

I WAS A CHILD OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY ANN MARIE FLEMING

TEACHER'S GUIDE

BASED ON THE BOOK, *I WAS A CHILD OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS*, WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY BERNICE EISENSTEIN

A NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA PRODUCTION



TARGET AUDIENCES

- Psychologists, social workers, mental health professionals or support group leaders helping survivors, and/or their second- and/or third-generation descendants, of traumatic events such as the Holocaust, genocide, ethnic cleansing, war
- Senior high school sector
- Post-secondary sector
- Non-credit adult education sector: courses, seminars, workshops offered by community organizations, religious institutions (e.g., synagogues, temples, churches) and seniors' centres or residences
- Marriage preparation programs for couples in which one or both partners are Jewish
- Parenting education programs for families in which one or both of the parents are Jewish
- Jewish boys preparing for their Bar Mitzvah and Jewish girls preparing for their Bat Mitzvah ceremonies

SUBJECT AREAS

- Senior high school: World History, 20th-Century History, English Language Arts, Judaism, Family Studies, Ethics
- Post-secondary: Psychology, Sociology, History of World War II, Judaism, Population Demographics, Holocaust studies, Linguistics, Parenting, Family Studies, Yiddish Language and Jewish History
- Non-credit adult education: 20th-Century History, Judaism, Family Studies, Ethics, Social Justice, Psychology, Sociology, History of World War II, Holocaust Studies, Linguistics, Yiddish Language and Jewish History

TOPICS

- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
- Holocaust Studies
- Genocide
- Immigration and demographics
- English Language Arts: writing personal narratives
- Media Literacy
- Individual or collective memories, remembering, forgiveness
- Intergenerational Studies
- Judaism: rites, rituals, religious beliefs, practices, history
- Family conflict between Canadian-born children and parents born in the “old country”
- Community support services for the settlement and integration of immigrant cultural and/or religious communities into the new country
- Family Studies: personal history, relationships, daily practices, extended family, bonding, belonging, emotional expressions, parenting
- Yiddish Language Studies
- Author studies: Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel
- Information Literacy

PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITY

In preparation for understanding the historical context of *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, students may be asked to research, or the teacher should present information, on the following topics:

- World War II
- Nazi Germany
- The “Final Solution”
- The Holocaust
- Auschwitz concentration camp
- Adolph Eichmann
- Jewish religious practices related to death, mourning and the naming of children

A THE CYCLE OF LIFE: JEWISH RITUALS AND PRACTICES

DEATH AND MOURNING

Each Jewish community may have a variation on the rituals and practices related to the death of, and mourning for, a loved one. However, the key elements include the tearing or cutting of a piece of cloth; the preparation and care of the body of the deceased for burial; the practice of sitting *shiva*; the comforting of mourners; the burning of a memorial candle; the recitation of specific prayers; and the honouring of the memory of the deceased. Research these elements and then compare and contrast them with those of another religion or culture. What elements are the same or different in their purpose, practice, structure or belief? How do these practices comfort the mourners?

NAMING OF A CHILD

Begin by asking the students, or viewers, who chose their name and why it was chosen. What is the origin or derivation of their name? Elicit responses dealing with the cultural, religious, traditional, historical, parental preference or linguistic significance of the name and the naming process. In Judaism, the male child is named at his *bris*, a circumcision ceremony, when he is one week old. In North America, the baby boy or girl is traditionally given the Jewish name of a deceased relative as a way of remembering that person, showing respect for their achievements and their continued significance in the lives of the family, honouring their memory and creating a living link to the past. The child's English name may be related to the Jewish name through the use of the same initial phonetic sound or translated letter of the alphabet. In *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, the scene of the *bris* ends with a circle drawn around the baby, his father, his uncle and the rabbi who performed the ceremony. At the top of the circle is the figure of the grandfather, whose name has been given to the baby. The circle of life—of death and birth—is complete. How have the students and viewers experienced this continuity of death and birth through the naming of a child or through the history of their own names?

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

Holocaust survivors who were liberated from the Nazi concentration camps had to remake their lives as everything had been taken from them—family, friends, homes, possessions, culture, religion, history, security, health, human rights and control over their lives. Even their identities were removed when, as prisoners entering the camps, they were permanently branded or tattooed with numbers on their left forearms. After their liberation, as they re-established their lives, some renounced all aspects of their Jewish religion believing that a God would not have allowed the Holocaust to happen and therefore there was no God. Others believed that they had to return to their Jewish roots and practices to prove that the Nazis' "Final Solution" had not vanquished Judaism and to honour the memories of the six million Jewish people who died in the Holocaust. In returning to Judaism, groups of survivors established their own synagogues

and temples (in some communities, the synagogue is called a temple) to create links to their past, to their lost Jewish communities and to the lost Jewish cultures of Europe.

Research the history of a local synagogue or temple to discover its links to a lost Jewish community. Discover the origins of its name, the rationale behind the architectural and religious structural design, the significance, history and meanings of its religious artefacts, practices and traditions. Invite the rabbi or a founding member of the congregation to speak to the class or group about the history and religious observances and practices of the synagogue or temple, either in the classroom or as part of a class or group visit to the synagogue or temple.

B WESTERNS ON 1950S AND 1960S TELEVISION

Bernice's father, Ben Eisenstein, loved to watch westerns on television. In the 1950s and 1960s, this genre of television programming had a hero or good guy, a bad guy and a clearly stated source of evil or problem that needed to be solved, permanently removed or rectified by the hero. The iconic scene was the hero riding in on horseback to save the family, lady, ranch or town from the ruthless bad guy and his cohorts. The bad guys got what they deserved, right triumphed and people could live in peace and prosperity. Ben Eisenstein imagined himself as the hero, riding into the Nazi concentration camp, overpowering the Nazis and liberating the prisoners. This entertainment was an enjoyable activity in Ben's daily life but what other role did it fill?

C GROWING UP IN THE HOME OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS: THE ATMOSPHERE

For many survivors, what had been vital to everyday survival in concentration camps became of paramount importance to their post-war lives. It was a demonstration that they now had what they had lacked. Whether it was the need for everyone to always wear shoes, the requirement that children always finish all the food on their plates, the enduring fear of German Shepherds, the pride in serving too much food to guests, the daily silences versus the gusto expressed at celebrations and simchas, the night terrors or nightmares and subsequent hallway pacing versus the quiet and short evening or afternoon naps, or the taking of baths instead of showers; for the children of the survivors these things were normal. How were these “normal behaviours” windows onto understanding the cruelties, losses and deprivations that Holocaust survivors had suffered, as well as their hopes and dreams for their children?

“Without my family’s knowledge or even their understanding, their past has shaped my loneliness and anger, and sculpted the meaning of loss and love. I have inherited the unbearable lightness of being a child of Holocaust survivors. Cursed and blessed . . . Growing up in my parents’ home was not tragic but their past was.”— Bernice Eisenstein, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2006), 187. How did their tragic past intentionally and unintentionally impact on the home life the parents created?

PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST

Many survivors did not or could not talk about their experiences in the Nazi concentration camps. They wanted to protect their children from the knowledge and pain of this time in their lives. Their children witnessed and understood this pain and did not want to inflict more pain by talking about these experiences with their parents. Each generation tried to protect the other. How could this pattern of communication have affected communication about other family life issues?

UNDERSTANDING THEIR PARENTS AS PEOPLE RATHER THAN PARENTS

Who are my parents? What and who made them who they are? These questions are even more difficult for children of Holocaust survivors because the Nazis eradicated family members, friends, education, histories, artefacts and communities. The teenaged children of Holocaust survivors tried to understand their parents as people, while struggling to develop their own identity without cutting off the parents, who often could not understand the reality of the teenagers’ world. The adult children of Holocaust survivors look back to their childhoods to understand how and why they became who they are. They want to recognize the good and normal aspects of their childhood while trying to establish their own parenting styles. They do not want to make the mistakes they perceive their parents to have made because of their Holocaust experiences. Honour thy father and thy mother, but

which father and mother? The people they were before the Holocaust? The father and the mother they were because of the Holocaust? The father and the mother they might have become if not for the Holocaust? The children of Holocaust survivors, as parents themselves, are also receptors of their parents’ spoken and unspoken Holocaust losses and painful memories. To succeed as parents, they must learn to find the balance between the new and the old, the good and the bad, the understandings and the mysteries, the known and the unknowns, of their parents, themselves and their children. The children of Holocaust survivors must decide what knowledge and memories of the Holocaust to share, forget and remember for their children, who are the grandchildren of the Holocaust survivors. How can they make these decisions? Will they be conscious or unconscious decisions? Will the family dynamics and practices experienced by the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors be different from those of the children of Holocaust survivors?

GENERATION THREE (G3)

The grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, while knowing that their grandparents are or were Holocaust survivors, must make their own decisions regarding what Holocaust knowledge and memories to ask about and whom to ask. As the number of living Holocaust survivors declines, what, if any, responsibility does G3 have in remembering the Holocaust and its lessons of survival?



D HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION LITERACY

Have the students create the following chart and brainstorm the contents of the chart. The students should then use the chart as a starting point for their research on the history of the Holocaust and World War II. The last column (“What sources should I use to learn what I need to learn?”) asks the students to look at a variety of sources, including books, online resources, films, primary source documents etc., and to evaluate them. A good starting point for online searching is this site: noodletools.com/debbie/literacies/information/5locate/adviceengine.html.

What do I know?	What do I need to learn?	What sources should I use to learn what I need to learn?



E LANGUAGE ARTS LESSON

Interview a Holocaust survivor, a child of a Holocaust survivor or a grandchild of a Holocaust survivor (teenager or older). Write questions for the interview subject on the following topics to discover their knowledge, opinions, thoughts, beliefs and practices:

- Historical context of the Holocaust (why it happened)
- Level of religious observance or commitment to Judaism or Jewish traditions
- Holocaust impacts on personal life choices and religious practices and observances
- Yad Vashem and other Holocaust museums and memorials
- Remembering and legacy

F MEDIA LITERACY LESSON

Create an audio or video recording of the interviews and put them together to make a documentary-style film. In creating the documentary, consider the following elements and their impact on the message of the film. Provide a justification for the choices.

- What is the message or primary intention of the film?
- Create a title for the film while remembering the many purposes of a title.
- Write a short description/tagline for the film.
- What transitions will be used between the interviews and/or within the interview sequences?
- What style of music will be used?
- What font will be used in the opening and closing credits and the identification of the interviewees?
- What image(s) will be used for the opening and closing sequences of the film?

G SOCIAL SCIENCE LESSON: MAPPING, DEMOGRAPHICS AND IMMIGRATION

Using statistical information available from Statistics Canada statcan.gc.ca, create a timeline of the major immigration waves to Canada since 1900. Using a world map, identify the countries and areas of those countries from which the immigrants left. What historical, political, economic, religious or social events prompted these groups to leave their homelands? Using a map of Canada, plot these immigration waves, the major ports of entry into the country and the geographical areas and communities where these immigrant groups settled. How have these immigrant groups affected the historical, political, economic, religious and social development of the communities where they settled? Looking at your own community, what evidence is there of the groups' presence (either currently or from the past)?

H FINE ARTS LESSON

The animators of *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* used a specific colour palette. How does this colour palette respond to and support the film's audio component? Why did the filmmakers not use any vibrant colours? How does the animation style create a mood or set a tone for the sound elements in the film?

I THE YIDDISH LANGUAGE LESSON

Some expressions and words used in *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* are in Yiddish. Like English and French, Yiddish and Hebrew share an alphabet and some words, although with different pronunciations. The Yiddish language was and is still used predominantly as a vernacular by Jewish people and their descendants of Europe, Asia and North America, and it borrowed much of its vocabulary from European languages. For example, central European Jewish people may say, "Vilst essen?" (meaning "Do you want to eat?"), with the word "essen" ("to eat") borrowed from the same German word. However, Jewish people from France may ask the same question by asking, "Vilst mangelen?" with the word "mangelen" ("to eat") adapted from the French word "manger." As with all languages, the speaker's accent may provide clues to their origin, just as North American English accents may vary from place to place. Consider a Canadian Newfoundland accent versus a central Canadian accent; a Montreal French Quebecois accent versus a Lac St. Jean French Quebecois accent; or a Southern versus Northern United States' accent. A Yiddish accent, as well as the variations in certain words, can denote the speaker's origins as being from Russia, Poland, Latvia, Hungary or France. Even though the speakers were born in Canada, the use of, and accents of certain words, provide hints of the family's European origins. Before the creation of the state of Israel, Jewish communities used Hebrew predominantly as the language of worship in synagogues.

Many Yiddish words have found their way into general use in English. Some examples include:

Bagel

A noun for a round bread roll with a hole in the middle. The recipes for Montreal, Toronto and New York City bagels yield very different taste experiences.

Chutzpah

A noun meaning audacity or nerve with a bit of arrogance.

Klutz

A clumsy person. The adjective is klutzy.

Mazel tov

An expression of congratulations.

Nosh

A noun for a snack, a nibble or a little something to eat.

Shlep

A verb meaning to carry or bring something that is heavy, either physically or socially. Can also be a noun meaning something that is heavy to drag around.

GLOSSARY OF YIDDISH WORDS, AND THEIR DEFINITIONS, USED IN *I WAS A CHILD OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS*

Auf simchas

An expression that literally means "at happy celebrations." *Auf* means at or on the occasion of and *simcha* means a celebration. This is usually said when people take leave of each other, with the expression of hope that they only meet on happy occasions and not sad ones. It is also said when offering condolences as a way of saying "while this is a sad time, may we meet again on happy occasions."

Bris

The circumcision ceremony of the male Jewish child performed seven days after his birth. *Brit Milah* is the Hebrew name for the circumcision ceremony.

Bubby

Grandmother

Dresskeleh

The literal meaning is a pretty little dress but it may also mean a special dress for a special event such as a holiday or a celebration (*simcha*).

Hundert und tzvantzik

Meaning "120." Tradition says that Moses lived to be 120 years old and enjoyed good health until the end of his life. Saying "until 120" is to wish someone a long and healthy life. The commonly spoken expression is *Zolst leben biz hundert und tzvantzik* ("May you live until 120").

Kosher

Colloquially refers to activities and/or practices that are within the law (Jewish religious or civil law), are morally correct and upstanding.

Kosher butcher

A butcher who only sells fowl and meat that accord with Jewish dietary laws and rituals.

Kosher food

Foods that are selected and prepared according to Jewish dietary laws.

Kvel

Verb meaning to feel and express joy and pride over the achievements of someone near and dear.

L'chaim

Meaning "to life." Used as a traditional toast before drinking.

Mishigas

Stupid or crazy idea, idiosyncrasy, behavioural quirk.

Nachus

Joy or pleasure in the achievements of others, especially children or grandchildren.

Nem bubbelah

Nem means take or here or have and *bubbelah* is a diminutive term of endearment for sweetheart or darling. An adult may use this phrase when offering a child something to eat.

Oy gevalt

An expression meaning “oh my goodness” or “oh my God” or “oh no.” It is usually said with a tone of worry, exasperation or fear.

Rabbi

A teacher and/or the religious leader of the synagogue or temple.

Shloshim

As part of the observances, rites, rituals and traditions following the death of a loved one, the first stage is the seven days of *shiva*, beginning with the day of the funeral. The second stage is the twenty-three days following the end of *shiva*. The seven days of *shiva* plus the following twenty-three days equal the thirty days of *shloshim*. During these twenty-three days mourners begin to return to their pre-mourning life as some of the mourning restrictions on their activities are lifted. *Shloshim* means “thirty.”

Shtetl

A small, poor Jewish community, village, town or “suburb” of a larger non-Jewish community in Eastern Europe or Russia before World War II. The shtetl inhabitants were usually politically and socially compelled to live apart from mainstream society in areas where they could practice a traditional form of Judaism and speak Yiddish.

Yom Kippur

Day of Atonement, a Jewish High Holiday. To observe Yom Kippur, Jewish people will refrain from eating and drinking for twenty-five hours and will spend the time in prayer asking for forgiveness for offenses against God, and seeking to be inscribed in the Book of Life for the following year. Yom Kippur is celebrated, according to the Jewish calendar, in the month of Tishri, which usually corresponds with September or early October.

Question: What words commonly used in English come from other languages? Do these words bring added layers of meaning that may be cultural, religious, historical and or social, adding to the nuances and contextual uses of the word?

ONLINE HOLOCAUST MUSEUMS AND TEACHING RESOURCES

- Canada: Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre, mhmc.ca (available in English or French)
- Israel: Yad Vashem, yadvashem.org
- United States: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, ushmm.org
- Poland: Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, en.auschwitz.org.pl (available in several languages, including English and French)
- France: Mémorial de la Shoah, memorialdelashoah.org (available in English and French)
- Argentina: El Museo del Holocausto de Buenos Aires, museodelholocausto.org.ar

RELATED LINKS

- Yad Vashem: The Auschwitz Album, 1.yadvashem.org/exhibitions/album_auschwitz
- The University of South Florida: A Teacher’s Guide to the Holocaust, fcit.usf.edu/Holocaust
- The University of Southern California, Dornsife College: Living History, Seven Voices from the Holocaust, dornsife.usc.edu/vhi/education/livinghistories
- The University of Southern California, Dornsife College: Ressources et informations sur les témoignages en français, dornsife.usc.edu/vhi/french
- The State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau & the Cybrary of the Holocaust: A Virtual Tour of Auschwitz/Birkenau, remember.org/auschwitz
- enotes.com: Trial of Adolph Eichmann, enotes.com/genocide-encyclopedia/eichmann-trial
- The Museum of Tolerance Online, Simon Wiesenthal Center: Timeline of the Holocaust motlc.wiesenthal.com/site/pp.asp?c=gvKVLcMVluG&b=394669
- The Museum of Tolerance Online, Simon Wiesenthal Center: Glossary of the Holocaust, motlc.wiesenthal.com/site/pp.asp?c=gvKVLcMVluG&b=394665
- A Cybrary of the Holocaust: Our Parents and Their Stories, emember.org/children/parents.html

RELATED NATIONAL FILM BOARD PRODUCTIONS

- ***The Boys of Buchenwald***
Audrey Mehler, 2002
- ***Raymond Klibansky: From Philosophy to Life***
Anne-Marie Tougas, 2002
- ***Dark Lullabies***
Irene Angelico and Abbey Jack Neidik, 1998

