Common Reading Program

SLS 1501: First-Year Experience

A Resource Guide:
Integrating *Determined* into the Classroom
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the Common Reading Program ................................................................. 2-3  
- Mission  
- What is the FIU Common Reading Program?  
- Why has FIU instituted a common reading program?  
- Common Reading History  
- How was this book selected?  
- Recommend a Book  
- How will this book be used in classes?  
- What should students do before the first day of classes?  
- Common Reading Essay Contest and Submission Link  
- Essay Prompt  

About the Author/Author Visit Information ...................................................... 4  

Common Reading in First Year Experience ...................................................... 5  
- Materials for Students to Review before Class  
- In-class Activities  
- General Talking/Discussion Points  

Topic Breakdown of the Course ...................................................................... 6-7  

Activities for Teaching ...................................................................................... 7  

Frost Art Museum Exhibit ............................................................................... 8  

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Thank you for all your contributions toward making the Common Reading Program a successful experience for our students!
ABOUT THE COMMON READING PROGRAM

Mission
The Common Reading Program affords students the opportunity of participating in a common curricular experience that creates community and a common ground for discussion. The program is tailored specifically for incoming first year students. Students are expected to have read the book before the first day of class and will join together with faculty and peers to discuss and think critically about key concepts. The Common Reading Program will encourage students to partake in intellectual engagement and will create a sense of community among newly admitted Panthers.

What is the FIU Common Reading Program?
The FIU Common Reading Program is targeted specifically at incoming first year students as an introduction to the academic expectations of the University. It is an effort to create a shared intellectual point of engagement for first year students and create a sense of community. As a FIU freshman, they will read the selected common reading book before the first day of class. Faculty and staff also read the book and engage students and others in discussions that challenge all to think critically about the text.

Why has FIU instituted a common reading program?
Common reading programs are increasingly popular features of first year programs at colleges and universities across the nation. After our pilot program in 2008, both students and instructors in our first year seminars reported a high level of communal and academic engagement as a result of integrating the common reading into the curriculum.

Common Reading History

- The Promise of a Pencil (2017-2018)
- In Order to Live (2016-2017)
- The Prince of Los Cucuyos (2015-2016)
- No Turning Back (2014-2015)
- Wine to Water (2013-2014)
- I'm Down (2012-2013)
- The Red Umbrella (2011-2012)
- A Chant to Soothe Wild Elephants (2010-2011)
- Funny in Farsi (2009-2010)

For more details concerning each Common Reading book, including book descriptions and videos of past author visits please go to this link: https://cse.fiu.edu/common-reading/common-reading-history/
How was this book selected?
The Common Reading Committee has faculty, staff, and student representation. After a number of books were recommended, several books were carefully reviewed and discussed. Before making a final determination the Committee members considered a variety of factors including interest, cost, readability, length, and applicability to our student population. All University community members are encouraged to make a suggestion for next year’s program.

Recommend a Book
All University community members are invited to make a suggestion for the common reading book selection. A variety of factors including cost, readability, length, and applicability to our student population are taken into consideration before a final selection is made. The student learning outcomes for the Common Reading Program are as follows:

- Model intellectual engagement by participating in a shared academic experience within the first year seminar
- Create a sense of community
- Demonstrate an understanding of diverse perspectives by exploring the distinct and/or common qualities in one’s own perspectives and those of others.
- Develop interest in reading and textual exploration.

Please visit this link to submit a recommendation: [https://cse.fiu.edu/common-reading/recommend-a-book/](https://cse.fiu.edu/common-reading/recommend-a-book/)

How will this book be used in classes?
The First Year Experience Seminar course has incorporated the common reading book into its curriculum. Students will be tested on material from the common reading book, and they will also write a paper related to the book and their own transition to college. Professors of other courses may choose to incorporate the book into their curriculum and/or classroom discussions.

What should students do before the first day of class?
- Read the book.
- Join our [Facebook page](http://Facebook) (FIU Common Reading).
- Frequently check our calendar of events: [https://cse.fiu.edu/common-reading/events/](https://cse.fiu.edu/common-reading/events/)

Common Reading Essay Contest and Submission Link
Every year, first year students are welcome to submit their essays for the Common Reading Essay Contest. The essay contest (with cash prizes) will be held in the Spring semester. Students will be able to upload their essays beginning in the Summer via this link: [https://library.fiu.edu/commonreading](https://library.fiu.edu/commonreading).

Essay Prompt
Martin’s story highlights the importance of hope and determination that helped him to persevere through the Holocaust. Using your critical thinking skills, select a theme from Martin’s story that you can relate to, and write a 2-3 page reflective essay. Be sure to include examples from Martin’s life and your life, and how you can relate the two.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR/AUTHOR VISIT

Martin Baranek

Martin Baranek was born in 1930 in Wierzbnik, Poland. He lived a happy life until Germany invaded Poland in 1939. At that time, Martin and other Jewish children were no longer permitted to attend school. Soon, all Jews were forced to turn in their valuables, wear yellow armbands, and move to a crowded ghetto, whose conditions worsened over time.

In 1942, the Germans prepared to liquidate the Wierzbnik ghetto. Martin and his parents had work permits for the local factories; however, a German officer confiscated Martin’s permit and sent him to the line bound for the trains to Treblinka. At the last moment, Martin escaped. His younger brother, Yechskel, most of his extended family, and the majority of Jews in the area were transported to Treblinka, where they were murdered.

Martin sneaked into the woodworking camp, where he found his mother, and worked as a slave labourer until July 1944. He and his father were then transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where he narrowly escaped the gas chambers twice, once by hiding in an oven and the second time because his uncle bribed a supervisor with a gold coin. Tragically, Martin’s father was not so fortunate.

In January 1945, after walking for days in sub-zero temperatures without food, water, or shelter, Martin and other prisoners came to the Mauthausen camp in Austria. Disease and starvation were rapidly overtaking the prisoners when the US army liberated them in May 1945.

Martin went to Palestine, where he fought in Israel’s War of Independence and lived for several years. The Red Cross put Martin in contact with his mother who was living in Canada, and in December 1949 they were reunited. Upon arrival in Canada, Martin spoke Yiddish, Polish, Italian, and Hebrew, but not a word of English. At first, Martin worked in the garment industry. In 1953, Martin married Betty. Martin started a supermarket and eventually opened up several more stores before retiring.

In his retirement years, Martin discovered a new passion when a group from Toronto—children of survivors from Wierzbnik—approached him in 2002 to lead them on a trip to Poland so they could see the places where their relatives had once lived. Martin has returned to Poland for the March of the Living, which is a program dedicated towards studying the history of the Holocaust. He has also spoken about his experiences at schools across North America.

Martin and his wife, Betty, are blessed with four children and nine grandchildren.

Author Visit

Author Martin Baranek will be speaking at FIU

Summer 2019

MMC: July 16 – GC Ballrooms, 3:15 pm
BBC: July 17 – WUC Ballrooms, 11:45 am

Fall 2019

MMC: September 24 – GC Ballrooms, 12 pm
BBC: TBH – WUC Ballrooms, 2 pm

Please consider giving extra credit for students to attend the author visit, and encourage your Peer Mentor to go with your students.
COMMON READING IN FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE

Materials for Students to Review Before Class

• Watch video on Determined. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbfITxHhnzQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbfITxHhnzQ)

• Have students read at least one of the following articles. While none of these articles directly discuss Martin Baranek, they all highlight an organization or program that addresses issues explored in Martin’s book. In this module, help connect the ideas students read to community-based initiatives related to those ideas.
  o Hillel at FIU Connecting Students to Business and Community Leaders
  o Silence Isn’t an Option for Miami’s Holocaust Survivors
  o Two-thirds of Millennials Don’t Know What Auschwitz Is
  o Information about FIU’s Holocaust and Genocide Studies Program

In-Class Activities

• Break students up into small groups and have them discuss the article(s) they read and how they relate to the themes explored in Determined. Encourage students to go beyond summarizing the articles. Is there a connection between the issues that affect Martin in his book and the issues that created the need for these organizations and programs? How are the ideas discussed in this course central to the work the students read about? Why is it important to read about and be informed of these kinds of organizations? What if a student isn’t personally affected by an issue these organizations address? Why should they care?

• In addition, discuss the Washington Post article linked above (Two-thirds of Millennials Don’t Know What Auschwitz). Ask students why they think there is such a lack of awareness and knowledge about the Holocaust amongst the younger generations in the United States. Discuss why this lack of awareness needs to be combatted, and what they can do to educate themselves and others, including reading and listening to stories from survivors like Martin.

General Talking/Discussion Points

• Students today may feel very far removed from the Holocaust. Not only is it something that happened outside of their life time, but unfortunately, the chance of learning from people who experience the Holocaust first-hand is decreasing. Talk to students about why Holocaust remembrance and awareness is so important. Have them relate it to their own experiences of carrying on legacies within their own families. Why is it important to pass on these stories?

• One of the prevailing themes of Determined is hope. Hope and perseverance amidst total devastation and loss is what helped Martin to survive the horrors he experienced. In what ways do hope and perseverance play a role in the everyday lives of our students? Discuss how resilience plays a role in this difficult time of transition from high school to college.
**2019-2020 Common Reading Program**

**Topic Breakdown of the Course**

- **Course Introduction & Intro to Common Reading**: Show video on *Determined* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbfITxHhznQ
  - As a means to introduce students to each other and to the course material lead a 5-10 discussion reviewing the book. The discussion can be general impressions the students had of the book, and then introduce how the text can relate to the topics discussed in the course.

- **Mental Health**
  - In the introduction to *Determined*, as well as towards the end of the book, Martin discusses the impacts of the Holocaust on his own mental health as well as that of other survivors. He says that for his generation, seeking out psychological counseling or acknowledging post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as legitimate and real was very unlikely due to the stigmatization and lack of awareness as the time. Discuss with students the importance of ending the stigma around mental health/mental illness, as well as some of the resources offered at FIU such as Counseling and Psychology Services (CAPS) and Victim Empowerment Program that they should not be afraid or ashamed to use to help them cope and stay mentally healthy.

- **Time and Stress Management**
  - Martin had to deal with almost constant stress throughout his imprisonment in the Holocaust - the stress of where his next meal would come from, if at all, the stress of whether or not his family members were alive, the stress to just survive both physically and mentally. Discuss with students how Martin managed his stress (such as the positive mantras he repeated- *Live for today, hope for tomorrow, try not to think of the past*, p. 44), and ask them to provide similar examples of ways they can cope with stress.

- **Common Reading**
  - Review articles, in-class activities, and general talking/discussion points section.

- **Life Skills wrap up/academic advising presentation**
  - After being separated from his family, Martin had to acquire and sharpen his life skills at an early age in order to survive on his own. Discuss with students what life skills Martin used to survive and persevere, and if there are similar life skills they can use in their daily lives throughout their four years of college and beyond.

- **Creativity**
  - A few times, Martin’s creativity and ability to think on his feet made the difference between life and death for him. For example, when Martin was selected for the gas chambers at Auschwitz, he escaped and hid in a tiny oven until it was safe to come back out again. Discuss with students how thinking creatively can help them both in challenging situations as well as in their every day life in college.

- **Collaboration**
  - Martin had to work together with others, such as his friend Kiva, many times throughout the Holocaust in order to ensure survival. Have students discuss on how teamwork and collaboration is necessary to their success, both in college and beyond.
Design Thinking
- How can design thinking be used by organizations and programs promoting Holocaust awareness, education and remembrance?

Opportunity activity
- Martin takes his experiences as a survivor of the Holocaust and turns them into an opportunity to spread education and awareness. In the introduction, he says, “For as long as I am able, I will make the pilgrimage each spring to remember and to bear witness… to participate in The March of the Living. There is no better way to educate people than hearing survivor stories firsthand… I see it as an opportunity to teach what humans are capable of doing to their fellow human beings.” Discuss with students how they can draw on their personal experiences to create opportunities in their own lives.

Course Wrap Up & Evaluation
- Martin has devoted his entire life to educating others. He is passionate about sharing his experience, even though it is difficult for him, because he realizes the importance of remembrance and education. It is his legacy. Have students reflect on what they are passionate about and how these passions can play into their future, and even their time here at FIU. Encourage them to seek out involvement opportunities on campus related to their interests and passions.

Activities for Teaching Determined

- **Response Cards:** Give each student an index card. Ask them to briefly write down their questions, thoughts, comments, etc. and have them turn in their cards for discussion
- **Group Discussions:** Have students pair up or get in small groups to talk about the book, the current topics review in class, and how it relates to their current experiences as a student at FIU
- **Word Clouds:** Have students submit key words describing their thoughts on the book and talk about the most reoccurring words (polleverywhere.com can be used)
- **Teach the Class:** Pick a theme(s) or historical event relating to the common reading book and have students teach their peers about themes in the book (perseverance, hope, holocaust awareness and education)
- **Journal Writing:** At the beginning of every new chapter, have students jot down a few lines of their experiences at FIU and how they might relate to Martin’s story.
In the 1980s, photographer Gary Monroe returned home to Miami Beach and photographed the old world Jewish community in his neighborhood. He had received his MFA from the University of Colorado at Boulder in 1977, and for his master’s thesis he captured this South Beach community. However, he knew there was more to explore and continued photographing this aging community for a decade.

Many of the Jewish residents of South Beach during this time had survived the Holocaust or Czarist pogroms and immigrated to the U.S. This aging community had survived some of the worst atrocities of the 20th century and identified a quiet and warm neighborhood in Miami Beach to live out their final days.

The Frost Art Museum invites all First Year Experience instructors and peer mentors to bring their classes to the museum for a tour of this exhibition and introduction to the museum. Inspired by the Common Reading Book, *Determined: A Memoir* by Martin Baranek, the photographs by Gary Monroe depict the survivors of the Holocaust in their final years. In addition, as Baranek discusses in the book, the end of the war was not the end of his journey. As Baranek immigrated and took several years to resettle, the Jewish community depicted in this exhibition includes immigrants and refugees.

You may book a tour on our website: [https://frost.fiu.edu/visit/tours/tour-request/index.html](https://frost.fiu.edu/visit/tours/tour-request/index.html)