

# Teaching the Holocaust from a Position of Strength

*A New Way to Teach the Holocaust for Jewish Educators*

By Dr. Deborah Fripp



**Cover photos:**

*Upper Left:* Children who have received clothing from self-help organizations, Bucharest, Romania 1942-1944 (Source: *“To Live with Honor and To Die with Honor: Mutual Aid”*, Yad Vashem Photo Archive 105B07.)

*Lower Left:* Candle lighting on the seventh night of Hanukkah at the Westerbork transit camp, Holland, 1943. (Source: *“Hanukkah – The Festival of Lights, Before, During, and After the Holocaust”*, Yad Vashem Photo Archive 1922/14.)

*Upper Right:* Reading from the Torah in the Ghetto, Lodz, Poland. (Source: *“To Live with Honor and To Die with Honor: Religious Observance”*, Yad Vashem Photo Archive 7028/66.)

*Middle Right:* High School in the Lodz Ghetto, with Principal Stella Rein, 1941-1942. (Source: *“Stay Together, the Fate of Jewish Families in 1944: the Rein Family”*, Yad Vashem Photo Archive 7317/2166.)

*Lower Right:* The Kovno Ghetto orchestra. (Source: *“To Live with Honor and To Die with Honor: Culture”*, Yad Vashem Photo Archive 4613/662.)

*Back Cover:* Pupils from the Rumkowski High School in the Lodz Ghetto with teacher and Principal Stella Rein in Marysin (the agricultural area of the ghetto), 1941-1942. (Source: *“Stay Together, the Fate of Jewish Families in 1944: the Rein Family”*, Yad Vashem Photo Archive 7317/2170.)



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## Introduction: Narratives Matter

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Like many in my generation, I learned about the Holocaust in Sunday School.<sup>1</sup> I had two Hebrew teachers who were survivors and interacting with them left me with a deep, burning understanding that we must pass this story on. The stories they told are seared into my memory. And yet, I have never shared those stories with anyone – they are too horrible to contemplate. As much as I know we must pass on this knowledge, I do not want this horror seared into my children’s memories too.

This has been a consistent problem for Holocaust education. Many of us, today’s parents and teachers, were raised with a type of multigenerational, community PTSD, reliving the horror of the Holocaust over and over, and unable to move beyond the trauma of the experience. We fear to pass the PTSD on to our children and students. We know there are many reasons we must teach our children and students about the Holocaust: to guard against it ever happening to anyone again; to remember the lost families and lost cultures; and to enrich our own practice of Judaism through understanding how our ancestors fought for theirs. We know our children and students must learn about this tragedy, but we deeply desire a better way to teach them about it: one that does not primarily involve tears.

Yad Vashem has shown that much of the problem in teaching the Holocaust stems from the *way* we teach the material, from the narrative we present. Traditionally, we have presented our children and students with the most horrific stories we know, in an attempt to imprint upon them the horror that our people endured. We have presented Jews as the eternal victims, helpless in the face of the oncoming force of Nazi hatred. We focused on the huge number of people lost: faceless, nameless bodies fed to the fires. And, most unforgivably, we allowed the perpetrators to dictate the story to us. We used the pictures and propaganda produced by the perpetrators to tell our story. We forgot that they had an agenda to dehumanize the Jews. By using their propaganda – and even their simplest photographs were propaganda – we have allowed them to continue that agenda and to make us feel somehow less than human, to be eternally victimized.

**We need a new narrative.** We need to tell the story from *our* point of view – using the pictures, the literature, the art, and the music left behind by our ancestors. We need the testimony of the survivors. When we tell the story in this new way, we see a different story. We see a story of people who held onto their humanity and their Judaism in the face of chaos and terror. When we give the people back their faces and their names, we find individual stories of strength and courage, even if many of them end in tragedy. This is the narrative we want to teach our children. A narrative that acknowledges the horror we endured but recognizes the strength with which we met that horror. A narrative that reminds us that, once again, as has happened so often in our history, they tried to kill us, they tried to destroy us from the inside out, they tried to take away our humanity – but they failed.

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<sup>1</sup> Coincidentally, I learned about the Holocaust in Sunday School and World War II in public school in the same year (1983). Except for the one day where the public school showed “Night and Fog”, a 1955 documentary about the concentration camps, there was no overlap between the two stories.



**The Perpetrators' Narrative:** This picture, taken by a German soldier walking through the Warsaw Ghetto, gives the distinct impression of a victimized, troubled population completely indifferent to the suffering of others.

(Source: "Photographs from the Warsaw Ghetto: *The Album of a German Soldier*", Yad Vashem photo archive 2536/8.)



**Our Ancestors' Narrative:** This picture of a communal kitchen from the Łódź Ghetto tells a story of resilience. This is the story of a functioning community where Jews help each other.

(Source: "*To Live with Honor and To Die with Honor: Mutual Aid*", *Yad Vashem Photo Archive* 1427/86.)

## Chapter 1: Developing a New Way of Thinking

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The Holocaust is a difficult and sensitive subject to teach. Teachers, parents, and students are often uncomfortable with the material and unsure how to approach it. When the educators at Yad Vashem evaluated Holocaust education in Israeli schools, they realized that the teachers' discomfort with the subject was leading to a bigger problem. Israeli students were graduating high school without a clear understanding of the Holocaust or its lessons.

This evaluation led the Yad Vashem educators to a series of insights that helped them develop a new and better way to teach this difficult subject.

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### Insight 1: **Trauma does not lead to learning.**

In the traditional way the Holocaust is taught, it is common to hear teachers say, "That was a successful lesson; I had every student in tears." Students who are in tears are not the same as students who are learning, however. Horrific stories and pictures of emaciated bodies primarily cause students to shut down. Distraught students do not ask, "Why did this happen?" They ask, "Why do I have to learn this?"

If we want our students to learn, we do not want to make them cry. Our main goal should be to help them find the meaning and lessons that we can learn from this history.

Teaching the Holocaust without trauma is a tall order because the story, and the history, is traumatic. This leads us to a fundamental question:

### **How do you teach a traumatic story without traumatizing the students?**

The answers to that question were the insights that led to the development of a new narrative.

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### Insight 2: **We need to teach the human story.**

The best way to teach a traumatic story without causing trauma is to teach it primarily as a human story, not primarily as an historical story. We need to rescue the individuals from out of the pile of bodies. We need to focus on their humanity and on our empathy with them. Although we need the historical context, we need to teach the story thematically, through literature, music, art, and religion.



**Corollary: We need to hear the voices and the names of our ancestors, not the voices of the perpetrators.**

When we think about the pictures from the Holocaust, we think of pictures of the dead and dying, of gaunt bodies and empty eyes, of trouble and fear. We think of drawings showing Jews as grotesque devils bent on the destruction of perfect German children.

These images, and all the propaganda of the Nazis, show Jews as something less than human. What is remarkable is that for two generations, we have used the Nazis' pictures to tell the story of what they did to us. We have forgotten that they have a built-in agenda and, thereby, allowed them to continue the work of dehumanization.

It is time to reclaim the humanity of our ancestors. We do not have to rely on Nazi artifacts to tell our story. We can listen to the voices of our ancestors and see what they left us. In the depths of chaos, the Jews recognized that unless they documented what was happening, their story would only be told by the perpetrators. They left diaries and writings, stories, art, and music – and they hid these in places where we could later find them.<sup>2</sup> Many of those who survived have told their stories and the stories of those who were lost. We can use this legacy to give the victims back their names, their faces, their voices, and their humanity.<sup>3</sup>

When we do listen to our ancestors' voices, we hear a very different story. It is a story that acknowledges that many people died, but also that



**The Perpetrators' Narrative:** "Pulled from the bunkers by force" in the Warsaw Ghetto. A picture of a people crushed beneath the unstoppable force of the Nazi machine. Wikimedia lists this picture as "One of the most famous pictures of World War II." (Source: *The Stroop Collection, Yad Vashem Photo Archives 29B09.*)



**Our Ancestors' Narrative:** The Kovno Ghetto orchestra. There was debate about whether music and theater were appropriate in the ghetto ("You don't make theater in a graveyard") but the theater thrived in many ghettos. The orchestras continued to play music by non-Jewish composers, in spite of laws forbidding it. (Source: *"To Live with Honor and To Die with Honor: Culture", Yad Vashem Photo Archive 4613/662.*)

<sup>2</sup> See the online exhibitions at Yad Vashem: "Don't Forget Me" Children's Personal Albums from the Holocaust ([www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/albums/index.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/albums/index.asp)) and "Let the World Read and Know" the Oneg Shabbat Archives (<http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/ringelbum/index.asp>).

<sup>3</sup> Yad Vashem has been making an effort to put names to the faces in their photographs: see "Anonymous No Longer" ([www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/museum\\_photos/index.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/museum_photos/index.asp)).

many people lived. This new story asks, *How did they live? How did they survive? What did they hold onto?* When we follow this path, we find our ancestors holding onto those things that they felt most important – their love, their families, and their traditions, but also their community, their art, and their music. We see pictures of life and living, of families and communities, of joy as well as sorrow. We acknowledge the inner strength of so many, even in the face of chaos, terror, and destruction.

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### Insight 3: **We need to put the stories in context.**

In the same way that we have allowed the Nazi propaganda to dictate the tone of our story, we have allowed the Nazi regime to dictate our timeline. The story of the Holocaust is traditionally taught starting with the Nazi rise to power in 1933 and ending with their defeat in 1945, as if the only important part of the story is the one that involves the perpetrators.

We need context to understand the human story. We need to know who these people were before the terrible things happened to them. We cannot understand how each person reacted to their victimization unless we understand where they came from. These people were as varied as we are – they were scientists and shopkeepers, athletes and artists, teachers and politicians.

When the Jews were forced into ghettos and camps, they tried to recreate those things they felt were most important to them. For some, that meant schools and synagogues; for others, theater and orchestras. Unless we understand who they were before 1933, before their lives became confined by racist laws and pogroms, we cannot understand why they reacted as they did. We cannot see their humanity.

In the same way, to end in 1945 leaves the survivors as nameless near-corpses in the camps and as terrified children cowering in hiding places or lying about their identities. In 1945, even at liberation, they were still victims. We must show our students the path our ancestors took from victim to survivor, how they stepped out of the ashes and the bunkers, found a way past the anger and the sorrow, and rebuilt their lives.



**The Human Story:** Gisi Fleishmann of Bratislava before the war. Gisi was active in the Jewish Center before the war. During the war, she was one of the leaders of the “Working Group” trying to end deportations from the ghetto. She was murdered in Auschwitz in 1944.

(Source: “The Story of the Jewish Community in Bratislava: Their Legacies Remain”, Yad Vashem, photo archive 995/1.)

**Corollary: We must put the Nazis' anti-Semitism in context.**

Our ancestors' lives are not the only part of the Holocaust story that needs context. Often when we teach about the Holocaust, we talk about Nazi ideology and Nazi anti-Semitism as if the Nazi party invented the idea and it died with them. The Nazis did not invent anti-Semitism. They took advantage of a deep and abiding hatred that had existed for generations. Generations of European Jews faced persecution at the hands of their neighbors, from anti-Semitic laws to state-sanctioned pogroms. Although state-sanctioned pogroms are generally a thing of the past, anti-Semitism is still prevalent in many places in the world, including in Europe and North America. In teaching about Nazi anti-Semitism, it is important to put that ideology in the context of historical and modern anti-Semitism.

The Nazi ideology drew on both long-standing stereotypes and newer visions of genetics. Almost as long as Christianity has been in power in Europe, there have been people who believed that the Jews were evil, in league with the devil, and conspiring to take over the world. Nazi ideology combined this age-old hatred with a newer science. As scientists began to understand genetics in the late 1800s, racists gravitated to the idea that some people had better genes than others and that bad genes could ruin the purity of a race.

The Nazi implementation of anti-Semitic hatred was more deadly than any that had come before. However, we often incorrectly imply that the Holocaust was a great conflagration of hatred that stands alone and apart from everything else. This hatred has ancient roots in Europe. This hatred did not disappear with the Nazis. Anti-Semitism has been around for thousands of years and continues today. For our students to truly understand the lessons of the Holocaust, we must teach them about the origins of bigotry and hatred, and how to fight it in all contexts.

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**Insight 4: We must teach this story in an age-appropriate manner, and we must start at a young age.**

When is the right age to begin discussing the Holocaust? Most of us would agree that it is not appropriate to tell second graders about that time when their great-grandparents were rounded up and shot for being Jews. On the other hand, if we wait until middle or high school to even mention the Holocaust, then our students will be unable to deal with the complexities of the story. The Holocaust makes one question every aspect of life – culture, history, democracy, even G-d. It is imperative that



**Modern Anti-Semitism:** A cartoon from Iran's Fars news agency in 2016, depicting a Jewish monster bent on taking over the world.

(Source: *Fars News Agency*.)

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we allow our students to work through these questions in a space where we can help them, rather than forcing them to work through these questions alone.

We must, therefore, build a foundation upon which our students can lay the more difficult parts of the story. If we build them a foundation, then when they get to high school, we will be able to talk about the difficult questions that the Holocaust raises.

Discussing the Holocaust with young children takes careful planning. At the youngest ages, we can teach about ghettos and the loss of home or freedom. At this age, we avoid teaching about the loss of family, which is much more difficult for young children. The key point here is that although we must tell true stories, **we do not need to tell the whole story at every age**. We must carefully design our lesson plans to what we feel the students at each age can handle.

Corollary: **We must teach through empathy, not through roll-play.**

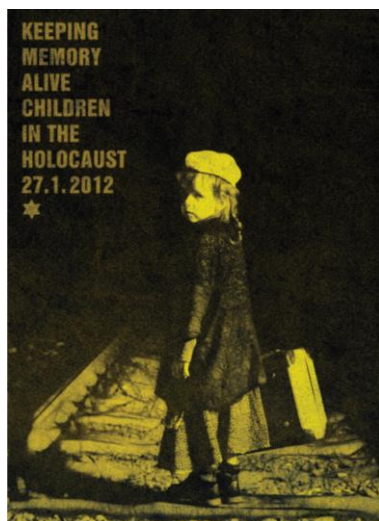
One common approach to Holocaust lessons has been to have the students put themselves in the

victims' shoes. "If you had to leave everything behind except one suitcase," we ask them, "what would you pack?" Although this seems like a good idea, it is actually a recipe for trauma. Trying to imagine losing your home, your parents, or your children does not facilitate learning, or even empathy. It only puts you in a terrifying place you do not want to be.<sup>4</sup>

Do not ask, "How would you feel?" Instead, ask, "How do you think *they* felt?" The phrasing of this question leads to empathy and avoids trauma.

Equally fundamentally, the exercise in trying to understand how it felt "to be there" is futile. Our students cannot fathom what it means to be hungry. "Starving" to them means it's been three hours since breakfast and, oh, lunch isn't for another ten minutes! None of us, thank G-d, can really understand what it was like to be in these situations.

If we give our students the chance to empathize, to consider how the people in those situations felt, then the students will begin to relate. They will relate in ways that are natural to them and, therefore, are not traumatic.



**Developing empathy and avoiding trauma:** Don't ask "How would you feel in her place?" Ask "How do you think she felt?"

(From *Keeping the Memory Alive, Yad Vashem 2012*. Artist: Petra Nehera.)

<sup>4</sup> The only time I was even close to tears during the Yad Vashem seminar was listening to the description of the first deportation from the Łódź ghetto, in which children under ten were ripped from their parents' arms. The ghetto's leader, Chaim Rumkowski, argued that by sending the weak, the rest had a better chance to survive. My youngest child was seven at the time and she was all I could think of. I did not hear the rest of the description of Łódź, and I still cannot think of this objectively.

Corollary: **Students learning about the Holocaust should NOT be solemn and quiet.**

In watching Israeli teachers present this subject, the educators at Yad Vashem noticed that teachers typically expected their students to be solemn and quiet, as if to say, “This is a solemn subject, and you must be respectful.”

The Holocaust is a solemn subject but it is also a difficult subject. If we want our students to understand, then we must allow them to engage with the material. We must let them react to it. If we expect them to be quiet in these lessons, then we are expecting them to disengage and, therefore, not to learn.

Often, we will find that the students’ reaction is anger. Who among us will tell them that is an improper reaction to this story? For many, this anger will be directed at people, but for others, the anger may be directed at G-d. Some teachers fear to teach this material, fearing to drive students to question G-d. We must let students rage, let them question, and let them work through all these feelings. It is better to allow the students time and space to work through these feelings in class where we can help them than to force them to deal with these feelings on their own.

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## The Main Ideas of the New Narrative

These insights led Yad Vashem to develop a new way of teaching the Holocaust aimed at helping their students find meaning in the story and learn the lessons of the history.

The main ideas of the new narrative are that the Holocaust should be taught

- ★ Thematically, with historical context, focusing on literature, art, music, religion, and spiritual resistance;
- ★ Starting at a young age, but in an age-appropriate way designed to allow students to engage with the material;
- ★ Through stories of individuals, not focused on numbers;
- ★ Through the voices of our ancestors, not the perpetrators;
- ★ In context of the periods before, during, and after the war.

By teaching in this manner, we can focus on

- ★ Teaching empathy, trying to understand how those involved felt without putting ourselves in their shoes;
- ★ Understanding how people reacted to their situations and why;
- ★ Understanding how we can incorporate this story into our lives without allowing it to take over our lives.

## Chapter 2: Key Lessons and How to Implement Them

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Once you begin to teach the Holocaust based on our ancestors' narrative, four key lessons pop out.

1. These people, our ancestors, were living people with lives and stories that need to be told. They were not simply victims.
2. The Nazis tried to take away our humanity, but they failed.
3. The Holocaust is something that happened to us, but it does not define us as Jews. However, understanding how our ancestors held onto their Judaism enriches our Judaism.
4. Age-appropriate education is key and needs to be carefully thought out.

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### Lesson 1: Teaching through Individual Stories

Much of Holocaust education has been focused on trying to understand the scale of the disaster, the huge number of people lost. Numbers like this have little meaning. Numbers do not tell us about the actual depth of the disaster. And numbers perpetuate the dehumanization of our ancestors.

Telling the stories of individuals can give us a much more complex and compelling story than trying to fathom the meaning of more than six million murders.<sup>5</sup> The victims of this atrocity were real people with real stories, and we can teach all the pieces of the story of the Holocaust by telling individuals' stories.

You will find suggested curricula with individual stories of survivors in Chapter 3. More stories and curriculum ideas can be found at our website ([www.TeachTheShoah.org](http://www.TeachTheShoah.org)), on the Yad Vashem website ([www.YadVashem.org](http://www.YadVashem.org)), and on the websites of other Holocaust museums. Here are some hints about how to use these stories to teach about the Holocaust.

☆ *As much as possible, always use people's names.*

Using people's names is one of the ways we give them back their humanity and rescue them from just being one of a pile of bodies. Real names also make the stories more powerful and salient to the students.

Sometimes you will not know the full name of the person and sometimes you will not know the name at all. However, if you do have a name that goes with a story, even a partial name, then use it.

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<sup>5</sup> Throughout this booklet, we focus on the experience of the Jews and the treatment we got simply for being who we were. However, we must never forget the mixed multitude that died with us simply for being who they were: the Roma, gays, the disabled, and many others.

☆ *Remember that they were regular people.*

The Jews in the Holocaust were as varied as Jews are today. In spite of the image that many of us have, they were not for the most part *shtetl* Jews living *Fiddler on the Roof* lives. Some were religious, some were not. Some lived in the city, some in the country. They spoke many different languages: Yiddish, German, Polish, Dutch, Russian, French, Greek, even Arabic. They were doctors and lawyers, scientists and shopkeepers, musicians and poets. They did all the same sorts of things we do – went to school, went to work, played sports, went on vacation.

One of the ways we can see this most clearly is from documentation that shows teachers before the war trying to figure out how to get students more interested in coming to shul. Just like us, they were trying to figure out how to teach their students in a compelling way that would help maintain their connection to Judaism.



**Before the War:** Dora Szainman enjoying herself in nature in Plońsk, Poland. (Source: “*The Story of the Jewish Community of Plońsk: Economy and Society before the Holocaust*”, Yad Vashem Photo Archives 9398/18.)

☆ *Do not get ahead of yourself in the story.*

The people whose stories we are telling did not know where the story was going. In 1939, they did not know that in 1942 they would be sent to camps and gas chambers. Even the Nazis did not know. There was no master plan from the beginning; the Nazis were making it up as they went along.

It is essential that we do not layer our knowledge of what was to come onto their actions. They were acting with the knowledge they had, not with the knowledge we have.

There is one exception to this, however: when talking to children, especially young children, always start the story at the end, with the survivor all grown up and happy. This allows the children to listen to stories of scary things happening without worrying about what will ultimately happen to the child in the story. What age is old enough to switch, to allow the ending to be a surprise? That will depend on your students, but may not be until high school.<sup>6</sup>

☆ *Be sure to start before the war.*

To understand anyone’s story, we must know who they are and what sort of life they lived before the trouble started. This puts their story in context.

<sup>6</sup> My mother read Anne Frank’s diary when it was first published serially, as it was being translated into English. She was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and even at that age found the ending traumatic, not knowing it beforehand.

☆ *Don't end the story at the end of the war.*

The period of recovery immediately after the war is a critical part of the story. Understanding how the survivors responded to what had happened is essential to understanding their lives.

The period after the war needs to be divided into two parts: 1) Returning home, often to find that home no longer existed; and 2) Finally being able to look forward and rebuild life. As Lea Roshkovsky, our instructor at Yad Vashem, likes to say: Instead of getting revenge, they got married. Survivors often say that grandchildren are the best revenge.<sup>7</sup>

When we end our Holocaust education in 1945, then we also miss that anti-Semitism continued after the war. When we stop in 1945, we give our students the idea that the Holocaust was a great anti-Semitic catharsis, after which the Jews could live in peace. We must remember the Kielce Pogrom<sup>8</sup> of 1946, which drove many survivors back to what had been concentration camps and were now displaced persons camps. We must remember the many Jews who opted not to go home at all, knowing that they would still find violent anti-Semitism there. We must remember, and teach our students to recognize, that anti-Semitism continues even today.

☆ *Don't forget to talk about the perpetrators and bystanders. Remember that they, too, were regular people.*

It is easy to dismiss the perpetrators of this atrocity as inhuman monsters the like of which has not been seen since. This perspective fails to recognize that like the victims, the perpetrators were regular people with regular lives. We must recognize that these terrible things were done by people, not monsters, so that we can learn from them.

The bystanders were regular people with regular lives too. Bystanders fell into three categories: 1) those who joined the perpetrators; 2) those who did nothing; and 3) those who helped the victims



**After the War Part 1:** Survivors returning home to Budapest, only to find their homes no longer exist.  
(Source: Yad Vashem Photo Archives FA59/48.)



**After the War Part 2:** Circumcision ceremony of Josef Lichtensztein, the first baby born in the Displaced Persons camp, 1946 – Heidenheim, Germany.  
(Source: Yad Vashem Photo Archives FA378/47.)

<sup>7</sup> On March 11, 2016, Guinness World Records announced that Israel Kristal, a 112-year-old survivor of Auschwitz, was the oldest man in the world. Now, that's revenge.

<sup>8</sup> For more information on the Kielce Pogrom and post-war anti-Semitism in Poland, see [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/this\\_month/july/15.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/this_month/july/15.asp) and [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/newsletter/33/anti\\_jewish.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/newsletter/33/anti_jewish.asp).



(called by Yad Vashem the “Righteous among the Nations”). We must help our students to understand what makes a bystander a perpetrator, why most people did nothing (and why it often made sense to do nothing), and why some people risked everything to help strangers. These are lessons our students can apply to modern life.

We must ask: When does a bystander become a perpetrator? Some cases are clear. When “bystanders” participate in physical abuse or murder, they become perpetrators. However, there are many ways for a bystander to become a perpetrator beyond actually participating in the violence. When people stand by and cheer as the violence occurs, they are collaborating in that violence. When people go to rallies and cheer as the speaker talks about hate, about isolating communities, or about committing violence, they collaborate in the violence that arises out of that hate speech. During the Holocaust, when people reported their neighbors to the police, knowing that the police would arrest them for being Jewish, they were perpetrators too. We must teach our students to recognize all the ways that “bystanders” participate and collaborate with the perpetrators of violence.

We must also address the question of what you can or should do if you witness others subjected to unfair treatment. Witnessing bullying and racial hatred, unfortunately, is a situation in which our students may find themselves. In most cases, we want to encourage them to see how they can help. However, we must also recognize that during the Holocaust, in many cases it made sense to do nothing. Are you required to risk your life to help someone in need? If helping a stranger means risking your family, is it worth the risk? These are difficult questions that we must discuss with our students.

Many people during the Holocaust did choose to help, even at the risk of their lives and their families.



**The Righteous:** Adam Kapitancyk with Franciska Sasin who hid him during the war. (Source: *“I am My Brother’s Keeper: The Bond Between Rescuers and Rescued”*, Yad Vashem.)

Many people were saved because strangers chose this more difficult path. The people who chose to help did not all come from the same walk of life. They did not all have power. They did not all feel protected from the Nazis because of their position. Many were not – many lost their lives. And they did not all help for the same reasons. Some helped because they knew someone. Some helped because they felt sorry for someone who came to their door and chose to hide them rather than send them away. Some helped because they simply felt it was the right thing to do. By understanding the breadth of people who were willing to help, our students can understand how they might find the courage to help someone in such need.

## Lesson 2: Emphasizing Strength, not Victimization

There are recurring themes that come up in our ancestors' stories. These themes include continuing to educate their children, to make music and art, and to celebrate their Judaism, and to continue to do so in the face of chaos, terror, and laws that forbid all of these actions. There are, of course, stories of physical resistance, but the physical resistance started as spiritual resistance. Even the stories of physical resistance start with stories of not allowing themselves to be turned into something less than human, of not allowing the Nazis to take away their humanity or their Judaism.

When we teach from the perpetrators' perspective, our students learn about all the things we were forbidden to do. When we teach from our ancestors' perspective, our students learn, as it says in the diary of Chaim Kaplan, teacher and educator in the Warsaw ghetto, "In these days of our misfortune, we live the life of Marranos. Everything is forbidden to us, and yet we do everything."

In a world of chaos, our ancestors tried to maintain normal life as much as possible. When their children were forbidden to attend school, they found ways to keep teaching them. They home-schooled them or formed hidden schools in the ghettos. In spite of laws making the practice of Judaism punishable by death, every ghetto had services in hiding. Many ghettos had theaters and orchestras, where, in spite of laws to the contrary, musicians continued to play the music of non-Jews such as Mozart, Beethoven, and Bach.

In the face of grave deprivation, our ancestors asked their Rabbis and found ways to continue to practice. The questions and responses from the Rabbis in the ghettos are fascinating. When you can't get candles, you can turn on an electric light and say the Sabbath candle-lighting blessing over it. If you can't get wine, you can use sweet tea to celebrate Passover.

Even in the camps, services continued in hiding, quietly. Stories are told of poetry discussions in the bunkers at Auschwitz. Survivor Moshe Winterter tells a terrifying and uplifting story about making a shofar in the labor camp of Skarzysko-Kamienna in Poland, at the request of his



**The Lives of Marranos:** Dedicating a new Torah scroll in the Łódź Ghetto. (Source: *"To Live with Honor and To Die with Honor: Religious Observance"*, Yad Vashem Photo Archive 40B07.)



**The Skarzysko-Kamienna Shofar:** Made in a labor camp in anticipation of Rosh Hashanah 5704 (1943). (Source: *"To Live with Honor and To Die with Honor: Religious Observance"*, Yad Vashem)

Rabbi.<sup>9</sup>

There is no question that some people lost all hope under the pressure of the chaos. Everyone who survived came out scarred both physically and emotionally. But many people found ways to live, and even to hope, in spite of the chaos. Focusing on the strength of our ancestors, rather than the power of the victimization, gives our students a compelling story from which they can learn.

### Lesson 3: Enriching our Judaism

One of the most difficult aspects of teaching the Holocaust is helping the students to understand how to integrate it into their own lives. Can you maintain your faith in the world, in G-d, in Judaism, in the face of the Holocaust? To say, as we have for so long, “you must be Jewish for them,” fails to recognize that each individual must be Jewish for themselves and in their own way.

Emphasizing strength, rather than victimization, can help us, and our students, find ways to integrate this story into our own faith and lives. For two generations, we have let this story define us as victims. Defining themselves as victims is a difficult idea for young Jews, especially American Jews, to

integrate into their own lives. They do not feel like victims, and they do not want to be victims. Therefore, do not say, “Jews are victims”; say rather, “*During the Holocaust, the Jews were the victims.*” This is a very different statement, and one that we and our students can easily integrate into our understanding of ourselves.

But even during the Holocaust, our ancestors did not simply roll over and let the Nazis tell us what to do. Many Jews responded with an inner strength that held fast, even in the face of terror. Survivor Rivka Wagner has a wonderful answer for when people insist she should have lost her faith in G-d because of what happened to her: “Our faith was the one thing they could not take from us.” We can enrich our own Judaism by understanding how our ancestors fought for and held onto their Judaism, and how their Judaism served to help them hold onto their sanity and even to some hope.



**They fought for their Judaism:** Chanukah in the Westerbork transit camp, Holland, 1943.  
(Source: “*To Live with Honor and To Die with Honor: Religious Observance*”, Yad Vashem Photo Archive 1922/9.)

<sup>9</sup> You can find more on this story at <http://www.yadvashem.org/artifacts/museum/shofar> and in *And You Shall Speak of Them: Studying the Holocaust in the Light of Mishna*, available from Yad Vashem’s educational catalog.

## Lesson 4: Making Education Age-Appropriate

Age-appropriate lesson plans require careful thought. Here are three critical ideas for developing age appropriate lesson plans.

### 8→ *Have their regular teacher teach the lesson.*

In many programs like this, it is tempting to bring in a specialist. Teachers are often uncomfortable with the material and sometimes there is one person in an organization who has specialized training, or a person may be brought in from the outside, from a Holocaust museum for instance. For the purpose of teaching the Holocaust, changing teachers is not a good idea.

The implications of what students hear in a Holocaust class may take them time to work through. Students may also go home and discuss these matters with parents, siblings, or friends. They may hear additional aspects of the story that were not covered in class. They may think of additional questions as they mull over what they have learned. It is essential that they can come back and ask the teacher about what they learned and talk about what they feel.

When their regular teacher, rather than an outsider, teaches the Holocaust lessons, the students feel that they have a resource to come back to when they have additional questions.

### 8→ *Maintain age-appropriate safety nets.*

How we present the stories to the children can make a big difference in how much difficulty they have with the lessons of the Holocaust. Here are some safety nets that Yad Vashem recommends to prevent trauma among younger students.

The first safety net is to emphasize that this is something that happened a long time ago. It is over now.

- ★ The stories for elementary schoolers are all about survivors – the children in these stories survived these experiences and grew up. Most are grandparents now. To emphasize this idea, you should actually start at the end of the story, introducing the protagonist as an adult who wants to tell them a story that happened when s/he was a child.
- ★ With the youngest students (Grades K-2), emphasize that this happened a long time ago, in a faraway land. This perspective adds some distance and reduces the likelihood that the children will become fearful that something similar could happen to them.

The second safety net is the recognition that for children, safety is not in homes but with families. An intact family and loving parents makes an enormous difference to the security of a child. Therefore, we emphasize that

- ★ The children in the stories for the younger students (Grades K-4) still had intact, loving families. Although one parent may be lost, we get to the end of the story with at least one parent still alive and still with the child.

- ★ Even the children on the Kindertransport or living alone in the ghetto (which may happen in stories for Grades 5 and 6) had parents who loved them (even if they had to send them away). In some cases, the children will be together with siblings, even if they had to leave their parents behind.

By maintaining these safety nets, we can make the lessons appropriate for each age group, and, as they say at Yad Vashem, bring the students “safely in and safely out” of the lesson.

☞ *Involve parents from the beginning.*

It is important to include the parents in your discussions. In fact, you should include them early on and give them some say in what you are teaching. You need the support of the parents to successfully implement your program. The best way to garner their support is to recognize that parents are teachers, too, and teach them about the new narrative as you would your teachers.


Teaching the parents about the new narrative is almost as important as teaching the teachers. While teachers are the first line of education in this matter, parents are the second. Almost every student in your class will go home to their parents and tell them about the difficult story they discussed in class. The more difficult and intriguing the subject, the more likely it will be discussed with parents. The Holocaust is one of those difficult and intriguing subjects.

We recommend that you hold a meeting with parents early in the development phase of your program. A parent training seminar on how to talk to children about the Holocaust is an essential part of the program you develop. We also recommend a handout for parents with the basics of this training, because we know that not all parents will be able to attend the training. You can find a sample handout in Appendix 1.

## Chapter 3: Curriculum Suggestions

There are many places to find curricula to teach the Holocaust. Some present our ancestors' narrative, some present the perpetrators'. Here are some suggestions and links to curricula that present our ancestors' narrative. All of these, and more, can be found at our website, [www.TeachTheShoah.org](http://www.TeachTheShoah.org). Most of the books and units discussed here can be purchased online from Yad Vashem.<sup>10</sup> These are, of course, only suggestions – there are many more options out there.<sup>11</sup>

### Early Elementary (Grades K–2)

 **To Tommy, for his Third Birthday in Theresienstadt, 22 January 1944** was drawn by the Czech artist Bedřich Fritta as a present for his son on his third birthday. He wanted to teach his son about all the things in a normal world, such as trees, parks, birds, and flowers – for the day in the future when he hoped Tommy would face a better life.

This unit is designed to introduce the youngest students (Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade) to the idea of the ghetto. The unit consists of a soft-cover book which includes an introduction from Tommy himself, and a series of post cards with the pictures from the book.

To use this unit with the youngest students, start by introducing Tommy to the students without talking about the Holocaust. Start by talking to the class about the fact that their parents, and their teachers, were once children. As children, they did many things that they share with us now. Then tell the students of a man who had a special childhood.<sup>12</sup> Look at the pictures and have the students make up stories that Tommy might have told about these pictures. Most of the pictures have no specific Holocaust theme to them – they are pictures of means of transport (riding a turtle!), animals, or types of food.

Spend a little time every week talking about Tommy and making him part of the class. In January or February, after the students have gotten to know Tommy, introduce a few pictures that show how Tommy had to move to the ghetto with his mommy and daddy. Show how his mommy made him a



**To Tommy, for his Third Birthday in Theresienstadt, 22 January 1944** (by Bedřich Fritta)

<sup>10</sup> If you are in the Dallas area, the books discussed here can also be borrowed from the Holocaust collection at the JCC's Tycher library ([tycher.follettdestiny.com/cataloging/servlet/presentbooklistform.do?listID=11431380](http://tycher.follettdestiny.com/cataloging/servlet/presentbooklistform.do?listID=11431380)).


<sup>11</sup> If you find something you really like, let us know at [www.TeachTheShoah.org/Contact](http://www.TeachTheShoah.org/Contact) so we can share it.

<sup>12</sup> By starting in this way, we make it clear that Tommy survives whatever happens to him and grows up.

space to sleep because the apartment was so crowded. Talk about Tommy not being able to get all the types of food that he wanted and Tommy being upset about this.


Finally, introduce the picture of Tommy's birthday cake. Let the children look at it and talk about their own birthday cakes (if they want to – don't prompt this). Then tell them how Tommy's parents wanted to make him a birthday cake but could not because they could not get the ingredients. They drew this picture for him instead.

Depending on the age and maturity of the children, at this point you can also read Tommy's testimony from the beginning of the book, which tells about what happened to his parents (who were deported and died) and how he survived the war.

 **My Doll** is the memoir of Yael Rosner, adapted especially for younger children (grades 1-2). The book focuses on the subjects of struggle, survival, and revival. This story particularly emphasizes the significance of imagination and creativity inherent in the process of hiding and coping as a child during the Holocaust.

The story shows the students the everyday experiences of a girl who is confined to a cellar hiding from the German soldiers. She copes with the situation with the help of improvised toys, her imagination, and the warmth and love of her mother.


This book, along with an in-depth teacher's guide, can be found online at the Yad Vashem website.<sup>13</sup>

 **I am a Holocaust Torah** tells the story of 1,564 Torahs stolen by Nazis from synagogues in Czechoslovakia. The Torah scrolls were rescued twenty years later and placed in the hands of people who love them. This Holocaust account is uniquely told from the point of view of a personified Torah. Using a Torah to narrate the story enables Rabbi Goodman to present the emotive content of the Holocaust in a profound way to children of all ages.

More information about the project can be found at the Czech Torah Network's website.<sup>14</sup>

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## Late Elementary (Grades 3–5)

 **I Wanted to Fly Like a Butterfly** is a tender account of the Holocaust through the eyes of a young survivor, and is aimed at grades 3-4. Hanna Gofrit recalls her childhood in Poland and tells how her life dramatically changed when the Nazi soldiers occupied her country. Hanna lived to tell the story thanks to a brave Polish family who sheltered Hanna and her mother for two years until the end of the war.


The book itself is designed with color-coded pages to help teachers focus on various concepts. You can decide which units within the book you want to focus on, which you want to read but not comment on, and which can be skipped. *Important note: Although the book presents Hanna's life starting at a young*

<sup>13</sup> My Doll: [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/learning\\_environments/my\\_doll\\_rozner/index.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/learning_environments/my_doll_rozner/index.asp)

<sup>14</sup> Czech Torah Network: [www.czechtorah.org/thestory.php](http://www.czechtorah.org/thestory.php)

age, we recommend you start with the final pages, which discuss Hanna as an adult in Israel. This allows the students to follow the story without worrying about whether Hanna will survive.

An in-depth teacher's guide comes with the book and is also available at the Yad Vashem website.<sup>15</sup>

 **Children in the Ghetto** is an interactive website written for children. It portrays life during the Holocaust from the viewpoint of children who lived in the ghetto. At the same time, it attempts to make the complex experience of life in the ghetto as accessible as possible to today's children.


Along with the description of the hardships of ghetto life, the website presents the courage, steadfastness, and creativity involved in the children's lives. One of the most important messages to be learned is that despite the hardships, there were those who struggled to care for one another and to continue a cultural and spiritual life.



**Children in the Ghetto: The Street**

At the center of this site is an imaginary representation of a street in the ghetto. The site invites children to “move around the street” and “enter” various locations in it. In each of the locations, original exhibits such as video testimonies, photographs, paintings, and artifacts are accompanied by interactive activities.

The interactive street can be found at [ghetto.galim.org.il/eng/street.html](http://ghetto.galim.org.il/eng/street.html). Additional teaching materials and information can be found there as well.<sup>16</sup>


 **The Daughter We Had Always Wanted** is the story of Marta, a young Jewish child who lived in Czortkow, Poland. At the age of eight, Marta was sent by her mother to live under an assumed identity with a non-Jewish family in Warsaw who risked their lives to protect her. After the Holocaust, Marta immigrated to Israel and began to rebuild her life despite various hardships. Today, Marta Goren is a great-grandmother who lives in Rehovot, Israel. In this age-appropriate memoir, Marta recalls her childhood experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust. Marta includes her address in the memoir and encourages students to write to her. You can take advantage of this as an extension activity for this book.

This story opens the idea of children in hiding and the difficulties of living under an assumed identity. When the war ends, Marta finds it difficult to return to her old identity. For older students, these pages could lead to an interesting discussion of their Jewish identity and how they feel about it.

<sup>15</sup> I Wanted to Fly like a Butterfly: [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/lesson\\_plans/butterfly.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/lesson_plans/butterfly.asp)

<sup>16</sup> Teaching materials for Children in the Ghetto: [ghetto.galim.org.il/eng/about/lessons.html](http://ghetto.galim.org.il/eng/about/lessons.html). Additional information: [ghetto.galim.org.il/eng/about/](http://ghetto.galim.org.il/eng/about/).



 **Fragments** is the story of three siblings sent on the Kindertransport to find safety in England, far from their parents. Author Naomi Shmuel wrote *Fragments* based on the experiences of her mother, the author and poet Karen Gershon. When read together as a class, this story introduces the students to the Kindertransport and the difficulties faced by children having to leave their parents to find safety. This story is good for students in grade 5 and older.


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## Middle School (Grades 6–8)

In each age group, it is worth considering re-using some of the curricula designed for younger students and addressing it at a higher level.

*The Daughter We Had Always Wanted* (see *Late Elementary*) is a great book to read with middle schoolers, especially 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, as it touches issues of Jewish identity. For these older students, there is additional depth in the story which can be addressed at this age.

*Tommy* (see *Early Elementary*) is another good option to repeat with middle schoolers. At this age you can discuss the other paintings that Tommy's father made and what was going on in the ghetto that Tommy was not aware of. Along with other artists, Tommy's father (Bedřich Fritta) was forced to make propaganda art for the Nazis. But in his free time, he drew pictures of what was really happening in the ghetto. The difference is striking. A good source for information about Fritta's other artwork is the Jewish Museum in Berlin's exhibit of them.<sup>17</sup>

 **Through Our Eyes** contains a collection of excerpts from Jewish children's diaries and testimonies of Holocaust survivors who were teenagers during the war. This book provides a chronological overview and highlights the perceptions of children from before the war through its aftermath. Through poetry, diaries and testimonies, *Through Our Eyes* reveals the thoughts and feelings of children and teenagers confronted by death and destruction. The book gives an insight into the world of the children who lived during the wartime period who were approximately the same age as the readers themselves.

At Congregation Kol Ami, we use this in our 6<sup>th</sup> grade class in conjunction with ***Return to Life***, a kit focused on the time directly after the war ended. The *Return to Life* kit comes with posters, a teacher's guide, and a 60 minute video. We use this because although *Through Our Eyes* has a small section on the period after the war, we found it insufficient for the purpose. Consider using the *Return to Life* unit to teach this essential part of the story and as a complement to *Through Our Eyes*.

We teach a 4-lesson unit as follows:


- Lesson 1: **How Life Changed.** Comparing life before the Nazi rise to power to life in the ghetto.
- Lesson 2: **How Did We Get from There to Here?** Exploring how the Nazis were able to isolate the Jews from the rest of society.

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<sup>17</sup> The Jewish Museum in Berlin: [www.jmberlin.de/fritta/en/](http://www.jmberlin.de/fritta/en/). Yad Vashem's resources for teaching the Holocaust through art, music, poetry, and literature: [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/educational\\_materials/arts.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/educational_materials/arts.asp).

- Lesson 3: **Life Changes Again.** Understanding life in the camps.
- Lesson 4: **What Do We Do Now?** Learning how the survivors were able to move on after the war ended.

The complete lesson plan can be found in Appendix 2.

 **Circles** is a teaching unit designed for junior high school students, focusing on topics that reflect Jewish observance during the Holocaust. The curriculum discusses Jewish religious traditions and how Jews struggled to maintain their customs during the Holocaust. The following topics are covered: Tu B'Shvat, Chanukah, Purim, Passover, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Brit Milah, Prayer, Shabbat, and Kaddish and Commemoration.

*Circles* is a particularly good unit for 7<sup>th</sup> graders, who are going through the Bar/Bat Mitzvah process. Each topic has a booklet with quotes and suggested discussions. Choose topics based on the interest and maturity level of your students.<sup>18</sup>

 **Using Facts to Respond to anti-Semitism** is a teaching unit designed by the Anti-Defamation League for middle and high school students. When learning about the Holocaust, students often see anti-Semitism as a thing of the past, something that ended in the great conflagration of the Holocaust. We know, of course, that the hatred and intolerance of anti-Semitism remain powerful and significant realities today. Many of our students experience incidents in their regular schools.

This lesson introduces students to factual information that refutes commonly circulated anti-Semitic myths. Applying this newly acquired information to anti-Semitic case studies, students can begin to develop effective responses to anti-Semitic incidents. By generating ideas in a small group setting, students will also learn from each other and increase their skill set when responding to anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry.

The complete lesson plan for this can be found in the education-outreach section of the ADL's website.<sup>19</sup>

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## High School (Grades 9–12) and Adult Education


It is worth considering re-using some of the curricula designed for younger students and addressing it at a higher level. For instance, the ADL's *Using Facts to Respond to anti-Semitism* (see *Middle School*) is a great unit for high school as well as for middle school.

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<sup>18</sup> One of the teachers in the Yad Vashem seminar with us suggested starting a Brit Milah unit with the scene from *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* where Robin first meets Rabbi Tuckman, "mohel extraordinaire". Showing this scene can help get past the students' natural giggle reaction to the idea of circumcision.

<sup>19</sup> ADL's anti-Semitism unit: [www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/curriculum-connections-summer-2006-ms-hs-lesson.pdf](http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/curriculum-connections-summer-2006-ms-hs-lesson.pdf)

 **Everything is Forbidden and Yet We Do Everything** provides information and texts around which to build a lesson on spiritual resistance. These texts demonstrate how the Jews in the ghettos and camps held onto their traditions. The text for this lesson can be found at the Yad Vashem website.<sup>20</sup> A PowerPoint of pictures from Yad Vashem to go along with these texts can be found on our website.<sup>21</sup>


 **Rays of Light in the Darkness.** There are a number of ways to teach about the Righteous among the Nations, those who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. Yad Vashem's website has a series of online exhibits highlighting different groups of rescuers. A good place to start is "I am My Brother's Keeper"<sup>22</sup>, an online exhibit featuring five themes of the myriad of dilemmas and situations that involved both the non-Jewish rescuers and the Jews they attempted to help. A selection of stories demonstrates the daunting choices and issues they faced. For many more stories, go to Yad Vashem's online exhibits<sup>23</sup> and look under "Rescue: Jews Saving Jews and Righteous Among the Nations."

One way to approach a lesson on the Righteous is to allow the students to choose among the people in these exhibits. Consider presenting the students with a narrowed list of exhibits or people to choose from. Have each student research the following questions and present them to the class:

- Who was this person? What was their religion, occupation, age, educational level, etc.?
- Where did they live?
- What did they do to help?
- Why did they help?
- What did they risk?
- What price did they pay?

By doing this, the students will learn that there were people from all over the world and from all walks of life who helped. Some of these people continued to help even after being arrested or threatened, and some of them died because they helped. Within a discussion of why some people helped, you can also discuss why some did not help and the choices that people must make.

Another good source for lessons on this topic is Echoes and Reflections, lessons 7 (Rescuers) and 9 (Perpetrators, Collaborators, and Bystanders).<sup>24</sup> Alternatively, lesson plans highlighting individual rescuers, including Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara<sup>25</sup>, Oskar Schindler<sup>26</sup>, Anne Frank's helpers Miep Gies and Bep Voskuijl<sup>27</sup>, and several other individuals<sup>28</sup>, can be found at the Yad Vashem website.

 **Responsa from the Kovno Ghetto** is a resource highlighting issues of Jewish religious law that arose in the ghetto in Kovno, Lithuania, an ancient center of Jewish learning. Amidst the terror and persecution,

<sup>20</sup> Spiritual resistance text: [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/remembrance/2016/pdf/texts.pdf](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/remembrance/2016/pdf/texts.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Spiritual resistance PowerPoint: [www.teachtheshoah.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Spiritual-Resistance.pptx](http://www.teachtheshoah.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Spiritual-Resistance.pptx)

<sup>22</sup> I am My Brother's Keeper (the Righteous): [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/righteous/themes.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/righteous/themes.asp)

<sup>23</sup> Yad Vashem's online exhibits: <http://www.yadvashem.org/exhibitions>

<sup>24</sup> Echoes and Reflections lessons: [echoesandreflections.org/the-lessons/lessons-components/](http://echoesandreflections.org/the-lessons/lessons-components/)


<sup>25</sup> Sugihara: [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/lesson\\_plans/sugihara.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/lesson_plans/sugihara.asp)

<sup>26</sup> Schindler: [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/lesson\\_plans/schindler.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/lesson_plans/schindler.asp)


<sup>27</sup> Gies and Voskuijl: [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/lesson\\_plans/righteous\\_women.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/lesson_plans/righteous_women.asp)

<sup>28</sup> Other individuals: [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/newsletter/07/main\\_article.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/newsletter/07/main_article.asp)

and in the abnormal conditions of the ghetto, the Jews could no longer adhere to their customs and mitzvot. This guide outlines how rabbis were called upon to answer numerous issues of Jewish law and grapple with ethical dilemmas. The responsa (rabbinic discussions of questions) in this book can lead to fascinating discussions about how best to answer these questions. Be sure to note the alternative answers to some of the questions presented in the book's footnotes.

 **The Auschwitz Album** is the only surviving visual evidence of the process leading to the mass murder at Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is a unique document and was donated to Yad Vashem by Lilly Jacob-Zelmanovic Meier. The photos were taken at the end of May or beginning of June 1944, and show the arrival of Hungarian Jews from Carpatho-Ruthenia. The photos in the album show the entire process except for the killing itself.

Although *the Auschwitz Album* is a unique resource for teaching about the camps, we recommend great care be taken when using this album as a teaching tool. Instructions about how to use the album, as well as detailed lesson plans can be found at Yad Vashem's website.<sup>29</sup> The album itself can also be found online at Yad Vashem's website.<sup>30</sup>

 **How was it Humanly Possible?** is a curriculum that examines how human beings willingly participated in the mass murder of millions of men, women, and children. Specific case studies are presented and examined through historical documents, testimonies, photographs, literature, and art. The unit includes a resource book, a teacher's guide, and a CD-ROM containing computerized copies of photographs and other materials. More resources for teaching this unit can be found at Yad Vashem's website.<sup>31</sup>

The subject matter of an educational unit on the perpetrators of the Holocaust is fraught with difficulty. The mystery of how some human beings become the mass murderers of others – men, women, and children – makes such a unit unnervingly difficult to approach. However, the moral warning signs that the Holocaust must raise for us oblige us to attempt to understand how it is that human beings can reach such a point. It should be stressed at all times that understanding is by no means equivalent to acceptance, empathy, or forgiveness. Rather, it is precisely the moral obligation to reject and to revolt against such conduct that reasserts the historical burden of understanding how it was possible.

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<sup>29</sup> How to use the Auschwitz Album: [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/video/hevt\\_auschwitz\\_album.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/video/hevt_auschwitz_album.asp)

<sup>30</sup> The Auschwitz Album itself: [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/album\\_auschwitz/](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/album_auschwitz/).


If you live in the Dallas area, you can also find it in our collection at the JCC's Tycher library: [tycher.follettdestiny.com/cataloging/servlet/presentbooklistform.do?listID=11431380](http://tycher.follettdestiny.com/cataloging/servlet/presentbooklistform.do?listID=11431380).


<sup>31</sup> How was it Humanly Possible: [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/learning\\_environments/perpetrators/index.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/learning_environments/perpetrators/index.asp)

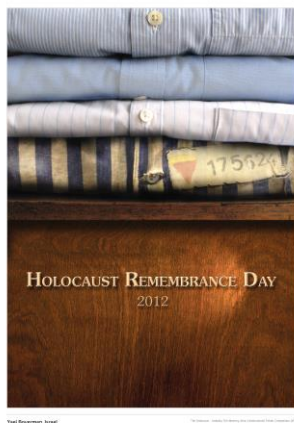
## Additional Resources

 **The Anti-Defamation League’s Challenging anti-Semitism curriculum:** In addition to the Myths and Facts curriculum, the ADL has multiple resources for addressing the issue of anti-Semitism. The complete *Challenging anti-Semitism* curriculum can be found at their website.<sup>32</sup>

The ADL’s website has additional curriculum for all age groups covering topics from bullying and stereotypes to specific Holocaust curriculum options.<sup>33</sup>

 **Echoes & Reflections** is a combined effort of three world leaders in Holocaust education: the Anti-Defamation League, the University of Southern California’s Shoah Foundation, and Yad Vashem. This website provides educators with the professional development and resources necessary to develop the knowledge, capacity, and practice required to responsibly and effectively teach the Holocaust. Their main website is EchoesAndReflections.org and provides a teacher’s guide.<sup>34</sup>

 **Keeping the Memory Alive – International Poster Competitions:** For several years, Yad Vashem hosted a poster contest for their Holocaust Memorial Day. The posters submitted to this contest are fascinating in the various ways they present the issues and depth of the Holocaust. The posters from both the 2012 competition (the theme of which was “Children of the Holocaust”) and the 2013- 2014 competition (the theme of which was “Journeys through the Holocaust”), along with additional information and suggested lesson plans, can be found at Yad Vashem’s website.<sup>35</sup>



Yael Boverman, Israel



Peter Chmela, Czech Republic

**Posters:** These both come from the 2012 contest. Consider the many ways you could interpret these images. When looking at the poster on the right, focus on the black, and then separately on the grey. Do you see two different images?

(Source: *Keeping the Memory Alive, Yad Vashem 2012. Artists: Yael Boverman and Peter Chmela.*)

<sup>32</sup> ADL’s anti-Semitism curriculum: [www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/challenging-anti-semitism.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/challenging-anti-semitism.html)

<sup>33</sup> ADL’s Holocaust curriculum: [www.adl.org/education-outreach/holocaust-education/](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/holocaust-education/)

<sup>34</sup> Echoes and Reflections teacher’s guide: [echoesandreflections.org/the-lessons/lessons-components/](http://echoesandreflections.org/the-lessons/lessons-components/)

<sup>35</sup> 2012 Keeping the Memory Alive: [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/international\\_projects/posters/2012/index.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/international_projects/posters/2012/index.asp); 2014 Keeping the Memory Alive: [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/international\\_projects/posters/](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/international_projects/posters/). If you live in the Dallas area, you can also borrow the posters themselves from the JCC’s Tycher library.

## Holocaust Memorial Programs

Having a time set aside to memorialize these events is worthwhile. However, it is important to maintain our narrative as we do it. A memorial service in which we light six yahrzeit candles to memorialize the six million dead misses the focus on individual stories and strength that we wish to maintain throughout our curriculum.

There are many ways to memorialize the Holocaust. Here are suggestions for three age-appropriate programs.

### **Gathering from the Whirlwind – the Yom HaShoah Seder** (Grade 6 – Adult)

At Congregation Kol Ami, we have developed an innovative program for Holocaust Memorial Day, a Yom HaShoah Seder. The seder is loosely modeled on the Passover Seder and is designed to commemorate the events of the Holocaust and celebrate our survival. This poignant and beautiful ceremony was designed to reflect the new narrative: it commemorates both the terrible things that occurred and the inner strength of our ancestors and those who helped them.

To obtain a copy of the haggadah for this seder, which includes instructions and suggestions on how to run the seder, contact us at [www.TeachTheShoah.org/Contact](http://www.TeachTheShoah.org/Contact). An age-appropriate version for grades 3 to 5, with simplified language and no mention of the camps, is also available.

### **No Place for Hate** (Grades 3 – 5)

For grades 3 to 5, we recommend the ADL's *No Place for Hate*<sup>36</sup> initiative. This project is designed to help students learn about combating hate and building respect for all. A great source for project ideas is their resource guide.<sup>36</sup> Some of their terrific suggestions (see page 7 of the guide) include 1) having the students complete the statement "I am unique because..." and posting the responses around the school, 2) having the students collaborate on a "No Place for Hate" mural, and 3) connecting the students with pen pals of a different background in another state or another country. Connect this to the Holocaust with a discussion of how hatred led to the events of the Holocaust, but be careful to keep the discussion age-appropriate.

### **Say Something** (Pre-K to Grade 2)

For the youngest students, we at Congregation Kol Ami developed a program addressing the issue of bullying. Based on the children's book *Say Something*, this lesson is designed to help students develop skills to cope with bullying and to become people who take a stand against bullying. As part of the lesson, we state that long ago, in another country, there were people who bullied us because we were Jews. They did not want us to grow or be successful, but we did! As a tangible expression of that, the students write the names of their living relatives on construction paper and make a chain of the names, which we display in the hallway.

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<sup>36</sup> *No Place for Hate* resource guide: [dallas.adl.org/files/2015/08/NPFH-Resource-Guide-Dallas-Reduced-File-size.pdf](http://dallas.adl.org/files/2015/08/NPFH-Resource-Guide-Dallas-Reduced-File-size.pdf)

The lesson plan for this unit can be found in Appendix 3.

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### Aside: The Classic Texts

What about the Holocaust standards: books like *Number the Stars*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and *Night*? Do they fit into the new narrative? Should you use them? Our answer is no. Here's why.

#### Fiction

Many of the books that are commonly used to teach the Holocaust are works of fiction: books like *Number the Stars*, *The Devil's Arithmetic*, and *The Book Thief*. Although these are all well written books, consider using true stories rather than fiction. The problem with fiction is that it is hard to know which parts of it are based on truth and which are exaggerated or made up for dramatic effect. This makes these stories too easy to dismiss. There are so many well-written true stories available that there is no reason to use fiction.

#### *The Diary of Anne Frank*

One of the most commonly read true stories about the Holocaust is *The Diary of Anne Frank*. This story can teach a lot about what life was like for children in hiding. Anne is similar to middle schoolers everywhere, in her hopes, dreams, and fears. However, for the length of the book, this story does not teach as many aspects of the Holocaust as some of the other books about children in hiding available from Yad Vashem. The fact that Anne does not survive also makes this story more traumatic than other stories. Consider other options, such as *The Daughter We Had Always Wanted* or *I Wanted to Fly like a Butterfly*, to teach about children in hiding in place of Anne's diary. If you do choose to use the diary, we recommend discussing how it ends with your students before you start reading.

#### *Night and Maus*

Other than *Anne Frank*, the most famous books about the Holocaust are probably Elie Weisel's *Night* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. These are very well written books that tell true stories. They are also very dark and difficult. In many ways, these books lay bare the PTSD of both the survivors and their children. As such, they can be a fascinating study. As such, however, they are traumatic and require a nuanced understanding of the Holocaust prior to reading. The earliest we would use these is in high school, and even in high school, you should use discretion. These books are really best for college students and adults with some background in the subject.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> I read *Night* in a single night in graduate school, at the age of 23, and still consider it to be one of the most disturbing books I have ever read.

## Aside: Survivor Testimony

Nothing is quite as powerful as actually meeting survivors and hearing them tell their stories. Meeting a survivor is the ultimate in hearing “human stories”. Survivors can help make the inconceivable tangible and can transform students into the torchbearers of memory.

This tool must be used with care, however. Not all survivors’ stories are appropriate for all age groups. For **elementary and middle schoolers**, if you are interested in inviting a survivor to testify, you should meet with the survivor before extending the invitation. At this meeting, explain how important it is that the students not be traumatized. Primary and middle-school students should not be presented with a survivor whose story includes horrific descriptions of life and death in the camps. A survivor who spent the war in hiding would be a better choice.

By **high school**, students may be prepared to deal with more difficult stories. You should still understand the survivor’s story beforehand and use good judgment in choosing testimonies that will correspond with the students’ cognitive and emotional needs.

For a more complete discussion of using survivor testimony, and how to prepare for it, please see the discussion of it on Yad Vashem’s website.<sup>38</sup>

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## Aside: Field Trips to the Holocaust Museum

Class visits to Holocaust museums, memorials, and educational centers can provide students with special opportunities to gain awareness and knowledge about the Holocaust. As with all field trips, preparation is essential to the success of the trip. Students should only visit these sites after they have had the chance to study and discuss the Holocaust in class, including discussing what they might see at the museum. You should prepare specific activities to do at the museum to better guide the students’ learning process during the field trip itself. And, of course, follow-up discussion is crucial.

It is important to note, however, that such field trips are not appropriate for all age groups. Holocaust museums tend to be aimed at an adult audience and tend not to shy away from the difficult aspects of the story. Students younger than middle school are generally too young for such museums. Middle and high schoolers should be carefully prepared for what they might see.

It is also important to remember that Holocaust museums often emphasize different aspects of the story than this program is designed to emphasize. Be sure to have activities for your students that pull out the aspects that fit the new narrative.

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<sup>38</sup> Using survivor stories: [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/learning\\_environments/testimony.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/learning_environments/testimony.asp)



## Appendix 1: Sample Handout for Parents

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*Teaching parents about the new approach you are taking to Holocaust education is an important part of your program. Here is a sample handout that helps parents understand how to approach the Holocaust when discussing it with their children.*

### How to Talk to Your Children about the Holocaust

As we begin to talk to your children about the Holocaust in Religious School, you can expect that they will bring home questions. Here are some suggestions for dealing with some of these questions.

- ☞ **Most importantly, be open to all their questions.** These are difficult issues, and it is essential that your children feel comfortable discussing them with the adults in their lives. If we make them feel that they cannot ask questions, already difficult issues will become traumatic. Please be open to discussing what they have heard in class and listening to their feelings. Don't be surprised if one of the feelings they express is anger.
- ☞ **Try to keep your answers age-appropriate.** Remember that we are not trying to upset our children or to make them cry. Remember also that it is not necessary for children to know the whole story at every age. They will learn the whole story eventually.

You may find that some of the questions they ask do not have age-appropriate answers. (For example, they may have heard something from older students.) The best way to deal with this is to answer the questions with short, flat answers (for example, "Yes, that's true"). These types of answers, if delivered in a flat tone of voice, tend to discourage further questions. It is important to always answer the questions, however, and to not give the children the idea that they have brought up something that is shameful or is too scary to discuss.

- ☞ **With younger children, try to maintain some safety nets.** Here are some examples of how to help children maintain a feeling of safety while discussing the Holocaust, depending on the age of the children:
  - ★ The stories we tell the younger students are about survivors – the children in these stories survived these experiences and grew up. Most are grandparents now.
  - ★ This happened a long time ago, in a faraway land.
  - ★ The children in the stories for the younger students (Grades K-4) still had intact, loving families.
  - ★ Even the children on the Kindertransport or living in the ghetto (Grades 5-6) had parents who loved them, even if they had to send them away.

Remember that an intact family and loving parents make an enormous difference to the security of a child.

- ☞ **Do not ask your children to try to understand how it felt to experience these things.** We and our children cannot understand the incredibly difficult experiences these people went through and the attempt is traumatic.
- ☞ **Feel free to come to us if you have questions about how to deal with something your child brought home.** There are many additional resources and materials we can provide you, along with support and help from our trained teachers and program leaders. Please do not feel as if you have to deal with these issues alone.

## Appendix 2: Through Our Eyes/Return to Life Lesson Plan *For Middle School*

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This lesson plan was developed for Congregation Kol Ami by Deborah and Michael Fripp.

### **Lesson 1: How Life Changed**

*Objective:* Compare life before the Nazi rise to power to life in the ghetto.

*Questions this lesson addresses:*

- What was life like before and how did it change?
- How did they survive physically?
- How were they able to maintain their culture?

*Essential lessons:*

- These were regular people.
- They were able to maintain their culture, humanity, and hope.

*Plan:*

- Select pictures and testimonials from chapters 1 and 7 of *Through Our Eyes*.  
(Do not use all of them – there are too many. See below for recommendations.)
- Have them look at the pictures and read the statements aloud and tell what they see/hear.
- Make charts of these on the board, comparing life before vs. in the ghetto. Note what is similar, what could not be continued, and what was continued in a different form.

*Recommended Selections:*

- Chapter 1
  - P15: School: pictures, Dora
  - P17: Music: guitar picture, Hanna S. & Anna H.
  - P19: Recreation: pictures, Liliana & Kitty
  - P23: Synagogue: pictures, Alicia
  - *Ask: What kind of houses did they live in? What did they eat?*
- Chapter 7
  - P77: Ghetto: pictures of the wall, Sima
  - P78: Housing: Miriam + homelessness picture on p80
  - P79: Life: Yitskhok
  - P80: Life: Eva & Charlotte
  - P82-83: Physical Survival: all 3 testimonials and Reflection at bottom
  - P85: School: Sara S. & Warner
  - P87: Synagogue: pictures, Judith
  - P89: Helping each other: Pictures, Motele's poem

## **Lesson 2: How Did We Get from There to Here?**

*Objective:* Explore how the Nazis were able to isolate the Jews from the rest of society.

*Question this lesson addresses:*

- How was it possible for the Jews to go from tightly integrated into society to so isolated that they could be forced into a ghetto?

*Essential lessons:*

- Isolating people takes specific effort.
- Once a population is isolated, bad things can happen.

*Plan:*

- Select pictures and testimonials from chapters 2 to 6 of *Through Our Eyes*.  
(Do not use all of them – there are too many. See below for recommendations.)
- Have them look at the pictures and read the statements aloud and tell what they see/hear.
- Draw a stair-step on the board. Label the stairs with each step of the process of isolation (loss of rights, being forbidden from school, destruction of property, humiliation, isolation through the yellow star).

*Possible Supplements:*

- Is it possible to prevent the isolation and subsequent bad things by objecting?
  - Denmark refused to let their Jews be marked and when the Germans came to round up the Jews, the Danes rescued them. The Germans allowed the rescue in order to prevent the spread of opposition to the occupation.<sup>39</sup>
- Should we speak up when people talk about isolating a population?
  - During the 2016 election, suggestions were made about banning or isolating the Muslim population. Should we speak up? At what point? Should we speak up when people are only talking about it or wait until laws are being proposed?

*Recommended Selections:*

- Chapter 2
  - P30: white section, Susan, Boycott picture – why is there a soldier standing there?  
*Answer: to keep Germans out – the boycott was a failure because the Jews hadn't yet been isolated from the rest of the population.*
  - P31: white section, Liliana and Chava
  - P32-33: pick one testimonial
  - P36/37: Discuss "For Reflection" questions 1 & 4
  - *Note: if you want to discuss propaganda, use pages 34-37, but this needs a separate class.*
- Chapter 3

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<sup>39</sup> Additional resources for discussing Denmark in the Holocaust can be found at [www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/courses/life\\_lessons/pdfs/lesson9\\_1.pdf](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/courses/life_lessons/pdfs/lesson9_1.pdf)

- P41: Bernhard Rust, Erica
- P43: white section, lithograph
- P44: quote in white section
- Chapter 4
  - P49-50: pick from both the white and tan sections, consider “For Reflection” question 1
- Chapter 5
  - P56: timeline
  - P59: white section, Hanna D
  - P60: pictures, white section, Jacku
  - P61: Eva, For Reflection
  - P62-63: pick some
- Chapter 6
  - P68: Rosemarie & Macha, also Livia on P69 and Agnes on P70
  - P73: For Reflection question 1, *and 6 if you think they would be able to answer it.*

### **Lesson 3: Life Changes Again**

*Objective:* Understand life in the camps.

*Questions this lesson addresses:*

- How did life change when they got to the camps?
- How did they survive physically?
- Were they still able to maintain their culture?

*Essential lessons:*

- Essential aspects of life were broken – family, home, freedom, identity, feelings of safety.
- Some were able to survive and to maintain their culture, humanity, and hope, although barely.

*Plan:*

- Select pictures and testimonials from chapters 8 to 10 of *Through Our Eyes*.  
(Do not use all of them – there are too many. See below for recommendations)
- Have them look at the pictures and read the statements aloud and tell what they see/hear.
- If you still have the chart of life before vs. life in the ghetto, add life in the camps to that chart.
- Ask: *What are the questions the kids in the book are asking?* Write them on the board.  
Remember, avoid asking the students to place themselves in the position of the kids in the book.

*Recommended Selections:*

- Chapter 8
  - P93: History/Timeline
- Chapter 9
  - P99: Vladka
  - P101: Livia, packing list

- P107: David B
- P108: Sara S
- Chapter 10
  - P110: Sara S
  - P113: Barry
  - P115: Mel
  - P117: Miriam
  - P120: Jacob
  - P121: pick some or read all
  - P122: pick some or read all
  - P125: Simcha & David B (*these are essential for the 2nd Essential Lesson*)
  - P127: Simcha, discuss the For Reflection question

#### **Lesson 4: What Do We Do Now?**

*Objective:* Learn how the survivors were able to move on after the war ended.

*Questions this lesson addresses:*

- How do you go on and rebuild after something like this? Do you get revenge? Or do you find a way to rebuild life?
- Survivors say: “Grandchildren are the best revenge.” What do they mean by that?
- Why Israel?<sup>40</sup>

*Essential lessons:*

- It is difficult to move on from a trauma of this nature.
- “They did not get revenge, they got married” – they rebuilt their lives.
- Israel was the only place that they could count on.<sup>40</sup>

*Plan:*

- Use the *Return to Life* kit, as directed in the teacher’s guide. Using the posters in the kit to establish what a return to life looks like can be an effective technique.

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<sup>40</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> grade class at Congregation Kol Ami has a strong focus on modern Israel and this lesson connects to that. If your class does not have such a focus, you may want to concentrate on other aspects of this lesson.

## Appendix 3: Say Something Lesson Plan

### *For Pre-K to 2nd Grade*

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This lesson plan was developed for Congregation Kol Ami by Violet Neff-Helms.

#### *Overview*

In this lesson, each student will think about what they can do when they observe an incident of name-calling or bullying, but are not being called names or bullied themselves. Students will learn that adults can be bullied also.

*Grade Level:* Pre-Kindergarten – 2<sup>nd</sup> grade

*Estimated Time:* 30-45 minutes

#### *Lesson Objectives:*

- Students will understand what it means to be a bystander to bullying or name-calling.
- Students will think about how one might act as a bystander to bullying, and learn to differentiate between times when a student can “take a stand” and times when a student needs to ask an adult for help.
- Students will listen to a variety of name-calling scenarios via flashcards and demonstrations with other teachers, and then decide how they might act in order to interrupt the bullying behavior.

#### *Materials Needed:*

- *Say Something* by Peggy Moss<sup>41</sup>
- Paper
- Crayons
- Tape
- Scenarios to role-play on index cards (for adults to perform)<sup>42</sup>
- Bully Illustrations (see below)

#### *Procedure:*

Read *Say Something* to the students.

Have students respond to these questions:

- What is a bully?
- Have you ever been bullied?
- Have you ever witnessed another being bullied?
- What did you do? Why?
- What does a bully look like? Explain and illustrate using the Bully Illustrations. Discuss their responses.

#### *Bully Illustrations:*

Make two examples of what students might predict a bully to look like, one mean-looking and one normal-looking. Display these on the board and invite student to identify the bully. Talk about the

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<sup>41</sup> 2008, Tilbury House Publishers

<sup>42</sup> Example scenarios can be found on our website [www.TeachTheShoah.org](http://www.TeachTheShoah.org).

results. Many students will choose the meaner-looking student. Discuss as a class that a bully can look like anyone.

*Assessment*

Students should be able to recognize bullying situations, both physical and verbal. Students should be able to explain how to handle either one.

*Extensions and Adaptations*

Students create a chain of the names of their living Jewish relatives. As you have explained that adults too can be bullied, tell them, "A long time ago, in another country, adults were bullied because they were Jews. The bullies tried to make us all go away, but we did not." The paper chain is a hands-on project that serves as a tangible proof of our survival. Hang the chain in the classroom or in the hall for other classes to see.

*You can teach  
the traumatic events of the Holocaust  
without traumatizing your students*

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**We need a new narrative.** We must stop allowing the perpetrators to dictate the story of the Holocaust to us. It's time to listen to **the voices of our ancestors.**

We can teach the Holocaust without traumatizing our students if we teach the **human story**, put that story in **context**, and teach it in an **age-appropriate way.**

This booklet will teach you a new way to teach the Holocaust.

[www.TeachTheShoah.org](http://www.TeachTheShoah.org)



Pupils from Rumkowski High School in the Lodz Ghetto with teacher and Principal Stella Rein on a field trip to Marysin, the agricultural area of the ghetto, 1941-1942.