

Students are Survivors Too: Bearing Witness to the Stories of Our Lives Through Holocaust Survivor Testimony

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Overview

This is a roughly two week writing intensive unit designed for use in an eighth grade English classroom. The unit is designed around the testimony of Holocaust survivors. This is not a history course laden with facts and figures, but rather a unit that will use witness testimony to inspire discussion and personal writings. Many students throughout Philadelphia, and beyond, have faced traumatic events in their young lives. They are survivors, and like the people before them who have borne witness to the trauma in their lives, this will provide them the opportunity to bear witness to the events—good and bad—in their lives.

The content presented has been evaluated for its age appropriateness, and selected purposefully. Obviously, each classroom teacher who chooses to use this unit in their classrooms is entrusted to modify any or all portions of this unit, as the material and discussions may not work with every class. This material is sensitive and should be treated as such.

Rationale

Many students in the School District of Philadelphia have faced enormous struggles. Many experience extreme poverty, violence, and family issues. These periods of trauma weigh heavily on the minds of our young people who often have no outlet for their stories; no one to turn to for help, or even a friendly ear to listen to their stories.

Our stories and our memories are often all we have once we strip away the material possessions in our lives. Whether these stories are good or bad, they die with the bearer if they are never passed on. Holocaust survivors, after making it through unspeakable horrors, were faced with the unimaginable burden of memory. Some survivors told their stories freely and willingly, through memoir, poetry, and video testimony. Some survivors told their stories with eloquence, while others could not manage much more than a mangled account of what happened. Some survivors told their stories in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, while others waited years, sometimes decades. Some survivors told their stories even though they didn't quite know what story to tell or how to tell it.

Although the approaches to bearing witness to their own tragedies are as varied as the people who speak of them, there is commonality between them. The unimaginable atrocities they faced left them with the burden—whether welcomed or unwelcomed—to tell their stories so that mankind would know what happened during the Holocaust, and with the hopes that we wouldn't let this happen again. As reluctant as many survivors are to tell their stories, because of the trauma that retelling dredges up, they are compelled to tell their stories; to not let the world forget what happened to them and to the millions who didn't make it through to tell their own stories.

How does one make sense of the senseless, comprehend the incomprehensible? How can you convey the unbelievable to those who did not experience the trauma themselves? Holocaust survivors routinely experienced this dilemma when telling their stories. Many survivors try to put their words into a linear narrative with beginning, middle, and end. These stories, as horrific as they are, are “comfortable” to the reader. We, as readers and consumers of information, are usually more comfortable when a story follows a logical sequence. Elie Wiesel in his memoir *Night* and Primo Levi in *Survival in Auschwitz* make attempts to put their stories of survival into structured novels. In all of these testimonies of the Holocaust there are characters facing unimaginable circumstances, witnessing the most hideous of atrocities who in the end find some sort of resolution to their suffering. In these stories there may be a hero or heroine, there may be a valuable lesson learned, but always in the end goodness wins. These rounded stories are familiar to us and are therefore probably the easiest to teach to our students. However, as valuable as these testimonies may be, they can seem overwrought. Many question if these accounts aren't somewhat embellished because how can one put something that is totally incoherent into such a coherent narrative? How can one who has witnessed the most deplorable treatment imaginable organize their memories into neat sentences and paragraphs? While readers can question the authenticity of these testimonies for their coherent narrative form, we cannot question the survivor who is bearing witness in this way. Every person must tell their story in their own way and perhaps, for these storytellers, this is the best way they know.

In contrast to the survivors who are able to bear witness to their experiences in a narrative form, there are many more survivors who are not able to make sense of what they witnessed during the Holocaust. And how can we expect them to? These testimonies are more reluctant, more disjointed. They are filled with ramblings and difficult metaphors and rarely follow a sequential order. These witnesses lived each and every day trying to make sense of what they went through, sometimes for years and years before telling their stories to anyone. And yet, when it came time for them to put pencil to paper, they still can't seem to find the right words. In his *The Story of a Life*, Aharon Applefeld insists over and over again that his memory is an issue. He says, "memory is elusive and selective; it holds on to what it chooses to hold on to" (v) and "I still haven't found the words to give voice to those intense scars on my memory" (50). When the witness is unable to make sense of their experiences, we must make meaning for ourselves. It is also important that our students understand that chaos cannot often be represented in coherent writing or telling. This will have to be repeated to our students over and over again throughout the unit because this type of writing is probably unfamiliar to them. They are so used to narrative form, that anything that deviates from that produces anxiety. But that anxiety should be experienced, both when they read the accounts of the survivors and when they write their own accounts.

There are also testimonies from witnesses who did not experience the Holocaust from the point of view of a persecuted person. These testimonies come from witnesses like Father S., who, as a priest, did nothing when he saw trainloads of people being deported. He is deemed a guilty bystander. These are people who could have done something--spoken up, laid down in the middle of the street—but because of fear or feelings of helplessness chose not to. These people have chosen to tell their stories, too. Perhaps out of guilt and regret, they have shared their accounts of what they witnessed and in some cases, how their inaction forever changed their lives.

Perhaps then, the most moving of all testimonies are the video testimonies taken as part of various video archives. Lawrence Langer says that while Holocaust literature raises "issues of form and tone and figurative language", nothing can "distract us from the immediacy and the intimacy" of watching these former victims on a screen (xii-xiii). Here we can actually put a face and a voice to the name and to the words. We can hear their voices shake, see their hands tremble. We see these survivors lapse into deep memory where it is as if they are reliving their experiences all over again. They cry or yell, they are sad or angry, and sometimes their stories are disjointed and hard to understand. In video testimony, unlike written testimony, there is no opportunity to edit. Therefore these testimonies are raw, and perhaps that is why they are often times the most meaningful.

The delivery methods of survivor testimonies are variable, but there are common threads that run through all of them. Many of these testimonies seek to memorialize a person lost, whether that is a family member or their former self. They seek to recall a way of life that

was lost; to share how so many lives went from making sense to being utterly chaotic. They seek to share the heroism and good deeds of people who were able to think of others in their time of great despair. They seek to condemn those behind the murder of six million Jews and millions of others gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, Poles, and other groups deemed unacceptable to Hitler and the Nazis. The survivors tell these stories with a sense of reluctant urgency—a sort of, “I went through this and I have to tell you about it so that it never happens again.”

When we use the term *bearing witness* we simply mean the act of telling stories and passing on what we have witnessed. The Holocaust survivors that students will meet in this unit are bearing witness when they tell their stories to the camera or when they write down their memories of their lives before, during, and after the Holocaust. As easy as the definition of bearing witness is, however, the act itself usually comes with a lot of trepidation and reluctance. Many survivors waited years and years to bear witness to their experience. Stacey Zembrzycki and Steven High write about the reasons why many survivors chose to come forward in the 1990s after decades of silence. Many survivors developed a ‘now or never’ mentality because of their advancing age. They worried that if they did not tell their story soon, it would be too late (414). In addition, the growing popularity of interview projects around that time contributed to the increase in the number of survivor testimonies. Still, others gave their testimony for their children, one survivor saying that it was ‘my wedding gift to my son’ (418). In his article *Shame, Guilt, and Anguish in Holocaust Survivor Testimony* Michael Nutkiewicz says that “survivors are probably more likely to tell their story, not because they understand it as a form of psychotherapy for their own suffering (an alien concept), but because they see that in telling they are participating in a collective process of truth telling” (18). Healing is therefore possible for the survivor because they feel like they are part of something larger than themselves.

Survivors also faced, or in some cases still face, an inner struggle—to tell or not to tell. And if they decided to tell, they had to figure out how exactly should they tell it. “Survivors live with countervailing pressures: the struggle to forget and remain silent, and the need to tell and to memorialize” (Nutmiewicz 3). Survivors are conflicted. They have had many years of life since the end of the Holocaust, yet many feel like the experience was just yesterday. A smell or a sound can transport them back to the ghetto, the train car, or the concentration camp. They deal with their memories in different ways, sometimes depending on how their lives have progressed since the devastating events of the Holocaust. Zembrzycki and High write “survivors deal with the remembered and lived legacies of the Holocaust in a variety of ways, and certainly we must be mindful of this. Some married and some did not. Some had children, others did not. Some found faith, others lost it. Some told their children about what happened to them and others would (or could) not. For those who did not experience the ghettos and death camps, there has been a struggle to have their stories heard at all” (420).

Another problem exists in the sharing of testimony—memory. “Testimony is a form of remembering,” says Langer (2). The reliability of the memory is an issue no matter how much time has passed. Zembrzycki and High write that we can “find meaning in the form and structure of oral narratives, and in the silences, in what is mis-remembered, in the words spoken and also in the information conveyed. Memory is therefore front and centre in our analysis” (411). Furthermore, Langer says that the “complex layers of memory” that are present in these oral testimonies “give birth to the versions of the self” that we should be studying (xv).

Many of the testimonies we study fluctuate between deep and common memory which can contribute to the discordance present in them. Deep memory is what “remains essentially inarticulate and unrepresentable, that which continues to exist as unresolved trauma just beyond the reach of meaning” (Young 14). The survivors are essentially transported back to the moment of the trauma. They sweat, cry, shake their heads as if they are reliving it all over again. Common memory, on the other hand seeks to “restore or establish coherence, closure and possibly a redemptive stance” (14). The two kinds of memory can interrupt one another and create frustration both for the speaker and the listener. Langer writes that witnesses in these testimonies can “often appear troubled or exasperated...when the two kinds of memory intrude on each other, disrupting the smooth flow of their narratives” (6). On page six of *Holocaust Testimonies*, Langer describes deep memory as trying to recall “the Auschwitz self as it was then” while common memory would offer a detached story from the vantage point of today. “Deep memory thus suspects and depends on common memory, knowing what common memory cannot know but tries nonetheless to express.”

Many of the testimonies used in this unit come from survivors who were children during the Holocaust. Zembrzycki and High found that many survivors find their stories resonate with the students they speak to because the students can relate to another child’s story. One in particular shares her experience by teaching about the Holocaust saying that it “really had nothing to do with the war...The Holocaust happened because of racism, because of hatred, because of intolerance, and because of anti-Semitism, and it happened because it was allowed to happen, because of the silence, nobody spoke up” (410). A lesson usually comes with the testimony—we cannot remain silent when we know bad things are happening to people.

As owners of their own experiences, students, like the Holocaust survivor are witnesses and must be given an opportunity to give testimony about their own lives. When teachers teach, particularly in this unit, it cannot simply be for the purpose of passing on facts. This unit has been designed with this in mind. Students must be taught to not simply be recipients of information. They need to be links in the chain, a part of the process of bearing witness. They need to be taught how to listen to others who bear witness and given the opportunity to bear witness to their own stories. Testimony is how history is passed on. While this experience may be intense, and not always pleasant, we need to

remember that, like Brown says in the Preface of *Night*, “we cannot indefinitely avoid depressing subject matter, particularly if it is true” (v).

It is incredibly important for our students to be given an opportunity to bear witness to their own lives. Many child survivors of the Holocaust had difficulty telling their stories. Zembrzycki and High write about a survivor named Sidney Zoltak, who as a youngster did not talk. “I left it to the grown-ups. We, younger people had a problem with our stories, with our experience, because we were often told, ‘Well you were only a kid, what do you remember?’ We were not really survivors. We were just listeners” (416). He gave credit to child survivor conferences for helping him break his silence. The setting and the community that resulted from these conferences gave child survivors the confidence they needed to tell their stories. That is what this unit seeks to achieve. A common theme among child survivors is that once they tell their stories they no longer have to carry the burden alone.

It is my hope for this unit, that as students read survivor testimonies and bear witness to their own stories, they are able to begin finding commonalities between people that span time, continents, and cultures. I hope that students use this opportunity to tell the stories they want to live on, or to tell about a painful experience that will hopefully lighten their load. Above all, this unit seeks to teach students that ultimately, as humans, we are more similar than different and we need to do everything we can to help each other. This understanding, I believe, can work wonders to make sure that this sort of thing never happens again.

Objectives

This is a writing intensive unit designed to expose middle school students to written and oral Holocaust survivor testimonies. Students will use these historical documents as a catalyst for discussion and written response. Students will keep a survivor journal throughout the unit and choose one written response to develop into a published piece. This unit aligns with Pennsylvania Common Core standards for teaching, specifically standards for reading literature, writing, and speaking and listening. This unit can certainly be adapted for the specific abilities and maturity level of the students in your classroom. As the teacher, you are it is your responsibility to decide whether all or some of the materials in this unit is appropriate for your students. You can eliminate any materials from this unit that do not suit the needs of your class.

Strategies

Throughout this unit, students will read and watch a variety of Holocaust survivor testimonies. Students will keep a “survivor journal” where they will write their reflections to the literature and oral testimonies we experience. Each video clip, book excerpt, or poem will be connected to a series of questions that students will reflect upon

by writing in their survivor journal. These written responses will then hopefully drive class discussion. Because of the extremely personal and emotional nature of the testimonies and written responses, the survivor journals will remain private unless decided otherwise by the student. For the culminating activity, students will select one response from their journals to develop into a published piece. These published pieces will be compiled into a class survivor journal.

This unit seeks to be a learning experience as well as a therapeutic outlet for students. Many of our students in the School District of Philadelphia experience trauma on an all too frequent basis. By being exposed to the testimonies of Holocaust survivors, it is the hope of the unit to encourage students to tell their own stories however difficult they may be to tell. Because students may be reluctant at first to write openly, despite the fact that journals will be kept private, it may be helpful for the teacher to share some of their personal responses with the class. Students must be encouraged to keep an open mind and show respect during the testimonies, as well as be honest and open in their writing. The teacher should also consistently remind students that this unit is going to be uncomfortable, both in the witnessing of testimony and the sharing of testimony. Furthermore, students may not always have a personal story to share in response to the writing prompts. Students should be encouraged to write no matter what, even if their response does not align with the prompt. For example, if a student is asked to relate to a particular struggle a survivor went through but they have not experienced a similar struggle, they may choose to reflect upon the survivor's struggle. The important thing is that they write!

Classroom Activities and Lesson Plans

Lesson One

Objectives:

Today will be the introduction to the unit where students will be given the expectations for the unit. Students will be given their "survivor journals" and make their first entries. Today will set the tone for the unit.

Do Now:

Pass out survivor journals. Display on the board: Why do people tell stories about their lives? Students should write the question in their journal and respond to it.

Introduction:

Share Do Now responses; list them on the board. Ask students if they think that people should tell stories even if they are hard or painful to tell. Why? Insist that people *should*

tell these stories because it leads to learning and sometimes, a lessening of pain for the person telling the story.

Activities:

Introduce the unit. In this unit we will be reading and watching the testimonies of Holocaust survivors. We will then respond in writing to many of the themes and ideas that are presented to us in these testimonies. This is not a history unit, so we will not spend much time going over the facts and dates of the Holocaust. Rather, it is a story-telling unit.

This is the time to have a serious discussion with your students about the sensitive nature of the subject matter. The people we will watch and read about in the next couple of weeks will do their best to tell their stories about living through the Holocaust. Explain that these are real people who survived a horrifying event that killed millions of people. Some survivors are better than others because trauma affects everyone in a different way. Some tell their stories with a beginning, middle, and end; some are all over the place. Urge students to do their best to understand as we go through the unit. Students need to be sensitive to their own feelings and to the feelings of their classmates. This can all be very emotional and that is okay. This has to be a safe place.

The people the class is going to meet are all different. When they tell their stories it is called *bearing witness*. Some feel better telling their story, others worse. Some want to tell their stories, some only tell their stories because they feel they have to.

Explain that the survivor journal they now have is going to be used to respond to what we read and see. Students will be given prompts to respond to and will also have the opportunity to do some free writing. At the end of the unit, students will select one of their responses to develop into a published piece. Because we will be writing about our personal experiences, these journals will be kept private and you will only have to share if you want to. Pass out survivor journal guidelines (see appendix) and staple them to the inside cover of the journal. Go over guidelines with students.

Display the following rules for the unit. Discuss them with students.

1. Recognize what bearing witness is: an urgent telling of an event. The event is often traumatic, as in the case of these Holocaust testimonies.
2. Be a willing listener. Really hear, listen to, and think about what these survivors have to say.
3. Relate to what the survivors are saying. Care about their testimony. Recognize that this is important to the survivors and have empathy for them.
4. Figure out a way to respond to these testimonies, whether by passing the stories on, changing your behavior, or telling your own stories that have been inspired by these witness testimonies.

Conclusion:

Assign homework. Display on board: Have you ever needed to get a story off your chest, but it was hard to share it? Did you feel better or worse after you told someone? Or did you perhaps never tell anyone? Respond in your journal.

Lesson Two

Objectives:

Read selections of Elie Wiesel's *Night*. Respond to various prompts in survivor journal.

Do Now:

Hand out writing prompts for today (Night Part I, see appendix). Students should staple the prompt sheet into their journals and then respond to the first question—"Imagine you've just been told you need to leave your home immediately. You can only bring a small suitcase or backpack. What would you take with you? List and describe the importance of each item. Provide 5-7 minutes to respond.

Introduction:

Introduce the book *Night*. Provide a brief background of Elie Wiesel. Elie grew up in Transylvania. When he was 15 years old he was deported, along with his parents and younger sister to a concentration camp. He wrote this book over ten years after the Holocaust was over.

Activities:

- Ask for volunteers to read their list of what they would bring with them.
- Read page 3 (from "Then one day...") to page 17. You will stop along the way to respond in journals or to discuss.
- Stop at page 5 ("...no one will listen to me.") Respond in journals to second question on prompt sheet—Imagine the frustration of Moshe the Beadle. He's seen something horrific, managed to escape, and yet when he comes back to warn the others, no one believes him. Have you ever had a similar experience where you've tried to tell someone something very important, but they didn't believe you? Provide 5 minutes for students to write. Ask for volunteers to share.
- Continue reading, stop towards top of page 10, "It was neither German or Jew who ruled the ghetto—it was illusion." Discuss. What is an illusion? What does this sentence mean? Did Elie and the other Jews feel comfortable at this point, or were they fearful?
- Read through page break on page 17 ("Thy great mercy....") Discuss what has just happened. They are being marched at gunpoint past houses full of people who do nothing

to stop what is happening. How do you feel about this? Should they have done something? Do you think they could have done something? What would you have done if you were in that situation? Mention that these “compatriots” would be called bystanders. -Explain that soon after this they were loaded into cattle cars and began their journey to the concentration camp. Pick up reading at top of page 21. Stop at the bottom of the page and instruct students to complete prompt number 3—cross out anything from the list you wrote earlier that fits the criteria in the last paragraph on page 21. Share out.

Conclusion:

Comments or questions from today’s class.

*From here on, a less detailed description of day to day activities is included. Lessons will follow the same approach as described in the more detailed plan for Lesson Two.

Lesson Three

Today the class continues reading excerpts from *Night*.

- Hand out prompts for Night Part II (see appendix).
- Read page 27-32, stop at the page break. In journals, respond to prompt 1.
- Skip ahead, read pages 45-49 at page break. Respond to prompt 2.
- Read page 58 (“A week later...” to 62. Respond to prompt 3.
- Read pages 99-106. Respond to prompt 4.
- Read to end, discuss.

Lesson Four

This class period will focus on excerpts from Aharon Appelfeld’s *The Story of a Life*. Appelfeld was a young child during the Holocaust, who ended up losing both of his parents. These excerpts will be a great departure from *Night*, as this account is very disjointed. Appelfeld does not know how to tell his story which makes it much more complicated, but perhaps more powerful.

- Hand out prompts for *The Story of a Life*
- Read the preface of the book. Based on just what he says in the preface, and the difficulties he says he has with his memory, how might this testimony be different than *Night*? Discuss.
- Read pages 3-7. Respond to prompt 1. Students should be given 10 minutes for this prompt and should be encouraged to write the entire time.
- Read 50-52; 62-64
- Read 69-top of 70 (Stop before “But one night...”) Respond to prompt 2.

-Read 89-page break on 92. He is talking about his memory again. Can we trust him as a narrator? Or do his honesty about his memory and his difficulties telling his story perhaps make him more trustworthy? Discuss.

-Assign homework: Respond to prompt 3.

Lesson Five

This class period will be devoted to excerpts of Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*. Anne is a girl who is around the same age as the students, so we will use today to try to draw similarities between Anne and the students. The goal is to establish the fact that the victims of the Holocaust were normal people, just like us, who suddenly found themselves placed under incredible circumstances.

-Introduce *Diary of a Young Girl*. This is an edited version of a diary that Anne Frank started when she was thirteen and kept for just over two years during the Holocaust while her family was in hiding. She began the diary just before going into hiding and kept writing in it up until the family was discovered in the Secret Annex. Unfortunately, Anne died in a concentration camp after falling ill. She was just fifteen years old. When her father returned to the Secret Annex after the Holocaust was over, he found her diary, and published it. It gives us a look at how life for Jewish people went from "normal" to chaotic very quickly, and how Anne and her family attempted to save themselves. We must also remember as we read, that we know something that Anne doesn't. We know that she will never grow up to do all the things she writes about, and this makes this book incredibly heartbreaking.

-Read entry dated Saturday, 20 June, 1942, pages 2-4. Which of the anti-Jewish rules do you think would be the most disruptive to everyday life? Discuss.

-Read Wednesday, 8 July, 1942 (page 13) through Saturday, 11 July, 1942 (page 21). Respond to prompt 1.

-Read Thursday, 19 November, 1942 (page 52) and Friday, 20 November, 1942.

-Read Monday, 19 July, 1943 and Friday, 23 July, 1943, pages 90-91.

-Read final entry, Tuesday, 1 August, 1944. Respond to prompt 2.

Lesson Six

Today will be spent reading excerpts from Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*. At twenty-five he found himself in a concentration camp trying to negotiate a daily life that was heartbreaking and horrifying. He speaks fondly of two people in the camp that were important to him. While we read, we should pay attention to the way that he attempts to remember them and get the words just right.

-Do Now: Respond to prompt 1.

-Read Chapter 3, pages 38-41. Here Primo is having a hard time understanding the point of continuing to take a shower every day. There are reminders from the Germans all over

the camp to stay clean, but Primo finds this insulting because for one, there is no soap and also because he is pretty confident that they are going to be killed soon anyway. He meets Steinlauf who attempts to convince him that it is still important to continue showering, to keep life as normal as possible in the chaos of the camp. Does Steinlauf make a good argument? Discuss.

-Read Chapter 5, pages 56-64. Based on the dream that Primo describes, do you think the days or nights in camp are worse? What is the specific fear he has that keeps showing up in his dreams? Discuss.

-Respond to either prompt 2 or 3. Provide plenty of time for this response.

Lesson Seven

Today, students will view clips of video testimony from three Holocaust survivors. The time will mostly be spent viewing the testimonies and discussing what the students saw and heard. Students will respond to the written prompt after viewing all the testimonies.

-Watch video testimony of Menachem S. from beginning to 15:10 and 23:59 to 29:42.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbBqOibdlfU&feature=relmfu>>

-Watch video testimony of Edith P. from beginning to 16:50.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbaSloeU-WQ&feature=relmfu>

-Watch video testimony of Helen K. from beginning to end.

-Students will respond to the writing prompt for homework.

Lesson Eight

The focus today will be on bystanding and what students can do when they see something wrong happening to someone. The class will take part in some discussion, view a video testimony, and read a short passage that will connect what happened during the Holocaust to their lives today.

-Do Now: Respond to prompt 1 in journal (3-5 minutes). On center of board write “My Decisions.” Ask for students to share what they wrote for the Do Now. Create a web of their responses around “My Decisions.” Ask, what if you encountered a situation where someone needed help and you needed to make a decision to do something to help, but you risked looking stupid or risked danger? Would you still do the right thing? Would you speak up for someone or try to stop something bad from happening even if it posed some risk to you? Discuss.

-Introduce Father S., a priest who twice during the Holocaust had encounters with Holocaust victims and did nothing to help. View video. Stop at end of his portion at 7:20.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WByrxGE64Y0&feature=results_video&playnext=1&list=PLE129969D102584DD>.

-What should Father S. have done? Do you think the risk to do something was too great, or do you think it was so important to try to do something that he should have taken a risk?

-Pass out a copy of “The ‘In’ Group” found at <<https://www.facinghistory.org/for-educators/educator-resources/readings/group>>. Ask a volunteer to read each paragraph aloud. Discuss, how does this relate to the video we just watched of Father S.? Students should see the connection between two people who witnessed something wrong, and who decided not to do anything about it. How is this relevant to our lives in school?

-Respond to prompt 2 in journal.

-Homework: Respond to prompt 3.

Lesson Nine

Today students will choose one of the written responses from their survivor journals. This response should be one that they do not mind sharing with others. Students will rewrite this piece on a separate sheet of paper, by cleaning it up and revising for spelling and grammatical errors. Students should be reminded that, as per the guidelines for the journal, pieces are not required to be in paragraph form. Once students have rewritten their piece they will hand it in for further editing by teacher.

Please use the last 10 minutes or so of class to share reflections about the unit. The teacher may wish to reflect as well as student volunteers who may or may not read their response from last night’s homework.

Lesson Ten

Students and teachers will use today to further edit and revise pieces in order to end up with a finished product. Teacher will compile the typed responses into a class journal. Perhaps each student can receive a copy and you might want to share it with others in the school. If it is to be made public, allow students to decide whether or not they want their name published along with their piece.

Annotated Bibliography

Langer, Lawrence L. Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory. New Haven: Yale UP, 1991. Print.

Discusses the struggles that Holocaust witnesses have with memory, both deep and common. The critiques focus particularly on oral testimonies where survivors, or “former victims” as he calls them, provide conflicted, anguished testimonies.

Nutkiewicz, Michael. "Shame, Guilt, and Anguish in Holocaust Survivor Testimony." *The Oral History Review* 30.1 (Winter-Spring, 2003): 1-22. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 May 2014.

This article discusses reasons why survivors finally decide to tell their stories, and the difficulties they face in doing so.

Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. New York: Bantam, 1982. Print.

A memoir of life in Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Is of particular interest for use in class because of its easy reading style despite the subject matter. It is used at the beginning of the unit as an introduction.

Young, James Edward. *At Memory's Edge: After-images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2000. Print.

Provides an excellent description of the difference between deep memory and common memory.

Zembrzycki, Stacey, and Steven High. "'When I Was Your Age': Bearing Witness In Holocaust Education In Montreal." *Canadian Historical Review* 93.3 (2012): 408-435. *EBSCO MegaFILE*. Web. 9 June 2014.

Provides insights into why Holocaust survivors choose to finally tell their stories and the struggles they have when doing so.

Reading List for Students

Appelfeld, Aharon, and Aloma Halter. *The Story of a Life*. New York: Schocken, 2004. Print.

Excerpts are read during the unit of this disjointed testimony written many years after surviving the Holocaust as a young boy. His difficulties with memory provide opportunity to compare and contrast his writing with that of other survivors.

Frank, Anne. *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. New York: Bantam, 1993. Print.

Students will read excerpts of this book. It is a book made famous because the writer is a young girl who eloquently describes the struggles of daily life spent in hiding during the Holocaust. Students should expect to see some aspects of their own lives reflected in her writing.

Levi, Primo. *Survival in Auschwitz*. New York: Touchstone, 1996. Print.

In his memoir about his time spent in Auschwitz, Primo writes about the struggles of maintaining the routines that humans follow while in the camp. He writes about the nightmares he has that no one will believe him when he talks about how horrible this place is. He describes two people who were of particular help to him during his time there. Many tangents can be drawn between aspects of his life at Auschwitz and particular struggles students may face in their lives.

Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. New York: Bantam, 1982. Print.

Used as an introduction to the unit. A memoir of life in Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Is of particular interest for use in class because of its easy reading style despite the subject matter.

Annotated List of Materials

Edith P. Edited Testimony. YouTube. N.p., 27 Aug. 2009. Web. 17 Mar. 2014.
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbaSloeU-WQ&feature=relmfu>>.

Emotional video testimony of Edith P., a woman who survived the Holocaust as a young girl.

Helen K. Edited Testimony. Yale University, n.d. YouTube. 27 Aug. 2009. Web. 16 Mar. 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHGYd_e9UbY>.

Video testimony of Helen K. who was a young woman during the Holocaust. Of special interest is when she talks of her total determination to survive.

Menachem S. Edited Testimony. YouTube. N.p., 27 Aug. 2009. Web. 20 Mar. 2014.
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbBqOibdlfU&feature=relmfu>>.

Video testimony of Menachem S. who recounts some of his experience during the Holocaust and the absolute horror of being reunited with his parents, who after several years in a concentration camp, were no longer recognizable to him. He also discusses the reasons he stayed silent for so long, and what finally encouraged him to tell his story.

Shalen, Eve. "The 'In' Group." *The "In" Group | Facing History and Ourselves*. Facing History and Ourselves, n.d. Web. 12 June 2014.
<<https://www.facinghistory.org/for-educators/educator-resources/readings/group>>.

A written excerpt that brings issues of bystanding into circumstances that students may face today. Students should be able to use this discuss issues of doing the right thing even if it is the unpopular decision.

Testimony Excerpts--Bystander and Two Survivors. Yale University, n.d. *YouTube*. 7 Oct. 2009. Web. 10 Mar. 2014.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WByrxGE64Y0&feature=results_video&playnext=1&list=PLE129969D102584DD>.

The first excerpt of video will be used where Father S., a priest, speaks about two instances where he witnessed aspects of the Holocaust, but felt “utterly unprepared” to do anything about it. This will be used to discuss issues of guilty bystanding.

Appendix/Standards

Standards

This unit meets Pennsylvania Common Core standards for English.

Standards addressed in this unit:

CC.1.3: Reading Literature—Students read and respond to works of literature—with an emphasis on comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and making connections among ideas and between texts with a focus on textual evidence.

CC.1.3.8.C: Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

CC.1.3.8.E: Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

CC.1.3.8.F: Analyze the influence of the words and phrases in a text including figurative and connotative meanings and how they shape meaning and tone.

CC.1.4: Writing—Students write for different purposes and audiences.

CC.1.4.8.M: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events.

CC.1.4.8.Q: Write with an awareness of the stylistic aspects of writing.

CC.1.4.8.R: Demonstrate a grade-appropriate command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

CC.1.4.8.S: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research, applying grade-level reading standards for literature and literary nonfiction.

CC.1.4.8.X: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CC.1.5: Speaking and Listening—Students present appropriately in formal speaking situations, listen critically, and respond intelligently as individuals or in group discussions.

CC.1.5.8.C: Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.

Survivor Journal Guidelines

This journal will be kept the entirety of this unit. You will use it to respond to and reflect upon the testimonies we read and watch. There are a few guidelines you should keep in mind.

1. This journal will be kept as private as you wish. You do not have to share anything you do not want to, so be as honest as possible.
2. Because this is your journal you may respond to the prompts you are given as you wish. Unless otherwise noted, you can write in paragraph form, you may write poetry, you can list your ideas, which ever form suits what you are writing.
3. If you have no response to the prompt given, or are uncomfortable answering the prompt, you can write about something else.
4. The only real rule is that you **MUST** write!

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Written Response Prompts for *Night* Part I

1. Imagine you've just been told you need to leave your home immediately. You don't know if you will ever return to this home again. You can only bring a small suitcase or backpack. What would you take with you? List and describe the importance of each item. Remember, it all must fit inside the small suitcase or backpack and you must be able to carry it.
2. Imagine the frustration of Moshe the Beadle. He's seen something horrific, managed to escape, and yet when he comes back to warn the others, no one believes him. Have you ever had a similar experience where you've tried to tell someone something very important, but they didn't believe you? Or, has this happened to anyone you know? Explain the experience. If not, reflect on how Moshe must have felt. Do you think Elie believed him? If you were in either one of their shoes, how would you react?
3. Look back at the list of belongings you wrote earlier. Cross out anything described in the last paragraph of page 21. What, if anything, would you have to give up now and how would you feel leaving it behind?

Written Response Prompts for *Night* Part II

1. At this moment Elie has seen things that make him question his faith in humanity and his religion. He can't believe what he has just seen. Have you ever witnessed something that no matter what, you'll never forget it as long as you live? Write about it here. If you don't want to tell your story, or have never experienced something like this, reflect on what Elie saw on that first day at Auschwitz.
2. Elie works very hard to make sure that he doesn't get separated from his father at any point in the camp. The relationship is extremely important to Elie being able to survive the day-to-day struggles of Auschwitz. Elie also mentions the brothers, Yossi and Tibi, of whom he says, "They lived, body and soul, for each other" (pg 48). Tell about a person in your life that you live "body and soul" for. Write about what makes them so special to you. Be as descriptive as possible.
3. After the first hanging, Elie says that he "found the soup excellent that evening" (pg 60), but that after the second hanging "the soup tasted of corpses" (pg 62). What makes the second hanging that Elie describes so much worse than the first?
4. When Elie's father becomes ill, Elie tries to take care of him and encourage him to stay strong and get through it. What do you think about the advice that the head of the block gives Elie on page 105. Do you think Elie should have focused more on keeping himself healthy, or do you think he did the right thing helping his father? What would you have done?

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Written Response Prompts for *The Story of a Life*

1. In the beginning of *The Story of a Life*, Aharon Applefeld describes his parents, especially his mother, in great detail from what he remembers of them as a child. Choose a parent or grandparent. Write about them in great detail. You may choose to list your descriptions or write in paragraph form. You can write about a specific memory, what they look like, how they act or speak, etc. What you write can be positive or negative. It is important to be honest and keep writing until time is up.
2. Once Aharon escapes and is in the company of many other survivors, there is often discussion about whether or not they should tell what they have been through. Some are worried that others won't believe what they say (a common fear among survivors) while others argue that they have to tell so that people know what happened. Try to see both sides of the argument. Do you think there may be anything so bad it is worth staying quiet about?
3. Knowing what you now know about the Holocaust from the point of view of two different survivors, who's account is more powerful to you, Elie or Aharon? Why? What about their writing speaks to you?

Written Response Prompts for *The Diary of a Young Girl*

1. Anne is a girl very close to your age with many of the same interests as you have. Imagine that you suddenly find yourself in the same position as Anne and her family, in hiding and unable to go outside or continue your way of life as you know it. What do you think would be the most difficult aspect of this new way of life? What would you make sure to have with you in your hiding place? What would you do each day to attempt to continue living your life as normally as possible?

2. Anne has documented so many details of her life in the Annex in this diary. She also spends a lot of time wondering aloud who she is. In the last entry she calls herself a “little bundle of contradictions” because at fifteen she is frustrated that she still doesn’t know who she really is. Who are you? Write freely about yourself. Write as if you are telling about yourself to someone you have never met before. Feel free to write about anything, what you look like, your dreams, your fears, your favorite foods, etc. Be descriptive!

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Written Response Prompts for *Survival in Auschwitz*

1. Yesterday we read about some of the daily routines that Anne and her family went through in the Secret Annex. Make a list of the routines and rituals you follow on a typical school day. Why is it important for you to follow these routines?

Choose to respond to one of the following:

2. In the excerpts we read today, Primo writes about two specific people—Steinlauf and Alberto. Both were extremely important to him in camp and he writes very fondly of them. Both Alberto and Steinlauf survive and live on because Primo writes about them in this novel. Writing is a way of remembering and helping someone live on. Write at length about someone that you would like to memorialize in writing. This person can be living or gone. You might tell a specific story about them or write as many details as possible. You can do this in paragraph form or a poem, or in list form.

3. In Chapter 5, Primo recounts a specific dream he has in camp. In it he tries to tell his sister what happened to him in the concentration camp, but she either doesn’t believe the horrific tale he tells, or simply doesn’t care. He has a great fear that this dream will become reality. What is your deepest fear? Write about it at length here.

Writing Prompt for Video Testimonies

Today you watched video testimonies from Menachem S., Edith P., and Helen K. How were these testimonies different than the ones we read? Did you find the video testimonies more or less powerful than the written ones? Respond to the video testimonies we saw. What did you think? What and who affected you the most? Could you call any of these survivors heroes?

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Writing Prompts for Bystanding

1. How do you make decisions? What or who do you think of before you decide to do or not to do something?
2. What do we need to do to make a better world? How do we stop being bystanders and really do something? Do you have what it takes to step up and do the right thing even if it is unpopular or puts you in danger? Or tell about an experience where you saw something bad going on and you stepped up and tried to stop it. What was the outcome of this experience?
3. Reflect on this unit as a whole. What did you learn? What upset you? Did anything make you feel happy or hopeful? What did you learn about Holocaust survivors? What did you learn about yourself? What needs to be done at this point to make sure that nothing like this ever happens again? Who are you going to tell? Feel free to answer any or all of these questions.