

Shadows of Shoah

Shadows of Shoah Trust
Charities Commission
CC48205
www.shadowsofshoah.com
The Shadows of Shoah
Exhibition
A Unique Multidisciplinary
Holocaust Exhibition
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Shadows of Shoah Teachers' Guide

Based on a selection of seven Shadows of Shoah stories
www.shadowsofshoah.com

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A Holocaust Narrative

In this collection of stories you will learn about men and women who survived the Holocaust. Some lived in ghettos and camps, some were in hiding while others survived on the run or by adopting false identities.

You will view the stories of survivors who at that time were either babies, children or young adults. They came from various European countries. Some emigrated to NZ; others to Australia, America or Israel. They all suffered the loss of those most precious to them, but they lived to tell their stories.

In order to understand what happened during the Holocaust, one must consider the events of the 1930's. During this period the Nazi party rose to prominence at time of great instability in the German Republic. Hitler as the leader of the Nazi party was voted into government within a democratic system, whilst propagating an openly antisemitic ideology. The passing of the Enabling Act in March 1933 gave Hitler dictatorial powers and during the first six years of his dictatorship, hundreds of laws were passed restricting the rights of Jewish people in Germany.

These anti-Jewish policies categorised Jews, restricted their civil liberties, and confiscated their property. Jews were isolated from German society. They were forced to wear a 'badge of shame' in the form of a yellow star and forbidden to make use of public facilities.

Jews were dispossessed economically through dismissal from civil service jobs, universities and professions. The boycott of Jewish businesses and shops in towns and cities throughout Germany on 1 April, 1933, signalled the beginning of the institutionalised persecu-

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tion of the Jewish people. It was to intensify in the years leading up to World War Two.¹

On 7 April 1933, all non-Aryans were dismissed from the civil service, including teachers from state schools. **Robert Narev** tells of his father, Erich, losing his job as a school teacher. Furthermore, the pension Erich was entitled to because of the Iron Cross he had been awarded for military service during WW1, was discontinued.

Persecution of the Jewish people intensified in the period leading up to the outbreak of war in September 1939.

Shortly after the German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, the Jews of Poland were forced to leave their homes and move to ghettos where they were held essentially as prisoners. Ghetto life was one of squalor, hunger, disease, despair and death. This was to be the blueprint for Nazi controlled territories.

In 1942, Robert Narev, along with his parents and two elderly grandmothers were sent to Theresienstadt Ghetto.

In Nazi propaganda, "Theresienstadt was cynically described as a 'spa town' where elderly German Jews could 'retire' in safety." It was however more like a holding pen in which the poor conditions would hasten the deaths of many elderly Jews and those who survived would then be deported to killing centres in the 'East'.²

Under these conditions one of Robert's grandmother's died shortly after arrival and Robert's father and other grandmother died the following year.

As a propaganda exercise Theresienstadt was remodelled in preparation for a visit by the International Red Cross in June 1944. The ghetto was beautified, gardens planted and barracks removed. Special events were held for the entertainment of the dignitaries but once the visitors departed the transport of Jews to the East continued unrelentingly.

Fortunately for Robert Narev one particular train trip in February 1945 headed West rather than East and he and his mother found themselves in Switzerland, rather than Auschwitz, on their way to freedom. But of the 15,000 children who passed through Theresienstadt, ninety percent perished.³

In the Summer of 1942, the Nazis began liquidating the ghettos of Eastern Europe. People were rounded up like cattle, crammed into

1 <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005678>

2 <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005424>

3 <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005424>

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trains and sent off on a journey, often lasting several days without food or water. Families were torn apart never to be reunited.

Within 18 months almost all the ghettos of Poland were emptied. By summer 1944 more than 3 million Jews had been transported to concentration camps.

There were different kinds of camps; concentration camps, labor and hard labor camps, transit camps, prisoner of war camps and finally death camps.

Kitia Altman describes her arrival at Auschwitz, the largest Nazi extermination and concentration camp, where some were selected for hard labour and others condemned, unwittingly, to their deaths.

"The Nazis developed an elaborate system of dehumanization, prior to annihilation. There was hunger, torture, loss, grief. These things are universal. But what did the Holocaust do? It stripped a person totally - physically, emotionally, spiritually - stripped a person naked and revealed the capacity of a human being to do evil to another human being."

The whole killing process was designed with assembly line efficiency. Victims were deceived into thinking they were having showers so as to minimize disturbances. The contact between perpetrator and victim was carefully limited making it an impersonal process.

Some Jews managed to survive the Holocaust by hiding and others by assuming false identities. **Roald Hoffman** and his mother were hidden by a Ukrainian family in the attic of the village school room. **Fridja Studen** spent much of the war on the run or in hiding and was eventually sheltered in a convent.

Historians disagree as to whether the idea of murdering all Jews took shape slowly over time or was rather a pre-meditated plan that existed at the very beginning of the Nazi regime.

It was clear that by 1941 the murder of Jews was the goal of Nazi policy. It was an act of murder foisted on a whole ethnic group that was premeditated, intentional, total, all encompassing and which served no political or territorial purpose. The persecution and then destruction of the Jewish people was a national priority, even at the cost of rational policy.⁴

The Holocaust raises many seemingly unanswerable questions.

Moshe Fizman asks, "We who gave the world the one true God and the Ten Commandments, we should be destroyed? Why?"

This comment by **Moshe Orgad's** grandfather expresses the disbelief that such evil could occur in a highly civilized culture - "The Ger-

⁴ Michael Berenbaum, *The World Must Know - A History of the Holocaust as told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, New York, 1993.

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mans have Beethoven, Goethe, Brahms. They can't be bad people. Why run away?"

Amidst all the tragedy there were those who were beacons of light.

Moshe tells how he was taken in and looked after by a Serbian family who joined the partisans. Moshe was carried on the shoulders of the grandfather of the family who walked for miles through the snow.

Philip Maisel was taken in by a village woman who fed and sheltered him.

The Holocaust could not have occurred without the passive or active cooperation of ordinary citizens. And yet, in the midst of such evil, the courageous actions of a minority resulted in many lives being saved.

It is important to learn the lessons of the past.



Further Background Notes

Roald Hoffman

Roald Hoffman's father was involved in a breakout attempt at the labour camp in which he was incarcerated. Unfortunately, he was betrayed and killed. Although this example of Jewish resistance was unsuccessful it does illustrate the fact that the Jews were not always passive victims.

Roald would likely not have survived if it were not for the kindness of a Ukrainian family who allowed him, his mother and relatives to hide in the attic of the village school. There were many 'Righteous among the Nations' who have been honoured by Yad Vashem for risking their lives to save Jews. Some are famous like Oscar Schindler, others virtually unknown.

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Roald's mother was a wonderful example of strength & resourcefulness in the midst of adversity.

Fridja Studen

Fridja spent much of the war on the run or in hiding. She was eventually caught by the Gestapo. Fridja's mother had prepared her for this day by telling her that she was to assume a false identity and claim that her mother was actually a Polish neighbour. After Fridja's mother was killed, Fridja was cared for by a Polish woman for awhile, and then sent to a convent where she was taught Catholic customs. Fridja had embroidered her name into her coat so that she would not forget her true identity. When the war ended she thought she was the only Jew who had survived.

When interviewed in 2008, Fridja was still in touch with the 102 year old Nun who had looked after her.

Moshe Orgad

Moshe's story raises the perplexing question - how could the atrocity of the Holocaust occur in one of the most developed, civilized cultures of the time? The general disbelief that a civilized society could carry out such brutality contributed to a general lack of resistance by the Jewish people until it was too late.

In contrast however, Moshe's story also highlights the effective resistance of the Serbian Partisans who successfully fought the Germans and kept their area free of Nazi control. An interesting comparison could be made with Jewish Partisan groups.

Most touching is the story of young Moshe's relationship with the grandfather of the Serbian family whom he admired greatly and looked to as his own father.

Philip Maisel

Philip tells the story of his escape from a labour camp during a snow storm and how a village woman showed him kindness by feeding him and giving him shelter. Because he had no idea where he was and did not know the language he eventually made his way back to the camp, but happened upon a guard who also showed him kindness. Often it was these small acts of kindness that meant the difference between life and death.

The account of Philip's father's death at Klooga Concentration Camp needs to be handled carefully. The burning of Jewish bodies on a pyre is one of the gruesome methods of murder employed by the Germans. The teacher needs to have discretion in dealing with this material.

While Philip's story highlights human kindness, the ending brings home the reality that these acts of kindness were indeed minimal in light of the tragedy that was unfolding.

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Robert Narev

Robert Narev's story provides a useful summary of the process of increasing isolation and persecution that took place in Nazi Germany during the 1930's. It is also a useful springboard for studying the uniqueness of Theresienstadt as a transit camp and the way Theresienstadt was used as part of Hitler's propaganda campaign.

Robert's story mentions the Nuremberg Laws, which were an antisemitic body of law that defined who was Jewish. This made it easier for the Nazis to enforce legislation restricting the basic rights of German Jews. Nazi antisemitism was based on pseudo-scientific racist ideology.

Kitia Altman

Kitia's story highlights the fact that there was a very real risk for those caught helping Jews. The German who helped Jews by delaying the day of their deportation was eventually arrested and killed. This is an important factor to consider when discussing the role of the bystander. Students could be asked to consider how they would respond in such circumstances, especially when it could bring danger on one's family.

Kitia contrasts the labour camp with Auschwitz. She gives a powerful description of the process of dehumanization that took place and a thought-provoking analysis of human nature.

Moshe Fizman

The yellow star was to be worn as a 'mark of shame'. The star was intended to humiliate Jews and to mark them out for segregation and discrimination. The policy also made it easier to identify Jews for deportation to camps.

Moshe's story hints at the terror of the selection process. Drunken Ukrainians herded Jewish people into the square. They were given

Themes/Questions to Explore

Discrimination and Racism

Examine the ways that Jews were discriminated against? Are there parallels in our society? Examine the similarities and differences. Investigate Nazi racism and its basis in pseudo-science.

Propaganda

How did the Nazis use propaganda to further their agenda? What can we learn from the Nazi use of propaganda. How effective was it?

Role of Onlookers

An onlooker may be a helper, perpetrator, collaborator or bystander. Discuss the differences. Does a bystander cooperate in a crime by not acting? When does passivity become complicity?

Choiceless choices

The Holocaust provides numerous opportunities to examine moral and ethical dilemmas and to consider how one would behave in such circumstances. e.g. if I shelter a Jew I run the risk of punishment or death for myself or my family. What should I do?

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only 30 minutes to organize themselves. Grenades were thrown into rooms to speed up the process. This is an example of how the Germans were able to exploit the latent antisemitism of the local communities. Local accomplices were often only too willing to participate in the brutality. This is an opportunity to consider the roles of helpers, bystanders and perpetrators.

Transcripts

[Download transcripts for the various stories.](#)

Moshe faced separation from his family without the opportunity to even say goodbye. He was never to see them again. This was one of the heart-rending situations that led to his question, why?

View the Shadows of Shoah Stories

[Robert](#)

[Kitia](#)

[Philip](#)

[Roald](#)

[Fridja](#)

[Moshe F](#)

[Moshe O](#)

Further Information

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<https://www.shadowsofshoah.com>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

The USA's Official Memorial to the Holocaust
www.ushmm.org/education/foreducators/

Yad Vashem

The World Center of Holocaust Remembrance and Education
www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/educational_materials/index.asp

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Questions for Students (based on transcripts)

Roald Hoffman

1. How does the Holocaust still impact Roald's life?
2. How important was Roald's mother in bringing him through the experience?
3. What is your response to Roald's story? (your emotions/feelings, or questions, or ideas, or desire for action)

Fridja Studen

1. How did Fridja's mother prepare her to survive?
2. Why do you think Fridja's mother was pushed out of the prison door? Why do you think Fridja did not recognize her mother when she was pushed out?
3. What is your response to Fridja's story? (your emotions/feelings, or questions, or ideas, or desire for action)

Moshe Orgad

1. Why did Moshe's grandfather think the Germans could not possibly be bad people? How did his belief affect what he chose to do?
2. Which group helped Moshe survive the war? How did they survive against the Germans?
3. What is your response to Moshe's story? (your emotions/feelings, or questions, or ideas, or desire for action)

Philip Maisel

1. Why do you think Philip returned to the camp?
2. Why do you think the Germans at Klooga killed all the Jewish prisoners only one day before the camp was liberated by the Russians?
3. What is your response to Robert's story? (your emotions/feelings, or questions, or ideas, or desire for action)

Robert Narev

1. How old was Robert when he was in Theresienstadt? Did their age protect them?
2. How did the Nazis fool the International Red Cross observers at Theresienstadt?

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3. What is your response to Robert's story? (your emotions/feelings, or questions, or ideas, or desire for action)

Kitia Altman

1. What does it mean to be dehumanized? How were Kitia and the other girls dehumanised?
2. How did some Germans try to stop themselves being dehumanised? What were the outcomes?
3. What is your response to Kitia's story? (your emotions/feelings, or questions, or ideas, or desire for action)

Moshe Fizman

1. What did it mean that Moshe was sent to the right of the line and his family to the left?
2. How would it affect what you believe about people or God if you and your family experienced the same things as Moshe?
3. What is your response to Moshe's story? (your emotions/feelings, or questions, or ideas, or desire for action)

Summative tasks

1. Is it possible to stereotype any of the different types of people in these stories?
2. How do these stories show us the good and the dark side of our humanity?
3. Do you think any person could carry out the atrocities described?
4. It is easy to feel numb seeing so much pain in people's lives. How can we turn such feelings into positives for life?

Questions courtesy of Stephen Beguely