

The Holocaust: A unit study through literature, testimony, and film

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Unit Objective

To provide historical information about the Holocaust, and allow students to explore personal stories and themes of the Holocaust, through literature, personal testimonies, and film.

Part I: Unit Introduction

Pre-reading/pre-study activity: Each student will be provided with a copy of the newspaper. The assignment will be to go through the daily news, and find three examples of prejudice or injustice that have been written about on this particular day. Students will record their findings, and we will discuss this as a group. The objective of this activity is to illustrate that injustice and prejudice are still problems in our society. One of the main reasons we study the Holocaust is the hope that education will prevent a repetition of history. After completing the newspaper activity, the class will fill out a KWL pre-study chart (attached). As a class, the students will share their responses to the following questions. The “K” represents what they already know. Students will have the chance to share the knowledge that they already have about the Holocaust. The “W” column represents what they students want to learn. This column can be filled with questions that the students have about our topic, and these questions can be recorded, for reference at a later time. The “L” column will be completed at the end of the unit. As a wrap up, we will come back to our chart and determine what we have learned. This will be a good time to follow up on the “W” column to see if all the questions that students had were answered throughout the course of study. (It may be helpful to make a larger display of this chart and hang it somewhere in the classroom throughout the unit study.)

Part II: Historical information, background notes and literature

This portion of the unit will involve some lecture and note-taking activities for the students. The first film that students will be viewing for this unit is called “Survivors of the Holocaust.” It a TBS original broadcast film, presented by the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation. Steven Spielberg narrates the production, and provides much information about the Visual History Foundation (VHF). It is important for students to hear about the VHF, as one of their activities for will involve the VHF website. I have divided the film into three separate segments, and prior to each segment, students will take notes on background information that is important to the understanding of the film. The film chronicles the lives of many Jewish individuals who lived throughout Europe during the time of Hitler’s reign. We hear from testimonies from these survivors about what their lives were like before, during and after the war and the Holocaust. As students view the three parts of the film, they will be asked to answer several study guide questions. The study guide is meant to direct students in their viewing of the film. (background notes and study guide are attached.) Following the film and background notes, students will have an opportunity to look at photographs and artifacts from the United States Memorial Holocaust Museum. They will also view a CD-rom photo gallery of concentration camps and artifacts throughout Europe. As a class, we will read short pieces of literature about the Holocaust. One is a short story entitled “I Promised I would Tell” by Sonia Schrieber Weitz. This story is written in the form of an autobiographical journal. In the journal, Ms. Weitz tells her story of growing up in Poland as a Jewish girl during the war. She tells of her experiences in the ghetto and the concentration camps, and how she survived these treacherous times. The second piece of literature is a play entitled “Daniel’s Story.” “Daniel’s Story” is an exhibit at the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C., that has been translated into a play. It is the story of a young boy, and his experience in the ghettos and concentration camps of Poland. While each story is different, both are

great examples of survival and the strength of the human spirit. In reading these stories, students not only hear personal accounts of survival experiences, but they gain historical knowledge about the Holocaust.

Part III: Survivors of the Shoah: Visual History Foundation Website

This portion of the unit will require use of the mobile lab. The class will spend some time exploring the VHF website. They learned some background information about this site from the film, and now will have a chance to explore the site and view some survivor testimonies. The website is www.vhf.org. Once we have arrived at this website, students will scroll up to the top to the link labeled “Education.” Under this section, there are several categories. As a class, we will go to the heading “For Students.” There, we will look at the Holocaust timeline, and the Holocaust glossary. For our class activity, students will click on “Additional Resources,” scroll down to the activity called “Labels” and click on the link- “go to exercise.” Handouts will be provided (attached) for completing this activity, and students will view the video together as a class and complete the activity.

Part IV: Theme Selection and Viewing of Testimonies

Part IV of this unit is the individual assessment of our study. At this time, students have learned quite a bit of background information about the Holocaust, and they are fairly familiar with the VHF website. Each student is going to be required to select a theme, and view two survivor testimonies on that theme. Through our exploration of the website, students have learned where to go, and how to view a survivor testimony. As they view the testimonies, students will have to complete a testimony viewing form (attached). The purpose of this is to record information about each survivor that they learn about, and to validate the viewing. Students will complete this activity outside of class time (most have access to the internet at home, but there is also access at the school library.) To view testimonies, students go to www.vhf.org, and click on “Education -for students.” Once there, they go to the “Watch Testimony” link. Before viewing a testimony, there are several themes to choose from. For this assignment, students may choose to view testimonies from the following themes: Hiding, Camps or Liberation. Each of these themes has a link, and once you arrive at that link, there are two testimonies to view. A final theme choice for students is Children. If students wish to view testimonies on this theme, they need to click on “Online Exhibits” under “Education- for students.” Here, they will be directed to an activity that provides them with several testimonies of survivors who were children during the time of the Holocaust. As students view the testimonies, they are to complete a testimony viewing form for each.

Part V: Film Viewing

Now that students have selected a theme, and viewed testimonies on this theme, it is time for them to incorporate film into this unit. I have selected several different films that relate to each of the theme options. Students are going to be required to individually view these films, (they will check them out from the teacher), and write an essay comparing the film to the testimonies that they watched (essay requirements attached). Each of the films are documentary-style productions, that provide historical information about the theme choices. (A possible modification for this project would be to allow students to work in pairs on this portion, as there will certainly be more than one student who needs to view each film. Students can write the essays independently, but watch the films together.) Study guides could be created for the viewing of each film if teachers wanted to provide more direction for their students. The film choices include: Hiding: “Anne Frank Remembered” Camps: “Auschwitz: If You Cried, You Died” Liberation: “One Survivor Remembers” Children: “My Knees Were Jumping: Stories of the Kindertransport” Upon completion of the film viewing, students will write their essays. To put closure on the unit, the class can go back to the KWL chart, and complete the “L” column, sharing with the class what they have learned about their theme.

Survivor Testimony Viewing Form

Directions: Complete this viewing form for both of the survivor testimonies that you watch. You will later use this form to guide you as you write your comparison essay.

My testimony theme is _____

1. Survivor Information

Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Country of Birth: _____ City of Birth: _____

2. List the ghettos in which this survivor lived:

3. List the concentration camps in which this survivor lived:

4. List other details of his or her survival experience:

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Survivors of the Holocaust

Find the answers to these questions as you view the video, *Survivors of the Holocaust*.

Part I

1. How many people died in the holocaust? How many were Jews?
2. What did one girl learn when she found a photo album at the labor camp?
3. What happened to Russian Jews after the war when they applied for visas to Israel?
4. What is the cure for hate, according to the speaker?

Part II

5. What sign was removed from park benches during the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, Germany?
6. Why were people dying in the Warsaw ghetto?
7. What did the Nazis do when not enough valuables were being turned in?
8. One father told his son that because it was the 20th century, the Germans would not " _____ ."

Part III

9. What was in the "soup" the inmates fetched at 4:00 a.m.?
10. What happened to people who couldn't walk to work?
11. What happened to the first violinist?
12. Who was told to collect the dead and put them into the ovens?
13. What does "liberation" mean?
14. What did the Nazis do when camps were about to be liberated?
15. One man bought a prayer book with _____ .
16. What did the people gain from the prayer book and ceremony?

Testimony Themes Comparison Essay

As our Holocaust unit draws to a close, your final assessment will be a comparison essay. We have read several pieces of literature about the Holocaust, studied historical information, and heard personal survival accounts through websites and films. Each of you has selected a theme for the testimonies you have seen, and your assignment is going to be to write a comparison essay on this theme. Using the notes and handouts you have completed from watching the testimonies and the film, write an essay that compares the two forms of media.

Your essay should contain the following information:

1. What was your testimony theme, and who were the survivors that you learned about?
2. How did the online testimonies and the film differ? (provide three specific examples)
3. What were some of the common thoughts and feelings that you heard the survivors talk about, both in the online testimonies and the film?
4. Which type of media (online testimonies or film) did you think was more effective in providing personal survival stories? (Support your answer with three specific reasons.)

Essays will be graded on thorough and thoughtful answers to the above questions, organization of paragraphs, and grammar, spelling and mechanics.

The final copy is due on : _____