

Learning about the Holocaust

An Educational Program for Museums

Introduction

If genocide is the ultimate manifestation of hatred, then the events that took place under the Nazi regime in the 1930s and 1940s in Europe are an example of racial and ethnic hatred turned into a government philosophy. Aside from the intrinsic value in learning about those events that are commonly and collectively referred to as the Holocaust, there is much to be learned about today's world from those horrific events that took place within such recent memory. Unfortunately, major textbook publishers tend to stay away from issues of moral and social philosophy, leaving much open to the individual teacher's background, time, and financial resources. Often, the generals, presidents, prime ministers, and battle dates cloud the vision we might have of the social, political, and moral roots of those events. How did they come to pass? How could they have gone on for so long? Why didn't anybody do anything? If they did, what happened? What this educational program addresses is this: high school students are at a stage in which many of the concepts which are central to understanding the social, political, and moral roots of the Holocaust, including social control, independence of thought, and moral reasoning, are developing. They need to learn the ways in which they are responsible to a democratic society. They need to learn the historical significance of the Nazi regime, and the causes of its power, as well as the causes of its eventual demise and slow resurgence into mainstream society in Europe and in the United States, especially the latter. A museum can offer unique ways in which such learning can take place, because rather than relying on textbooks, set curricula, and meeting standards for measurement, participants can engage in inquiry based on artifacts, documents, and photographs. They can therefore learn the important concepts behind this historical event rather than focusing on memorizing facts to be tested on later. The use of primary sources and reproductions of primary sources allow participants to reach their own conclusions, thereby making the knowledge their own rather than mere regurgitation of someone else's understanding of an event.

The purpose of this package will be to provide a sampling of four exercises that speak to these issues of individual in society, moral courage, and responsibility in the context of early Holocaust events and experiences. They are based upon an archival document, written excerpts from postwar writings of survivors, a postwar poem by a survivor, and a nonfiction

diary, memoir, autobiography, or collection of letters of a rescuer to be selected by the individual student.

The intention is to bring first-hand accounts to the student in the classroom with a minimum of expense to the teacher, and to provide meaningful and insightful reading and writing projects, which can be effectively integrated into history and English curricula. Emphasis is placed upon point of view, language choices, metaphors and symbolism, and seeing documents in their historical context. This can help students be more critical readers, more careful writers, and more thoughtful students of history and philosophy.

The methodology used in this project will be the inquiry method. This method entails a non-dogmatic approach, through which the facilitator presents information, in this case through artifacts, documents, and photographs, on a subject, and then the participants are given the opportunity to make statements, ask questions, perform research, and finally to make some preliminary conclusions, about the subject at hand. With this method, the participants will leave the workshops having formed their own opinions, or perhaps having developed new ways of perceiving information which they can then use to make future judgments about the subject.

While every facilitator will have opinions about the Holocaust and the exercises and situations set forth in this project, the goal of these activities is not to impose any particular political stance. Instead, the goal is to make participants examine their own views, to clarify and understand their origins, and to see fully the implications of their particular way of thinking. A secondary goal is to encourage participants to see themselves in social roles, to think about the role that they play in a democracy, and to begin thinking about the difference between personal opinion and political behavior as defined by the United States Constitution.

The target audience in these exercises would be a small group of about fifteen high school students, although they can be adapted according to the needs of practically any participants. The ideal situation for carrying these out would be to have the students do these activities before and/or after their museum visit, using the artifacts, documents, and photographs found there as a point of departure through which to initiate discussion and to augment their own research.

A Brief History of the Holocaust

What follows is not, and could not be, a complete list of events; the situations, personalities, and occurrences involved are far too complex to afford such a luxury. However, it is provided as a framework to which the information learned by students can be attached mentally. This should not serve as a substitute for reading published texts by recognized historians and scholars.

In January 1933, the Nazi party came to power in Germany. Within a month, the new government handed down a decree nullifying the parts of the Weimar constitution--the existing framework of German government--that protected citizens against arbitrary arrest and detention, and introducing an arrest category called "protective custody." This meant that anyone the police decided was a menace to society could be taken into detention. The

United States Constitution, in contrast, does not permit police to arbitrarily arrest individuals just because they think they *might* do something, or *could* do something.

About a month after that, the SS built a camp called Dachau about 20 minutes from Munich. A man named Theodor Eicke who had been with the SS for some time, worked at making Dachau a model camp, worthy of emulation by all other camps to come. Other camps were in existence in Germany and parts of Eastern Europe, but not under any centralized authority. In 1934, when the SS had seized control of all of the camps, Eicke became Inspector of all concentration camps and Commander of the SS Death Head Units that served in them.

In 1935, a series of laws known as the Nuremberg Racial Laws prohibited marriages and sexual relations between Jews and so-called Aryans. The Nazis, with Adolf Hitler at the forefront, propagated a theory about the races in the world. They taught that the Aryan race—which was defined basically as western European whites—was superior to all of the other races in the world, and that those other races needed to be either subjugated and controlled, or exterminated for good. Because of long-standing feelings of anti-Semitism in Europe, the Jews were considered a particularly dangerous group, destined—if not properly controlled through extermination—to rule Europe, and possibly the world. A strong plank in the Nazi platform, then, was to empower Aryans and destroy everyone else, particularly Jews. This thought was the basis for the Nuremberg laws and for all of the other oppressive measures taken by the Nazis until their defeat in 1945.

In 1937, the category of preventive custody was added to that of protective custody. Everyone the Nazis could lump into an “undesirable” category—including homosexuals, political dissidents, Gypsies, Jews, and the handicapped (mentally and physically)—was persecuted and/or taken into custody. More and more camps were being built and expanded in order to accommodate the number of prisoners, and life became increasingly difficult for members of those groups who were not in the camps. Jews, for instance, had to give up their businesses and properties to the Nazis. Beginning in 1938, Jews had to adopt Israel or Sara as a middle name; Jewish physicians were forbidden to practice medicine; and thousands of Polish Jews residing in Germany were deported. Jews were expelled from public schools; they were prohibited from attending theaters, cinemas, and resorts; they were not allowed to reside in, or even walk through, certain city districts; and they were given special identity cards and food ration cards. It was during this time, in the late 1930s, that the camp population reached its highest point.

The United States during this time stayed out of things for the most part. It was busy dealing with its own economic problems, and trying to stay out of what was quickly looking like a messy situation abroad. Britain and France were among the other nations who were hoping that by making small concessions to Hitler, like letting him annex certain parts of Europe without a fight, he would be satisfied and would not perpetrate any further violence.

Unfortunately, though, they were wrong. Hitler instead began to gain more and more power, and to seek more and more power. In November of 1938, his troops waged war on German Jews on a night called *Kristallnacht*, in which synagogues were burned, Jewish stores were destroyed, and Jewish cemeteries were vandalized.

One of the first points at which the United States became involved in this whole situation was when a ship called the SS *St. Louis*, carrying almost one thousand German Jews, entered US

waters. It anchored off shore for weeks waiting for someone in the United States government to let the refugees come ashore. The United States refused to let them in, and nearly all of them died.

Germany was not the only place where oppression was taking place. In Poland, and eventually in all Nazi-occupied areas, Jews were forced to wear a Yellow Star of David on their clothes, so that they could be easily identified. This made them easy to pick out when troops wanted to pick them up and move them to a camp, and it also made it easy for townspeople to scorn them, to deny them service in shops, hotels, and restaurants, and to boycott their businesses.

Also in the late 1930s, the SS began establishing their own industries in the concentration camps. Later, deals would be arranged between the camps and local industries, in which prisoners would be provided daily for work in the factories at little or no cost. Thousands of prisoners were literally worked to death in this way. The camp population was still relatively low, though, with only about 25,000 inmates, because inmates who promised to leave Germany were released in order that they could do so.

In July of 1939, President Roosevelt asked Congress to repeal an arms embargo so that the United States could begin to sell arms to England and other non-Fascist countries in Europe. This was the first official, military-oriented involvement that the United States took in what would become World War II. When Germany invaded Poland in September and refused to leave, Britain and France formally declared war on Germany. Roosevelt proclaimed American neutrality in the war, then he closed all US ports and offshore waters to the submarines of the warring nations.

By mid-1940, President Roosevelt had announced a shift from neutrality to active support for the Allies against the Axis. The United States government also began to try to protect itself by passing the Alien Registration Act, requiring aliens to register and making it illegal to advocate the violent overthrow of the US government. The draft was also enacted, requiring adult males between 21 and 35 years of age to register for military training. The minimum age would drop to 18 later in the war.

Back on the European side, gassing of camp inmates began on a small scale in 1941. The Nazis began with vans which they rigged to pump carbon monoxide from the exhaust pipe back into the back of the van, where they would stuff as many Polish Jews as they could.

In the fall of that year, German Jews were forced to wear the Yellow Star of David. It was not until 1942 that the yellow stars would prove as a tool for the Germans in major roundups of Jews. Around that time, the yellow-star rule extended from just Germany and Poland to all occupied countries, including France, the Netherlands, and Russia. This was also the year in which the infamous gas chambers began.

It was at about this time that the different types of camps really became distinct. There were transit camps, like most of the camps in France, which basically served as stopovers for trains moving prisoners from the towns and country sides of western Europe to Poland and other parts of eastern Europe to the more severe camps. Some of these were labor camps, which farmed out the labor of thousands of prisoners to major industries, including IG Farben, Bayer, and Siemens. Some, though, were death camps. These camps, including one of the

divisions of Auschwitz, as well as Chelmno, Sobibor, and Treblinka in Poland, were developed with crematoria and gas chambers--the latter to commit the murders and the former to hide the evidence. Thousands of prisoners were murdered in these camps in a very short time—for example, in January 1941, 12,000 Russian POWs were brought to Auschwitz, and by March, only 945 remained. By January of 1945, however, the camp population had risen again to well over 700,000 prisoners. As rumors of coming Allied troops reached the Nazis running the camps, they would often try to evacuate or murder all remaining prisoners in order to cover their crimes. Frequently, the commandants and other Nazi camp officials would flee the camps, leaving the prisoners to their own resources until the liberating troops arrived.

In late January 1945, the Soviet army liberated Auschwitz. By the end of March of that year, all German forces had been pushed back into Germany. In April, the SS tried to evacuate Buchenwald, but the prisoners fomented a successful rebellion and liberated the camp before US troops arrived. It was not for another few weeks, in May 1945, that Germany finally surrendered and Hitler committed suicide. Though the world war itself did not end for several months, the Holocaust was over and Nazi Germany had fallen.

Suggested Readings

- Berenbaum, Michael. (1993). *The World Must Know: A History of the Holocaust as Told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Dawidowicz, Lucy. (1986). *The War Against The Jews 1933-1945*. New York: Bantam.
- Dawidowicz, Lucy. (1976). *A Holocaust Reader*. West Orange, NJ: Behrman House.
- Gilbert, Martin. (1986). *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews in Europe During the Second World War*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Hilberg, Raul. (1985). *The Destruction of the European Jews*. New York: Holmes and Meier. Available as full 3-volume set or as abridged student edition.
- Hilberg, Raul. (1992). *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Levin, Nora. (1990). *The Holocaust: The Nazi Destruction of European Jewry, 1933-1945*. Melbourne, FL: Krieger Publishing Company.
- Yahil, Leni. (1991). *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry, 1932-1945*. New York: Oxford.

Current Holocaust Education Efforts in the United States

Two major museums received a great deal of attention in the spring of 1993: one already open and one slated to open in just a few weeks. Articles in professional publications like *Museum News* and in newspapers across the country are drawing attention to the fact that, just shy of fifty years after it ended, the Holocaust is being commemorated in multimillion dollar projects: Beit Hashoah, or the Museum of Tolerance (though its literal translation is "House of Destruction"), opened in March, 1993, at the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opened in April, 1993, in Washington, DC. Why now? Why there? Why them? Questions surround the openings of these museums and of those like them.

A few years ago, the citizens of a town called Fulda in Germany sponsored a reunion of Holocaust survivors. Survivors came from all over the world to visit their childhood homes,

schools, and familiar playgrounds, and to reacquaint themselves with those with whom they had lost touch in the raging years of the Third Reich. It was a difficult time, full of pain for the survivors of persecution returning to the site of much of their original oppression, but afterwards those who did return were glad without exception that they had. Michael Berenbaum, then the Project Director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council which set up the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, noted at the time that there may be a reason why it has taken until now to commemorate on a large scale the suffering of millions under the Nazi regime: "Only a generation more distant from the immediate catastrophe could dare to approach it. As the story of Lot's wife illustrates, a person cannot afford to look back while fleeing" (Miller, 1990).

Although it was forty-eight years after the end of World War II before both of the major Holocaust museums in the United States opened, they were both in the planning stages for a number of years, and neither of them is the first Holocaust museum. Many of the camps were turned into museums immediately after or shortly after their liberation. Even in the United States, museums and memorials have been in existence for decades, which is remarkable considering that many survivors have been reluctant to talk about their experiences until recent years, as they age and the realization becomes clear that when they are gone, there will be no one left to talk about what happened.

There is a powerful temptation to gloss over painful or ugly parts of history, to try to forget the bad things and focus only on triumphant times. However, as historians are forever reminding us, unless we can reconcile ourselves with our own past and with our former enemies, we are doomed to repeat our mistakes--or someone is, if they do not learn from ours. It is with this mission in mind--never letting this part of history repeat itself--that Holocaust memorials and museums begin.

Any attempt at commemoration of the Holocaust in the United States is necessarily different from any counterpart in Europe, mainly because the events being commemorated did not take place on American soil, and because most involvement of United States citizens did not take place until the liberation of the camps. The need for commemoration is instead for survivors, children of survivors, and their empathizers, and usually for educational purposes more than any other. James E. Young (1990), a Holocaust scholar with a particular interest in commemoration, writes, "Where the memorials *in situ* in Germany and Poland rhetorically suggest themselves in the material extension of events they would commemorate, those in America must gesture abstractly to events overseas.... American memorials seem not to be anchored in history so much as the ideals that generated them in the first place."

Young also comments on the politics involved in Holocaust commemoration, which are often peculiar to Americans. Survivors often set up memorials to remember those who did not make it; these usually are constructed in cities with large survivor populations, like New York and Los Angeles. Memorials can also bring tourist business, and can serve as gathering places for community members. Veterans remember the liberation of the camps through memorials, and politicians, Young (1990) cynically suggests, "propose monuments to secure votes among their Jewish constituency." Advocates of commemoration are usually also conscious of the fading of memory across generations; children of survivors recognize that even they do not have the same knowledge of the Holocaust as their parents did, and fear the loss of this memory by their children and generations to come.

The first public Holocaust memorial ceremony in the United States took place on the first anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, before the war was over, on April 19, 1944, in New York City. The ceremony was led by the mayor and leaders of the Jewish community there, and became an annual event. Later, survivors of the ghetto would propose a memorial for the site, but it would never be built (Young, 1990).

The Martyrs Memorial and Museum preceded the better-publicized Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, California. It is affiliated with the Jewish Federation of Los Angeles and is a relatively small institution. Los Angeles area survivors had been trying to build a memorial or museum since 1962, but to no avail. In the late 1960s, the Federation reluctantly made an agreement with local survivors that if they would raise the necessary funds to begin the museum, they would provide the space and the staff. Simon Wiesenthal, probably the most famous Nazi hunter, agreed to be the guest of honor at their first big fund-raising dinner in 1973, and again at another fundraiser in 1977 (Miller, 1990).

Meanwhile, New York-born Rabbi Marvin Hier had been working on his own project. He had been working in Vancouver, British Columbia, and had a lifelong interest in the Holocaust. His father's family had been victims of the Nazis, and he had often taken students to visit concentration camps. Hier decided that he wanted to build a Holocaust educational center in the United States. He chose Los Angeles because the United States was "the strongest nation on earth," and the city's Jewish culture and education were "one hundred years behind New York." Hier convinced Samuel Belzberg, a Vancouver businessman, to donate \$500,000 and to pledge further support for the center (Miller, 1990).

In 1977, Rabbi Hier flew to Vienna to meet with Simon Wiesenthal. He told Wiesenthal he wanted to establish his educational center in Wiesenthal's name. He promised Wiesenthal that the center would give his Nazi-hunting center in Vienna \$5,000 a month. He hoped the Los Angeles center would become a Nazi-hunting center as well. Wiesenthal accepted Hier's offer and canceled his obligation with the Martyrs Museum. Their bitterness did not subside, even with Hier's donation of \$25,000 to compensate for the losses they incurred due to the loss of Wiesenthal as their big name.

Hier's center is different from other Holocaust museums in the United States, in that Hier is neither a survivor nor the child of survivors. The Martyrs Museum, on the other hand, is part of the Jewish community of Los Angeles, many of whom are survivors, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is widely supported by survivors. Hier sees his non-affiliation with any other organization as a benefit, both to the center and to those it helps: "When Russian Jewish activists were given permission to open a Jewish cultural center in early 1989, it was Rabbi Hier who quickly assembled his poster exhibit on the Holocaust and installed it in the Moscow center to coincide with its opening. The night before the opening of the center, Hier secured permission to screen *Genocide* for an audience of close to one thousand Russians" (Miller, 1990). Hier is politically active as well: "In 1989, for example, he urged Jews not to visit Poland until the [Catholic] church agreed to honor its 1987 agreement and move a controversial Carmelite convent from the grounds of Auschwitz. In 1987, he refused to meet with Pope John Paul II as part of a Jewish delegation after the Catholic leader invited Kurt Waldheim to the Vatican and publicly praised him there without mentioning his wartime service for the Nazis" (Miller, 1990). In keeping with its current-events awareness, the center sees itself as a sort of a watchdog organization on prejudice today, monitoring

white supremacist groups around the country and around the world in an attempt to demonstrate the dangers of complacency and ignorance.

The most noticeable difference between the Beit Hashoah and other museums is its heavy emphasis on television communication. Hier's philosophy when designing the museum was that he wanted especially to reach young people with his message of tolerance, and that in order to do that he would give them the information "in a form that they are used to receiving it--the tube" (Miller, 1990). Newspaper and magazine articles across the country noted the museum's unique approach during its first week. Television images jump out from every corner, taunting the visitor at every turn with politically correct messages. The overriding theme of the museum definitely is that every one of us is part of the problem.

The Holocaust museum in Dallas is more artifact-oriented than is the Beit Hashoah. The chief donor traveled to Europe to find a boxcar from one of the transports to use as an entry hall to the museum. After finding one in Belgium, the donor brought it back to the Dallas museum, but found that some survivors refused to enter through a box car, having had some of the most degrading, humiliating experiences of their lives in box cars. The museum created a "for survivors only" entrance as a compromise (Young, 1990).

New York City, home of the largest survivor population in the United States, has its own Museum of Jewish Heritage, A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. The Museum has a view of Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, "thus situating the Holocaust somewhere between American shrines to immigration and liberty" (Young, 1990).

Perhaps the most eloquent and complete plea for building a national Holocaust memorial in the United States came from former President Carter when he set up the United States Holocaust Memorial Council in the late 1970s:

Although the Holocaust took place in Europe, the event is of fundamental significance to Americans for three reasons. First, it was American troops who liberated many of the death camps, and who helped to expose the horrible truth of what had been done there. Also, the United States became a homeland for many of those who were able to survive. Secondly, however, we must share the responsibility for not being willing to acknowledge forty years ago that this horrible event was occurring. Finally, because we are humane people, concerned with the human rights of all peoples, we feel compelled to study the systematic destruction of the Jews so that we may seek to learn how to prevent such enormities from occurring in the future (press release, undated).

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, one of the products of the Council set up in November 1978, opened on April 26, 1993. Its construction makes sense as a national commemoration, in that it will remind us of some of the ideals of what America should be: a democratic, pluralistic society that welcomes the oppressed peoples of the world. Its extensive educational programs underscore its commitment to help prevent such an event from occurring on American soil hereafter, and to teach the dangers of bigotry and totalitarianism. Young (1990) writes, "By remembering the crimes of another people in another land, Americans would recall their nation's own, idealized reason for being"; the memorial can serve as a reminder of our own moral responsibilities as individuals and as a society.

Because it was constructed rather than resurrected from an already existing historic site, choosing an appropriate design for the building which would contain the artifacts and information to teach the nation about the Holocaust would present the first challenge to the museum's designers. The building, designed by James Ingo Freed of IM Pei and Partners in New York City, abstracts some of the original forms of concentration camp buildings and ghettos. The Hall of Witness is constructed of steel and brick and is lit by skylights. The architect describes his decisions: a deliberately cracked wall at the end of the Hall serves as

a symbol of the rupture of civilization during the Holocaust. The arch at the top of the formal solemn staircase in this Hall is reminiscent of the opening in the entrance to the Birkenau death camp. A glass fissure, starting at the bottom of the grand staircase and running through the Hall of Witness to the outside wall, serves to rend the space as if it were shaken from its foundations by an earthquake. The glass ceiling of this Hall will be twisted and warped. The brick walls, exposed beams, boarded windows and metal fences and gates in this Hall will let visitors know that they are in a different place—that the Holocaust is an event that should disturb and be felt as well as perceived (Freed, undated).

The architect also is aware that the museum needs to fit somewhere in between adding aesthetically to the landscape around it (it is sandwiched between the Victorian Auditor's Building and the neoclassical Bureau of Engraving) and disturbing the calm surrounding it. The spaces within the museum place a heavy emphasis on contemplation and reflection, with natural light and open space. The building, the architect hopes, "speaks through us and lets us mourn, perhaps be comforted, and rejoin life" (Freed, undated).

Many people have wondered recently what the point is of commemorating the Holocaust now, almost fifty years later. They see the Holocaust as an obsession of Jews, as something that is just as well forgotten—or at least something with which they do not want to be bothered. The Holocaust is completely ignored or only mentioned in the most cursory of manners in most public school curricula. Why, then, is it important enough to deserve a museum?

The museum can, as Duncan Cameron explains, serve as a place for "confrontation, experimentation, and debate" (Karp and Lavine, 1991). The museum-as-forum allows for learning not only from artifacts, art, label copy, docents, and exhibition catalogs, but also from one's companions, and from other visitors. The subject matter of a Holocaust museum encourages memory, elicits stories from survivors and their friends and family, resulting in a

valuable dialogue among generations and cultures about a subject which has long been swept under the rug. A prominent museum like the national museum on the Mall can encourage the kind of understanding and awareness which could make it less likely that such an event as it commemorates will happen again—or at least make it more likely that Americans will intervene should world events turn in that direction again.

Methodology and Lessons

Often Holocaust scholars divide those who were involved into four neat categories: perpetrators, bystanders, victims, and rescuers. For this level of study, it is appropriate to spend the most time on learning about the victims; at more complex levels, time can be well spent understanding the differences between perpetrators and bystanders, and the similarities between them.

In Part One of this package, students will begin with an introduction to Perpetrators and Bystanders, by reading and investigating a memorandum written by a high-level SS officer, Oswald Pohl. In Part Two, they will gain some insight into Victims. This will come from reading the writings--prose and poetry--of three survivors. Finally, in Part Three, students will take the initiative to focus their attention on a Rescuer's memoirs, diary, or letters.

By looking at these three broad categories, students can see how the relationships of each type of person are defined over time. Less time is spent on Perpetrators and Bystanders in this package than on other types of participants, because at the age of students for which the package was designed, too much focus on the evil side can become overwhelming. The inclusion of information about rescuers can be especially crucial when dealing with young people, because it lends some optimism in appropriate places in an otherwise frightening and depressing subject.

Each activity will be made up of the following components: description, objectives, materials needed, preparation needed, hints/strategies, facilitator instructions, possible participant responses, and a list of suggested readings. The first activity, involving Oswald Pohl's memorandum, includes also a Background section in order to shed more light on the significance of the document. This information can be shared with students as needed.

Description

The description will explain generally what to expect from this lesson, and what its part is in the larger scope of the kit.

Objectives

The Objectives section will detail what the participants can gain from doing this activity. Each objective will relate back to the purpose set up in the description, which in turn relates back to the greater purpose of the project itself. This should tie the project together in the mind of the facilitator, allowing for a better feel for the flow of the whole picture, as well as helping that flow convey the sense of purpose and importance to the participants.

Materials needed

This section will enable the facilitator to ensure that he or she is fully prepared to lead the activity. It will list each item needed, and, when appropriate, possible sources for these materials.

Preparation needed

The kit is intended to be fairly self-contained, in that most of the research is provided here, both in the text of each activity section and in the history chapter provided previously. The facilitator needs to have a minimum comfort level with the material and talking about it, and some knowledge of social, political, and moral philosophy. This section is included to ensure that any advance reading, photocopying, material distribution, or other preparation can be done before the group assembles for the activity.

Facilitator instructions and possible participant responses

Flexibility is key, and facilitators should feel comfortable taking advantage of the teachable moments which will inevitably crop up. Therefore, it is hoped that facilitators will not feel the need to adhere to these instructions rigidly, but rather that they will use them as a guideline mainly for sequence, and secondly as a way to help them see the intent and the flow of the project's direction.

This section is intended as a way for the facilitator to see the intent of the project. Where there are factual answers, they will be indicated as such, but these are few and far between. Participants should be encouraged to arrive at their own conclusions, and answers should be accepted regardless of their presence or absence from this kit. This atmosphere must be initiated by the facilitator from the outset, and maintained by the facilitator as well, which will entail at times ensuring that participants do not judge one another based on their answers; they should be shown that the discourse--the open discussion of views--is what is vital, and that they are welcome to vocalize their own views but not to demean the views of others.

This can be a particularly difficult part of this methodology for many people, especially with topics as potentially volatile as politics and racism. Participants should be encouraged to view this as part of their own personal quests in truth and morality, and not a contest to find the right answer. Participants' views will in this way become less threatening to one another, and they can then freely participate in a meaningful discussion without attacking or becoming angry. Passion, but not combat, is okay.

Suggested Readings

The books included in this section are intended to serve as a starting point for students and/or teachers who are interested in the topic addressed by that chapter or activity, and who wish to follow this interest up with some individual outside reading. They have been selected for their content and for their age-appropriateness. There are certainly other resources available, including non-print resources like videotapes, which can serve the same purpose; this is merely a starting point.

Perpetrators and Bystanders: Pohl's Memorandum

Description

Having read a memorandum written by SS officer Oswald Pohl, students will incorporate developing critical thinking, reading, and writing skills to try to piece together what situations and personalities would precipitate such a document.

Background

A copy of the text of a memorandum entitled “Report About the Valuation of Used Textiles from the Jewish Resettlement” will be used for this activity. The document was found in the collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of the State Memorial Museum at Auschwitz-Birkenau. It was generated originally by SS Lieutenant General Oswald Pohl, Chief of the SS Central Office for Economy and Administration, addressed to Heinrich Himmler, and dated February 6, 1943. It concerns reusable textiles and possessions taken from killed Jewish deportees to the Lublin (Majdanek)¹ and Auschwitz concentration camps.

The Nazis were meticulous record-keepers when it suited them. There are many things which corrupt officials would not have recorded, such as items they wished to keep for themselves or to lavish upon their loved ones as expensive gifts. In such cases, their thievery could not be traced. However, this list is probably very accurate as far as items that would have made it beyond those officials to the general government and to the market.

There are several aspects of historical significance about this document. First, it belies any claim that Nazi officials, especially at higher levels, did not know what was going on around them or that they were unaware of their own roles as individuals in the killing machine. The last sentence in the first paragraph (“We are therefore unable completely to meet the full quota of men’s clothing requested”) signifies the awareness on the part of the general public as to the existence of such goods and the likelihood that they too must have been aware of their sources.

The mention of the “freezes on the use of rail transport,” noted in the second paragraph, indicates the frustration many officials (and civilians) felt with something that would help in the eventual undoing of the Nazi regime: the overuse of rail systems for “ethnic cleansing” resulting in their underuse for civilians or for other military uses such as ammunition, equipment, or personnel transportation.

It is important to note how the items inventoried on the second and third pages might have come to be available for such use in the first place. Auschwitz was the largest German killing center and the largest concentration camp in Europe. It consisted of Auschwitz I (the central camp), Auschwitz II/Birkenau (the killing center), and Auschwitz III/Monowitz (the forced labor complex, whose factories included the IG Farben synthetic rubber factory, also known as Buna, and other industrial plants built after 1941). Approximately 150,000 prisoners were literally worked to death in the 37 subsidiary camps that were part of Auschwitz III, while the SS and the enslaving corporations saved monies they would otherwise have had to pay to Aryan men.

¹ Lublin is a town in Poland, near which a camp was set up called Majdanek or Maidanek.

When prisoners arrived at the camps, they were stripped of all of their belongings, which were then driven to a special warehouse area called “Canada,” where they were sorted, cleaned, and disinfected. Then they could be distributed to German expatriates, to the military, and to other government agencies and favorites.

Finally, the original document’s historical value is in its role in the trial and conviction of Pohl by the United States Military Tribunal at Nuremberg in 1947.

Objectives

Given an official document describing some of the processing of incoming inmates into camps, students will write a research paper reflecting their understanding of and their reaction to factors like source, audience, and context.

In their papers, students should use these above considerations as a springboard to researching some aspect(s) of interest to them regarding the Holocaust and the concentration camps’ role in the Nazi plan. They should demonstrate the ability to make some inferences about and tie together several aspects of this document in order to come to some understanding about the events that gave rise to it and those that resulted from it.

Materials/Equipment

- A copy of the document for each student
- A reference copy of *The Timetables of History* or a similar book or excerpts relevant to December 1942 through February 1943
- Historical map or atlas of Europe
- Historical books relating to the second World War and/or the Holocaust and/or Nazism (see Suggested Readings)

Suggested Teaching Strategy

After engaging in some class discussion about the Holocaust in general, this document and the questions posited can be used as a way of encouraging independent research in upper-level students, as well as writing, analytical, and synthesizing skills. I suggest making this assignment after having begun some discussion with students about the Holocaust and Nazism. This will give students enough of an idea of what they are looking at to be able to make some sense of it.

Give each student a copy of the document. Ask each to read the memo and glance over the attachment.

You may receive questions from students as they read, such as who General Pohl was, or what various locations are or what certain words mean. Ask them to write down any questions that they have on a separate piece of paper.

Tell the students that you want them to research some aspect of this document that interests them. Give them the worksheet and tell them to add their own questions to it. Describe the written resources available to them in your library, perhaps even taking them to those

resources, and tell them that they have two weeks (or whatever you gauge to be a suitable amount of time for them to take to write a research paper, given your experience with them) to write a thoughtful paper reflecting their understanding of the events that gave rise to this document and those that resulted from what it describes.

The papers you will receive should reflect an understanding of the Nazi plan for exterminating the Jews of Europe, including the rationale for the existence of the concentration camps. Because the students choose the specific facet of history upon which they wish to focus, the topics addressed will surely vary.

Suggested Readings

Bauer, Yehuda and Nih Keren. (1982). *A History of the Holocaust*. New York: Franklin Watts.

Gilbert, Martin. (1986). *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews In Europe During the Second World War*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Hilberg, Raul. (1985). *The Destruction of the European Jews*. New York: Holmes and Meier.

Available as full 3-volume set or abridged student version.

Yahil, Leni. (1991). *The Holocaust. The Fate of European Jewry, 1932-1945*. New York: Oxford.

Report about the Valuation of Used Textiles from the Jewish Resettlement

6 February 1943

TOP SECRET

The attached list provides an overview of the quantities of used goods obtained from Jewish resettlement to the concentration camps at Lublin (Majdanek) and Auschwitz. In this context, it is important to note that the quantity of rags is extremely high. This of course reduces the value of the used clothing, especially the men's clothing. We are therefore unable completely to meet the full quota of men's clothing requested.

Shipment by train has been particularly difficult. Shipments have been backlogged because of the constant freezes on the use of rail transport, so that goods have accumulated in several concentration camps.

This has been especially noticeable since December 1942, since the ban on shipments to the Ukraine has prevented us from delivering the used clothing promised to ethnic German resettles there. Consequently, all deliveries for ethnic Germans in the Ukraine have been rerouted via Litzmannstadt (Lodz) by the Ethnic German Aid Office (*Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*, or VOMI) and stored there in a large warehouse. As soon as the transport situation has eased, VOMI will carry out the distribution of these goods.

Requisitioning the required number of freight cars could until now only be implemented through close cooperation with the Reich Ministry of Economics. The Ministry of Economics will inform the Reich Transport Ministry that shortages of textiles and other raw materials necessitate the shipment of used textiles from the General Government.

Signed: Pohl, SS Lieutenant General and General of the Waffen SS

TOP SECRET

List of reusable textiles from the Lublin (Majdanek) and Auschwitz concentration camps requested by the SS Central Office for Economy and Administration (WYHA):

1. Reich Ministry of Economics

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| Men's used clothing without underwear | 97,000 sets |
| Women's used clothing without underwear | 76,000 sets |
| Women's silk lingerie | 89,000 sets |
| TOTAL | 34 railway cars |

| | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| Rags | 400 railway cars | 2,700,000 kg |
| Bed feathers | 130 railway cars | 270,000 kg |
| Women's hair | 1 railway car | 3,000 kg |
| Reusable material | 5 railway cars | 19,000 kg |
| TOTAL | 536 railway cars 579 railway cars | 2,992,000 kg |

2. Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (Ethnic German Aid Office)

| Men's Clothing | |
|----------------|----------------|
| Coats | 99,000 pieces |
| Jackets | 57,000 pieces |
| Vests | 27,000 pieces |
| Pants | 62,000 pieces |
| Underwear | 38,000 pieces |
| Shirts | 132,000 pieces |
| Sweaters | 9,000 pieces |
| Scarves | 2,000 pieces |
| Pajamas | 6,000 pieces |
| Collars | 10,000 pieces |
| Gloves | 2,000 pair |
| Socks | 10,000 pair |
| Shoes | 31,000 pair |

| Women's Clothing | |
|------------------|----------------|
| Coats | 155,000 pieces |
| Dresses | 119,000 pieces |
| Jackets | 26,000 pieces |
| Skirts | 30,000 pieces |
| Shirts | 125,000 pieces |
| Blouses | 30,000 pieces |
| Sweaters | 60,000 pieces |
| Underwear | 49,000 pieces |
| Panties | 60,000 pieces |
| Pajamas | 27,000 pieces |
| Aprons | 36,000 pieces |
| Bras | 25,000 pieces |
| Slips | 22,000 pieces |
| Head scarves | 35,000 pieces |
| Shoes | 111,000 pieces |

| Children's Clothing | |
|---------------------|---------------|
| Coats | 15,000 pieces |
| Boy's jackets | 11,000 pieces |
| Boy's pants | 3,000 pieces |
| Shirts | 3,000 pieces |
| Scarves | 4,000 pieces |
| Sweaters | 1,000 pieces |
| Underwear | 1,000 pieces |
| Girl's dresses | 9,000 pieces |
| Girl's blouses | 5,000 pieces |
| Aprons | 2,000 pieces |
| Panties | 5,000 pair |
| Stockings | 10,000 pair |
| Shoes | 22,000 pair |

| Linen, etc. | |
|--------------------|----------------|
| Bed coverings | 37,000 pieces |
| Sheets | 46,000 pieces |
| Pillow cases | 75,000 pieces |
| Tea towels | 27,000 pieces |
| Handkerchiefs | 135,000 pieces |
| Towels | 100,000 pieces |
| Table cloths | 11,000 pieces |
| Napkins | 8,000 pieces |
| Wool scarves | 6,000 pieces |
| Ties | 25,000 pieces |
| Galoshes & boots | 24,000 pair |
| Hats | 9,000 pieces |

Pohl's Memorandum Worksheet

Who is the author? Who is he addressing in this memo? Why is it top secret?

What was happening in early February 1943 in Europe and in the United States? Be as specific as you can be.

How were the used goods obtained? What does Jewish resettlement mean? What was a concentration camp? What do you know about Majdanek and Auschwitz?

What does it mean that these items were meeting requests? Who was requesting them? Why were uses of the rail transports constantly frozen?

What happened in December 1942? Where is the Ukraine in relationship to Berlin, Germany? To Lublin, Poland? To Oswiecim, Poland? To Lodz, Poland? What is the significance in this context of those cities?

Who were ethnic German resettles? Why were they in the Ukraine? Why was the author trying to get these items to them? What would they do with them once they got them?

What do the numbers in the document tell you? What does this mean? As you work, keep the following considerations in mind:

- the source

- the intended audience
- the historical context: what was happening at the time it was written in Europe and in the United States? What had happened in reference to the ban on shipments to the Ukraine? What were those shipments?
- the content: how and why were the goods obtained? Who was requesting them?
- other inferences about the subject: What was Jewish resettlement? What were concentration camps? Why were the rail transports being constantly frozen? Who were the ethnic German resettles?
- the geographical references: Berlin, Lublin, Oswiecim, Lodz
- the numbers in the attachment

Victims: Quotations from Survivors

Description

Students will read two quotations from Holocaust survivors as they are quoted in Michael Berenbaum's (1993) book *The World Must Know: A History of the Holocaust as Told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. Using the copy of the quotations and some prompting questions, they will write a short essay (a page or two) about the speakers and their experiences.

Objectives

Students will consider the point of view, historical context, and language of the testimony of Holocaust survivors to write a short essay in response to what they have read.

Materials/Equipment

Quotations from Survivors worksheet

Suggested Teaching Strategy

As part of a writing curriculum, these quotations can be used as a means of exploring the importance of point of view, and poetic language and expression, in addition to historical context and discovering what events would evoke such comments as these. The exercise also encourages skills in empathizing with another's point of view.

Give each student a copy of the worksheet.

Ask the students to spend a few minutes thinking about what they read and then to use the questions on the worksheet as prompters to thinking about why the speakers said what they did. Encourage creativity and empathy.

Discussion among students is a good way for them to share their knowledge and understanding of victimization and of the historical context involved. They should be

allowed access to historical texts if requested in order to clarify questions they may have. The important part, though, is not entirely the events giving rise to these words, but rather the emotions and the metaphors used.

Suggested Readings

Des Pres, Terrence. (1976). *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Leitner, Isabella. (1983). *Fragments of Isabella: A Memoir of Auschwitz*. New York: Dell.

Levi, Primo. (1987). *Survival in Auschwitz*. New York: Macmillan.

Wiesel, Elie. (1982). *Night*. New York: Bantam.

Quotations from Survivors Worksheet

Holocaust survivors wrote the following quotes. The quotations have been written on this worksheet along with the name of the speaker, and some questions to go along with each quotation. Think about the quotations in light of the questions given. If you have questions of your own, write them down; if you think of any possible answers, jot them down as well and share your questions and answers with the group after you are finished reading.

1. "Slowly the bags and the clothes and the food and the sad, smiling photographs became people to me; the prams became babies and the heaps of carefully segregated little shoes became children. --Rudolf Vrba
Who do you think Rudolf Vrba was? Where might he have been talking about? What do you think he means when he says these things "became" people? What does "segregated" mean here? What might he have been feeling when he wrote this?
2. "We found ourselves near a building to the right of which was a large mound about the size of a two story building. As we neared the mound, we saw it was made entirely of shoes: women's shoes, children's shoes, beautiful shoes, ugly shoes--shoes wherever the eye rested. And this was the rise we had mistaken for a hill." --Reska Weiss
Who do you think Reska Weiss might have been? How might she have felt when she saw what she describes here? Why does it matter that she thought the pile of shoes was a hill from a distance?

Victims: I Saw a Mountain

Description

Students will read a poem written by a Holocaust survivor as it is printed in Michael Berenbaum's (1993) *The World Must Know: A History of the Holocaust as Told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. Using a copy of the poem and some prompting questions, they will explore it with attention to metaphor, language choices, historical context, and the point of view of the poet.

Objectives

Given a poem written by a Holocaust survivor, students will consider point of view, historical context, and language in writing an explicatory paper. Doing so may require additional outside research; appropriate time should be allotted for sensitive and thoughtful completion of the assignment.

Materials/Equipment

- Poem
- Poetry worksheet

Suggested Teaching Strategy

As part of a writing curriculum, this poem can be used as a means of exploring the importance of point of view, and poetic language and expression, in addition to historical context and discovering what events would evoke such a work.

Give each student a copy of the poem.

Explain to students what explication is: analyzing the careful choices of language made by a poet, and putting the poem into historical context and into the context of the particular point of view of the poet, in order to really understand what the meaning of the poem is.

Students may be skeptical of this type of exercise until they have explicated a few poems. A poem such as this, which is heavily laden with symbolism and historical references, can be a very concrete way of introducing a difficult yet useful means of analyzing and reading poetry.

I Saw a Mountain

I saw a mountain
Higher than Mt. Blanc
And more Holy than the Mountain of Sinai.
Not in a dream. It was real.
On this world this mountain stood.
Such a mountain I saw--of Jewish shoes in Majdanek.
Such a mountain--such a mountain I saw.
And suddenly, a strange thing happened.
The mountain moved....

And the thousands of shoes arranged themselves
By size--by pairs—and in rows--and moved.

Hear! Hear the march.
Hear the shuffle of shoes left behind—that which remained.
From small, from large, from each and every one.
Make way for the rows--for the pairs,
For the generations--for the years.
The shoe army--it moves and moves.

“We are the shoes . we are the last witnesses.
We are shoes from grandchildren and grandfathers.
From Prague, Paris and Amsterdam.
And because we are only made of stuff and leather
And not of blood and flesh, each one of us avoided the hellfire.
We shoes--that used to go strolling in the market
Or with the bride and groom to the *chuppah*,
We shoes from simple Jews, from butchers and carpenters,
From crocheted booties of babies just beginning to walk and go
On happy occasions, weddings, and even until the time
Of giving birth, to a dance, to exciting places to life...
Or quietly--to a funeral.
Unceasingly we go. We tramp.
The hangman never had the chance to snatch us into his
Sack of loot--now we go to him.
Let everyone hear the steps, which flow as tears,
The steps that measure out the judgment.”

I saw a mountain
Higher than Mt. Blanc
And more Holy than the Mountain of Sinai.

--Moses Schulstein

I Saw a Mountain Worksheet

Using these questions as a guide, explicate, or analyze, the poem “I Saw a Mountain.” Use your own thoughts and what you know about the Holocaust, and try to think about what you think the answers to these questions might be. With poetry, there is often no “correct” answer; therefore, think of these questions as probes with which you can investigate the language, which was carefully chosen by the poet. Try to decide why he used the words and images he did and what he was trying to convey with them.

What is Mt. Blanc? What is the significance of comparing its height to that of the mound of shoes? Why would a mountain of shoes be holier than Mount Sinai? What is Mount Sinai?

Where was Majdanek? Why would there be a mountain of Jewish shoes there?

How could a mountain of shoes move? How could they arrange themselves by size, into pairs and then into rows? What does the poet mean?

From what are the shoes left behind? From what do they remain?

When the poet says, "From small, from large, from each and every one," what does he mean? To whom does he make the command, "Make way"? Why does he say, "for the rows, for the pairs, for the generations, for the years"? What does that mean? What could he mean by "the shoe army"?

Are the shoes really talking? Of what are they the last witnesses? To whom are they witnessing? How can shoes be grandchildren and grandfathers?

Where is Prague? Paris? Amsterdam?

What is the hellfire the shoes avoided? Why would they be able to avoid it because they were not made of blood and flesh?

From the things they used to do, what can you tell about the shoes? They say they used to go strolling in the market or with the bride and groom to the *chuppah*. What is a *chuppah*?

Where are the shoes going unceasingly?

Who is the hangman? What was his sack of loot?

Why are the shoes going to the hangman?

Who is "everyone"? Why does the poet say the steps flow as tears? What does it mean to measure out judgment?

Rescuers: A Rescuer's Autobiography

Description

Students will read a book written by a rescuer of those persecuted by the Nazis. A local librarian can suggest available sources, or some listed in the bibliography to this kit are recommended. Two rescuers who have written readily available books are Miep Gies and Hiltgunt Zassenhaus. Because many of the rescuers were young adults at the time of their deeds, their writings can provide a special connection to the events of the Holocaust as well as modeling moral courage from someone very much like themselves in a difficult situation.

Objectives

Students will select from a library or bookstore a book written by a rescuer of victims and potential victims of the Holocaust then write a five- to eight-page paper reflecting their thoughts on moral courage, on resistance and risks, on civil disobedience, or another theme reflected of a personal, political, historical, or philosophical nature in the book they selected.

Papers should reflect an understanding of the tremendous risks involved in resisting a regime with such unlimited power and brutality, and of the possible reasons the rescuers did what they did in spite of these risks.

Materials/Equipment

A memoir, autobiography, or similar work written by a rescuer

Suggested Teaching Strategy

As part of a writing curriculum, autobiographical works can be an effective means of personalizing historical events that can seem very distant and removed—almost unreal. If the writings are those of someone of a similar age and demographic profile of the reader, the connection can be strong enough to evoke powerful inquiry into one's own morality, social roles, and personal convictions.

Suggested Readings

Gies, Miep. (1988). *Anne Frank Remembered: The Story of the Woman Who Helped to Hide the Frank Family*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

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