critical literacy (Huh et al., 2021; Roe et al., 2025). By tracing how metaphor structures meaning, shapes emotion, reveals stance, and exposes ideology, readers develop the ability to question, evaluate, and interpret texts more critically and independently (Huh et al., 2021; Roe et al., 2025).

Overview of 15-week syllabus

The table below shows the planned syllabus for the critical reading course. (see Table 1)

Table 1 15-week syllabus

Weeks	Course content
Week 1	Course introduction and syllabus
Week 2-3	Chapter 1 – Text structure; Claim–Reason–Evidence (CRE)
Week 4	Chapter 2 – Fact vs. opinion; AI literacy; identifying fact vs opinion in different genres
Week 5	assignment A: analytical paragraph
Week 6	Chapter 3 – Meaning, tone, stance; connotation, implicature, writer's purpose
Week 7	assignment B: analytical paragraph
Week 8	Midterm exam
Week 9	Midterm Break
Week 10	Self-study
Week 11	Chapter 4 – Headlines, judgement, and bias

Weeks	Course content
Week 12	Chapter 5 – Inference from textual cues; bridging vs elaborative inference; inference from different genres (Week 12) in-class activity and assignment C: analytical paragraph
Week 13	
Week 14	Presentation week
Week 15	Final exam

Rationale for locating the Holocaust-fiction lesson in Chapter 3 (Weeks 6–7)

By week 6, students will be able to analyze the text structure and claim-reason-evidence (CRE) from weeks 2 and 3. They must differentiate between fact and opinion when addressing AI literacy and be capable of verifying it. Chapter 3 will examine the intricacies of meaning, encompassing tone, stance, connotation, implicature, and the author's intent. The initial extensive literary passage will be an excerpt from Holocaust fiction. Students are encouraged to engage with a range of genres, and the chosen excerpts provide a particularly rich site for examining metaphor. Students may analyze the tone, perspective, and underlying values of the atrocities committed in concentration camps. Students can verify facts, identify the author's intent and viewpoint, and ascertain whether the novel includes fictional elements related to Auschwitz.

Planned connections to other weeks

By using the excerpt from the novels, *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* and *The Librarian of Auschwitz*, the lecturer can apply the backward link and forward link between the chapters. For the backward link, the lecturer can apply CRE to characters and the narrator's claims about camp life. The students are also encouraged to do research on the Auschwitz camp to revisit facts vs. opinions within testimony, memory, and fictionalization. For the forward connection, the lecturer can reuse a short passage in Chapter 5 when teaching inference and coherence. They could compare the inferences drawn from the literary text with those derived from literary genres that focus on conflict or human rights. Graphs and tables can also be part of making the inferences.

In Week 2–3, the focus is on CRE and text structure. Students apply Claim–Reason–Evidence analysis to characters' claims and narrator perspectives by asking: Who says what? What evidence supports it? In Week 4, the focus shifts to fact versus opinion and AI literacy.

Students evaluate historical claims about Auschwitz and learn to distinguish fact, memory, and fictionalization. In Week 6, students examine metaphor, tone, and stance through Holocaust fiction lessons. They analyze how metaphor shapes tone and how tone reveals stance, focusing on how language shapes meaning and perspective. In Week 12, students work on inference and coherence. They reuse literary excerpts for inference-based tasks and compare literary and non-literary texts related to conflict, human rights, and data. The final stage is the outcome, which is integrated critical reading skills. This outcome combines CRE analysis, evaluation, interpretation, and inference, showing that students gradually develop a comprehensive ability to read, analyze, and critique texts critically.

Text Selection and Lesson Design

Selecting texts from the Holocaust novels

The class will use excerpts from *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* and *The Librarian of Auschwitz*, which demonstrate rich metaphorical use. The criteria of the selection include (a) dense but teachable metaphor clusters (e.g., light / darkness, numbers, journey, book / knowledge); (b) language slightly above students' level but scaffoldable; (c) emotional power that avoids graphic descriptions and is suitable for trauma-sensitive pedagogy; and (d) length manageable within 2 hours and 20 minutes.

Planned lesson sequence within Weeks 6-7

The teaching process for each week will include the students' presentation slides. Thereafter, the flow will follow the procedures here.

First, the lecturer will go through the pre-reading stage. The lecturer will briefly activate background knowledge using images and keywords about Auschwitz concentration camp, gates, numbers, light, darkness, books, etc., along with introducing the conceptual metaphor, its function, and definition. Then, they will elicit everyday metaphors students already know. For example, demonstrate to the students the concept of life is a journey, "see the light," or "kept in the dark." Students will be informed about setting classroom norms for respectful discussions of sensitive historical trauma and will be warned that they may encounter images of victims, camp environments, and related topics.

Second, in the while-reading stage, the class engages in guided reading of the chosen excerpt(s) with support for key vocabulary. For the metaphor-noticing task, students will

underline phrases that seem non-literal and share mental images in pairs. They could share their opinions and what they will uncover in class to encourage participation.

Third, students will move on to the metaphor mapping stage. The lecturer will provide a teacher-modelled table of source and target domains using one example from the excerpt. Let students work in pairs or groups to complete mappings for other metaphors they will discover. For example, if they discover light that corresponds to hope, they may need to express their opinions of how they map this concept. Thereafter, the lecturer will conduct a whole-class discussion on how these metaphors shape understanding of camp life and survival.

Fourth, it then comes to the post-reading reflection stage. Small groups will discuss questions about tone, stance, and the author's purpose, using the questions provided in the presentation slides. They will be assigned to write a short reflection on how students connect one metaphor to a broader question about injustice, atrocity, and human rights without requiring disclosure of personal trauma.

In addition to these assignments, there is an optional extension available for each week. They will be encouraged to compare with a Thai proverb or metaphor about suffering, hope, memory, etc. In addition to these activities, students will be encouraged to connect the text to contemporary issues for contemplation, such as discrimination, war, and refugees, through critical discussions or analytical paragraph writing on assigned topics.

Integration with course assessment

The selected excerpts are used as the basis for Assignment B, requiring students to produce an analytical paragraph that evaluates tone, stance, metaphor, authorial purpose, and meaning. Alternatively, students may select a topic previously studied in the course and develop it into an analytical paragraph for their Week 14 presentation.

The analytical paragraph (see picture 1) (Assignments A–C) is assessed with a 10-point analytic rubric covering Content (4 points), Organisation (3 points), and Grammar and Language Use (3 points). Content focuses on the accuracy and depth of students' analysis of tone, stance, and metaphor with text-based evidence; Organisation addresses paragraph structure and coherence; and Grammar and Language Use evaluates overall accuracy and the appropriateness of academic vocabulary. (see figure 1)

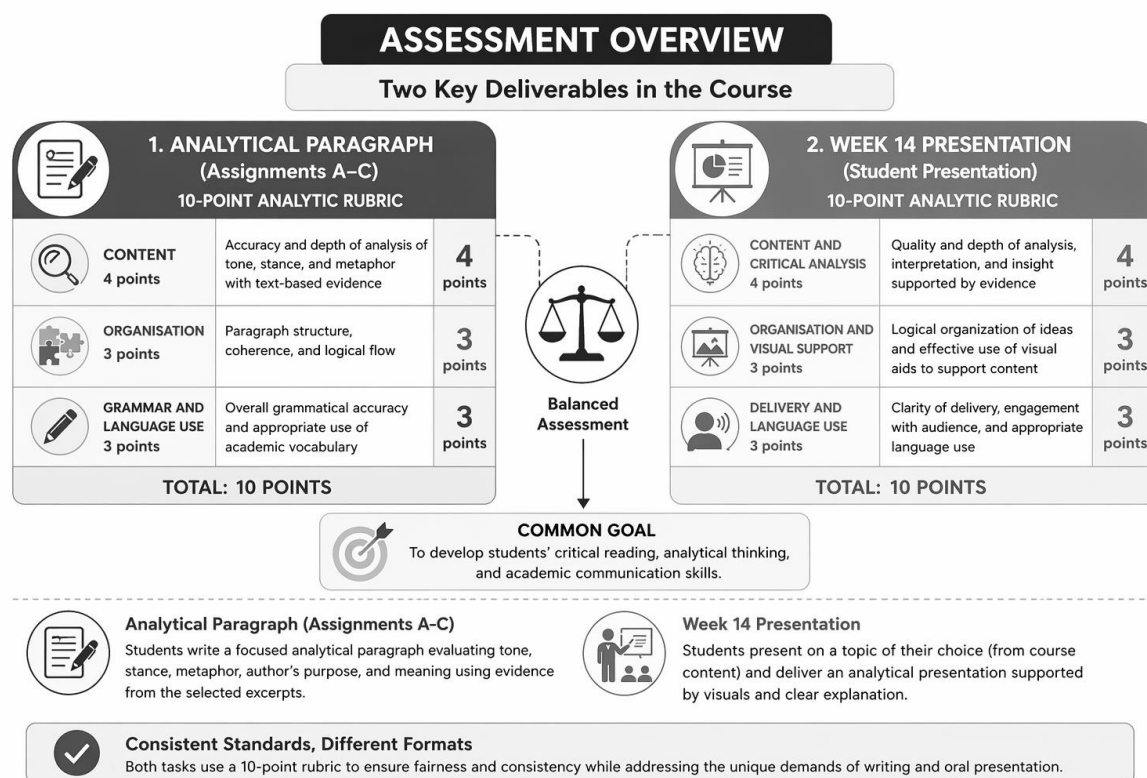


Figure 1. Assessment Framework for the Analytical Paragraph and Week 14 Presentation

Source: Created by the author (2026)

The Week 14 presentation (see Table 2) is evaluated with a similar 10-point rubric that emphasizes Content and Critical Analysis (4 points), Organization and Visual Support (3 points), and Delivery and Language Use (3 points).

Table 2 Rubric for presentation

Criteria	4	3	2	1	0
Content and critical analysis (4 pts)	- Shows clear and accurate understanding of the text/topic. - Provides critical analysis (e.g., tone, stance, metaphor, inference, bias), not just	- Mostly accurate understanding of the text/topic. - Includes some analysis, though parts are still descriptive. - Uses some evidence, but it is not connected to the point. - The course concepts are occasionally referred to, but not consistently.	- Understanding is partly incomplete or unclear. - Mainly summarizes with little analysis. - The text contains scant or weak examples. - Limited reference to critical reading concepts.	- Mostly off-topic or inaccurate. - There is a notable lack of analysis, with only vague comments being made. - The text lacks	- No presentation or completely irrelevant.

Criteria	4	3	2	1	0
	summary. - Uses specific evidence (quotations, examples, data) to support ideas. - Connects ideas to course concepts from Critical Reading.			significant supporting evidence.	
Organization and visual support (3 pts)		- Has a clear structure (introduction-body-conclusion). - Ideas follow a logical order; transitions are easy to follow. - Time is managed well. - Visuals (slides/handouts, if used) are clear, readable, and support the message.	- Basic structure is present but not always clear. - There is some logical order, but ideas occasionally jump around or repeat themselves. - Timing slightly rushed or slow. - Visuals are readable but may be crowded or only partly useful.	- Structure is unclear or confusing. - Ideas feel disconnected; it is difficult to follow the main line. - Poor time management. - Visuals (if any) are challenging to read or distracting.	- No clear structure or presentation was delivered.
Delivery and language use (3 pts)		- Speaks clearly and audibly; pace is easy to follow. - Maintains eye contact and engages the audience. - Very few language errors; meaning is always clear.	- Generally clear, but volume or pace is sometimes uneven. - There is a balance between maintaining eye contact and reading from notes or	- Difficult to hear or understand (very soft, too swift, or monotone). - Mostly reads from slides; little	- No delivery; the student does not speak.

Criteria	4	3	2	1	0
		- Uses appropriate academic vocabulary (e.g., "suggests," "implies," "positions the reader").	- slides. - Several language errors, but the message is still understandable. Vocabulary is sometimes basic or repetitive.	- audience engagement. - Frequent language errors that often confuse meaning.	

Teacher stance and constraints

Although the subject of the Holocaust can be very sensitive for students, the lecturer is required to decide to limit Holocaust-fiction work to one or two carefully designed lessons. Furthermore, they need to balance language-development objectives with ethical responsibility and emotional safety for students. In addition to the cultural distance and limited background on this topic among students, the lecturer still needs to choose appropriate language and excerpts from the novels. It is important to debrief and offer students choices or opt-out options. (see figure 2)

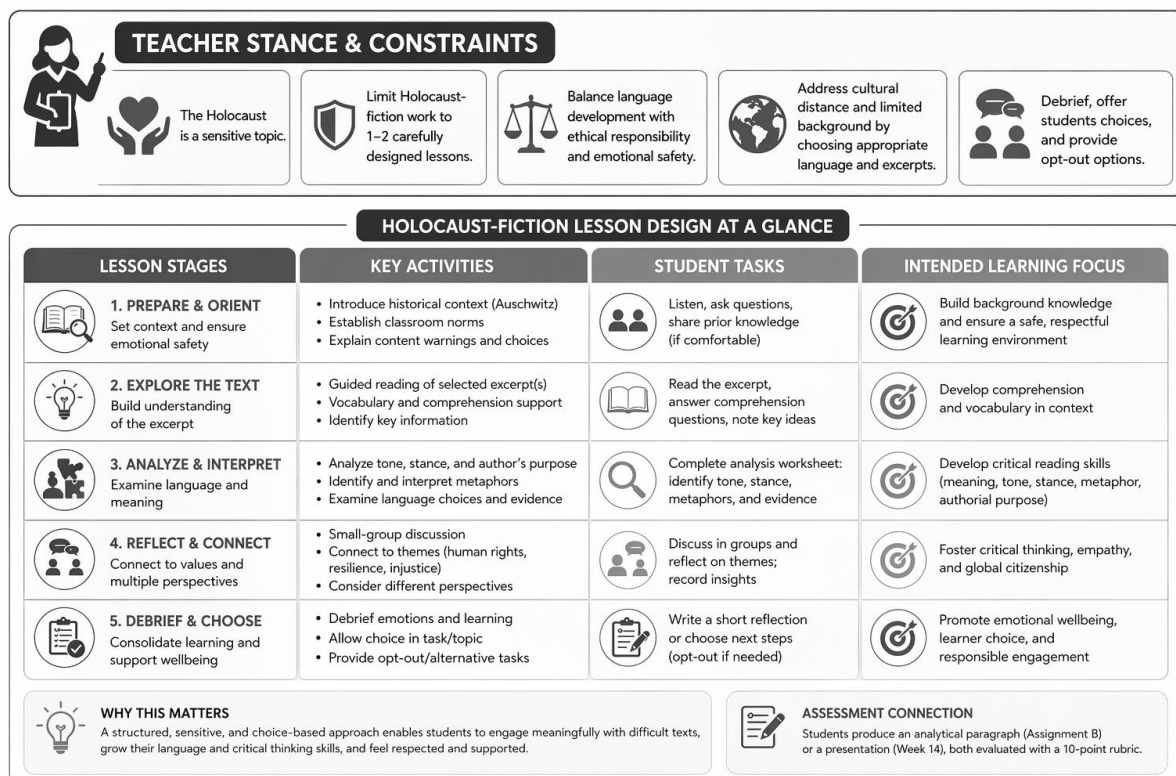


Figure 2. Overview of the Holocaust-Fiction Lesson Design and Teacher Considerations

Source: Created by the author (2026)

Anticipated Pedagogical Affordances and Challenges

Metaphorical pedagogy can be used to help facilitate students' awareness of figurative language in both literary and non-literary texts. It may also support the development of metaphor decoding skills across a range of contexts, including news media, social media, and academic discourse. Through guided engagement, students may begin to interpret implied meanings and reflect on representations of suffering, human rights, and empathy. This approach can also provide opportunities to explore how language constructs perspectives on victims, perpetrators, and bystanders.

When implemented with appropriate scaffolding, engaging with historically sensitive texts from a critical distance may encourage reflective thinking and contribute to students' ethical and emotional awareness. In addition, such pedagogical practices have the potential to connect global historical issues with students' contemporary understandings of discrimination and violence. However, these anticipated outcomes remain conceptual and would require empirical investigation to be substantiated. The texts present numerous challenges, including unfamiliar vocabulary, syntactic complexity, and historical references. A substantial scaffold is required to prevent overload. Moreover, historical and cultural disparities may pose challenges for students.

They may possess limited knowledge regarding World War II and the Holocaust, potentially resulting in a perception of these events as exotic or inconsequential without appropriate contextualization. This subject may cause distress or discomfort for some students, and there is a risk of unintentionally trivializing trauma or turning suffering into a form of 'interesting' classroom content. Ultimately, time limitations within a congested curriculum, particularly when evaluative frameworks emphasize grades over inquiry, render this approach challenging to execute in an actual classroom setting.

Planned strategies to address these challenges

To mitigate these challenges, the lecturer must possess fundamental background knowledge, utilize concise and accessible materials, and select less graphic excerpts along with explicit content warnings prior to instruction. Subsequent to the lesson, they ought to facilitate pair or group discussions and a comprehensive class debriefing. A rationale for the inclusion of the curriculum is required for alignment with assessments.

Reflections and Future Directions

As a practitioner-researcher, I contemplate the lesson's design, which seeks to elucidate the connection between research (metaphor analysis) and classroom practice. It generates a conflict between the aspirational objectives of critical literacy and the practical limitations within Thai higher education. A key limitation is that no empirical classroom data are yet available, although I plan to implement this lesson in a future offering of the course. In addition, any discussion of anticipated affordances and challenges remains necessarily speculative until the lesson is actually implemented. Future studies may implement this lesson in subsequent iterations of the critical reading course and examine its impact on students' metaphor awareness and critical reading. Classroom-based research questions may encompass topics such as alterations in metaphor awareness, student reflection, and writing stance. Other ELT practitioners are encouraged to consider sensitivity in literary texts for critical reading while engaging in applied linguistics discussions on metaphor pedagogy, trauma narratives, and global citizenship in ELT classrooms.

The suggested critical reading lesson has an ethical and social dimension beyond its pedagogical significance. The lesson exposes learners to the way metaphor, tone, stance and ideology shape texts on suffering, violence and human dignity. It takes learners beyond a literal interpretation to one that is ethically attuned. Through critical reading and ethical literacy, students' social awareness, empathy, and sense of global citizenship may all be strengthened important dimensions of social well-being and quality of life. Having students interrogate how texts assign victimhood, perpetration, and bystanding or historical culpability encourages those students to consider contemporary issues such as discrimination, exclusion, conflict, and human rights. In this way, critical reading is not just an academic skill, but a civil and humanistic practice. It allows students to consider the implications of language, respond sensitively to the experience of others, and participate more responsibly in pluralistic societies. Furthermore, this method aids in transformative learning as it enables to the learner's literature interpretation along with moral reflection and social engagement. So, by bringing critical literacy, metaphor analysis and ethically sensitive materials together, a community of compassionate global readers can be produced who reflect on the expression and meaning of texts. Therefore, critical reading and ethical literacy contribute to learners' social awareness, empathy, and global citizenship, which are important dimensions of social well-being and quality of life.

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