Lesson:
Pinochet’s Concentration Camps: 
Recounting History through Non-fiction Picture Books

OVERVIEW
In this lesson, students will watch and discuss video clips that show how two men in Chile coped with being prisoners in concentration camps during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Each student will then create a non-fiction picture book that tells the story of one of these men and provides historical context.

Storytelling is a strategy that can help students process intense events from history and develop feelings of empathy for those who have been affected by injustice and cruelty. To develop non-fiction picture books for this lesson, students will also combine the critical thinking and synthesis skills that are common to news writing with the creative process of weaving together relevant historical details, visuals and first-person experiences to form a distinctive story.

The video clips used in this lesson are from the film *Nostalgia for the Light*, a documentary that meditates on memory, history and eternity as it shows archaeologists digging for ancient civilizations, women searching for their loved ones and astronomers scanning the skies for new galaxies. To guide this exploration, filmmaker Patricio Guzmán links together reflections from interviews, sounds of the whistling winds from the Atacama Desert and striking imagery of the remains of pre-Columbian settlements, 19th-century mines and 20th-century concentration camps, as well as modern-day observatories and panoramic landscapes, in the desert. Please note that the film is in Spanish with English subtitles.

POV offers a lending library of DVDs that you can borrow anytime during the school year—FOR FREE! Get started by joining our Community Network.

OBJECTIVES
By the end of this lesson, students will:
- Discuss how two men in Chile coped with being prisoners in concentration camps under Pinochet’s regime.
- Research the historical context of these men’s imprisonment.
- Create non-fiction picture books that tell the stories of these men.

GRADE LEVELS
6-12

SUBJECT AREAS
Language Arts, Social Studies, World History

MATERIALS
- Internet access and equipment to show the class online video and maps and for students to conduct research
- Handout: Children’s Book Pre-writing Guide (PDF file)
- Baseball Saved Us, a children’s picture book by Ken Mochizuki (optional)

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED
One or two 50-minute class periods, depending on whether or not the project is completed outside of class.

FILM CLIPS
Clip 1: “We Felt Completely Free” (length: 4:20)
The clip begins at 31:40 with an aerial shot of Chacabuco concentration camp. It ends at 36:00 with the statement “He managed to preserve his inner freedom.”

Clip 2: “The Architect of Memory” (length 3:30)
The clip begins at 35:31 with a shot of a man sitting at a desk. It ends at 39:01 when the man says, “…memorizing all the dimensions.”

Clip 3: “My Brother Was Dead” (length 3:40)
The clip begins at 53:42 with a woman walking and searching the ground. It ends at 57:22 with a shot of a photo of a man in the dirt.

ACTIVITY
1. Point out where Chile is located on a map. Explain that in 1973, Chilean president Salvador Allende was overthrown during a violent military uprising led by Augusto Pinochet, who became the new president. Pinochet suppressed any resistance to his administration through a campaign of violence that included secret prisons, torture and the murder of thousands of people.

2. Show students where Chile’s Atacama Desert is located on a map. Tell students that the Atacama is one of the driest places on earth and has some of the clearest skies for looking at the stars. It was also the location of Chacabuco, the biggest concentration camp during Pinochet’s dictatorship. Show Clip 1 (length 4:20) and ask students to take notes on how the man featured in the clip coped with being a prisoner at Chacabuco. Have them also pay close attention to the imagery the filmmaker uses to tell this story.

3. Discuss:
   - Why do you think a group of prisoners in the concentration camp began to study the stars? What were the benefits?
   - What was the reaction of camp guards to the group’s interest in astronomy? What motivated this response?
• How did studying the stars help Luis preserve his dignity in spite of the injustices he faced?

4. Tell students that they are going to watch a film clip that shows an architect named Miguel who was imprisoned in five detention centers during Pinochet’s dictatorship. Ask students to take notes on how Miguel coped with his life as a prisoner, as well as on the imagery used by the filmmaker to tell his story. Then, show Clip 2 (length 3:30).

5. Discuss:
• How did Miguel benefit from his careful measurements of the camps? How might others? What is the value of such information?
• How were Miguel’s efforts a form of resistance? How do they affirm his humanity?
• How did Miguel and Luis experience both “captivity” and “freedom” as prisoners?
• What can be learned from these men’s responses to adversity and persecution?
• How did the visuals used by filmmaker Patricio Guzmán help to tell each story?

6. Point out that in the film, Guzmán follows a general pattern of interspersing images of the desert with historical details and quotes from interviews. Explain that students will now use similar techniques to create non-fiction picture books for young readers. Each book will feature the experience of either Luis or Miguel. To show the class an example of how to do this, you can read them the book *Baseball Saved Us* by Ken Mochizuki. This book is a fictional account of a young Japanese-American boy who plays baseball as a way of coping with life in an internment camp in the United States during World War II.

7. Get students started on their own books by giving each a copy of the *Children’s Book Pre-writing Guide* and having them complete each section. As needed, students should gather details by re-watching the clips about Luis and Miguel and conducting additional research on Pinochet’s dictatorship to provide context for the men’s experiences. (See the Resources section for a list of sites to get them started.) Students should then draft the texts of their stories, break them down into separate pages and add images to illustrate each page. Visuals might include simple sketches, computer graphics, images from the Internet or illustrations created in collaboration with art students at your school.

**EXTENSIONS**

1. Share and analyze the stories that students created for the main activity. Have student pairs who wrote about the same person read their stories to each other and then compare and contrast them in a Venn diagram. What might account for any differences?

2. Study additional stories of those in Chile who suffered under Pinochet’s regime. Explain that after Pinochet took power in 1973, the military removed a number of men from their families and is presumed to have executed them by firing squad and buried their bodies in a secret grave in the Atacama Desert. Since that time, a group of women
have painstakingly walked the desert with shovels, looking for clues that could reveal the
truth about what happened to their loved ones. Show students Clip 3 (length 3:40), in
which one of these women tells how she felt when part of her brother’s body was found.
Afterwards, have students reflect in writing on the perseverance and strength of these
women who seek the remains of their loved ones.

3. Explore the mystery of our origins. A key theme of *Nostalgia for the Light* is the
question: “Where do we come from?” Watch the whole film and have students take notes
on the information presented that relates to this question. Then research how science and
various religions answer this question and discuss those answers. Have students compare
and contrast their findings.

4. Use descriptive writing to create word pictures of a particular place. Begin by asking
students to close their eyes and try to imagine Chile’s Atacama Desert as you read aloud
this excerpt from Isabel Allende’s memoir *My Invented Country*:

I recall that my family and I, loaded with bundles, climbed onto a train
that traveled at a turtle’s pace through the inclement Atacama Desert
toward Bolivia. Sun, baked rocks, kilometers and kilometers of ghostly
solitudes, from time to time an abandoned cemetery, ruined buildings of
adobe and wood. It was a dry heat where not even flies survived. Thirst
was unquenchable. We drank water by the gallon, sucked oranges, and
had a hard time defending ourselves from the dust, which crept into
every cranny. Our lips were so chapped they bled, our ears hurt, we were
dehydrated. At night a cold hard as glass fell over us, while the moon
lighted the landscape with a blue splendor.

Display the excerpt and invite students to identify the language and sensory details that
Allende uses to “show” rather than “tell” what the Atacama is like. Then, have students
create word pictures of their own. Each should select a place in the local community to
describe. As a pre-writing exercise, they may find it helpful to use a Sense Chart
details about their chosen locations.

5. Conduct a deeper investigation of how people can experience both “freedom” and
“captivity” in the same circumstances. As a class, read books that can stimulate
discussion on this theme, such as:

- *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank
- *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck
- *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom
- *My Name is Asher Lev* by Chaim Potok
- *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe

These book suggestions include both stories of literal imprisonment and those with more
figurative situations of captivity, like family expectations or poverty. Have students
discuss how the protagonists of these books coped with their circumstances, and whether
they experienced a type of freedom as a result. Ask students to write essays that explain their thinking.

6. Explore additional POV and PBS films that address Latin American history, justice and healing or light and the night sky. Video, background information and classroom activities are provided online for each film.

- *The Flute Player* ([http://www.pbs.org/pov/thefluteplayer/](http://www.pbs.org/pov/thefluteplayer/)) tells the story of a Cambodian musician who returns to his country to face the dark shadows of his war-torn past and seek out surviving fellow musicians.
- *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator* ([http://www.pbs.org/pov/granito](http://www.pbs.org/pov/granito)) shows the process of collecting evidence to indict former Guatemalan dictator Efraín Ríos Montt for genocide. It also looks at how the families of those who “disappeared” are healing.
- *Las Madres: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo* ([http://www.pbs.org/pov/lasmadres/](http://www.pbs.org/pov/lasmadres/)) tells the story of a group of brave mothers in Argentina who stage weekly demonstrations demanding the return of their “disappeared” children and that the kidnappers be brought to justice.

**RELATED RESOURCES**

*The New York Times: Key Dates in Gen. Augusto Pinochet’s Career*
http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/10/world/americas/10cnd-pinochet-timeline.html
This timeline begins when Chilean president Salvador Allende names Augusto Pinochet commander of the army. It ends with Pinochet’s death in 2006.

*Nostalgia for the Light: Background*
http://nostalgiaforthelight.com/bkground.html
This timeline shows the historical context of the activities featured in the film.

*Nostalgia for the Light: Participants*
http://nostalgiaforthelight.com/particip.html
This page profiles the individuals featured in the film.

**POV Background: Augusto Pinochet’s Chile**
http://www.pbs.org/pov/nostalgiaforthelight/photo_gallery_background-pinochet-chile.php
This resource summarizes Pinochet’s 17-year dictatorship and his activities afterwards.

**POV Background: The Atacama Desert**
http://www.pbs.org/pov/nostalgiaforthelight/photo_gallery_map-atacama-desert.php
This resource summarizes the observatories in the Atacama and is accompanied by a map with the observatory locations identified, as well as several of the mass graves and concentration camps from Pinochet’s regime.

**STANDARDS**

[Common Core State Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects](http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards/)

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6-8.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details and well-structured event sequences.

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-12.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6-12.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6-12.9** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research.

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on
grade 8 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.2 Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text or issue under study.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.2 Analyze the main ideas and supporting details presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how the ideas clarify a topic, text or issue under study.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.2 Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

Content Knowledge: (http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/) a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Behavioral Studies, Standard 1: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity and behavior.

Behavioral Studies, Standard 4: Understands conflict, cooperation and interdependence among individuals, groups and institutions.

Geography, Standard 10: Understands the nature and complexity of Earth’s cultural mosaics.
Geography, Standard 13: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth’s surface.

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

World History, Standard 44: Understands the search for community, stability and peace in an interdependent world.

World History, Standard 45: Understands major global trends since World War II.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in secondary education and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive’s director of education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource website (now PBS Teachers) and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and northern Virginia.