STEVEN SPIELBERG

*in association with*

SURVIVORS OF THE SHOAH VISUAL HISTORY FOUNDATION

*and*

TURNER ORIGINAL PRODUCTIONS

*present*

# Survivors of the Holocaust

## STUDY GUIDE

TBS SUPERSTATION

TURNER ORIGINAL PRODUCTIONS

Sponsored in part by

CHRYSLER CORPORATION

CHRYSLER • PLYMOUTH • DODGE • DODGE TRUCKS • JEEP® • EAGLE

With special thanks to The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation of Baltimore, Maryland

## INTRODUCTION

**Between 1933 and 1945, the Nazis targeted and systematically murdered millions of children, women, and men solely because of their ancestry. Those murders are collectively known as the *Holocaust*, a Greek word that means "complete destruction by fire." The word *Holocaust* evokes the crematoria of Auschwitz and other death camps where the bodies of many victims were burned. This event is also known as the *Shoah*, the Hebrew word for catastrophe. Immediately after World War II, Nazi leaders were brought to trial at Nuremberg, Germany for "crimes against humanity" and other war crimes. At those trials, the world heard evidence solely of what the perpetrators did. The voices of victims were not given full expression until decades later. *Survivors of the Holocaust* brings some of their voices to the classroom. Steven Spielberg, in association with Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation and Turner Original Productions, offers viewers a unique opportunity to hear the story of the Holocaust from the perspective of the survivors.**

**For nearly 20 years, Facing History and Ourselves has been teaching about the Holocaust and bringing the stories of the survivors to classrooms across the nation. These stories literally change the way students and teachers view history and themselves.**

**As Steven Spielberg reminds us, the testimonies of the survivors reveal "that the devastating events of the Holocaust didn't happen to faceless numbers, they happened to... men and women and children with names and faces and families and dreams. People just like us."**

**As students confront this history, they discover how unexamined prejudices encourage racism and antisemitism by turning neighbor against neighbor. Students make important connections between history and the moral choices they face in their own lives. And they come to understand that acts like those described in the documentary did not just happen randomly. They were the result of choices made by countless individuals and groups. Students learn that even the smallest decisions can have enormous consequences.**

**TBS grants teachers the right to videotape the broadcast of *Survivors of the Holocaust* for classroom use in perpetuity. Teachers may also reproduce parts of this guide for classroom use. The guide is two sided. One side contains two sets of reproducible pages: Pre-View provides an overview of the ideas that led to the Holocaust and should be discussed with students before viewing the program; Post-View consists of short readings and questions that prompt reflection and discussion of issues explored in the documentary and can be used once students have seen the program. The other side of the guide is a poster that highlights significant events before, during, and after the Holocaust, along with brief quotations from the documentary.**

**Please Note: This program should be previewed for age appropriateness before it is shown in the classroom.**

Margot Stern Strom
*Executive Director, Facing History and Ourselves*

Phyllis Goldstein
*Senior Program Associate, Facing History and Ourselves*

## RESOURCES

For a fuller treatment of ideas and concepts developed in this guide, see ***Facing History and Ourselves Resource Book: Holocaust and Human Behavior***. Other books of interest available from Facing History and Ourselves include:

- ***Elements of Time***: a companion manual to the Facing History videotape collection of Holocaust testimonies—the result of a live-year collaborative project between Facing History and the Fortunoff Video Archive at Yale University made possible through the vision and support of Eli Evans and the Charles H. Revson Foundation. The book includes transcriptions of the videos along with essays by some of the many scholars who have addressed Facing History conferences.
- ***I Promised I Would Tell***: Sonia Weitz's poetry and remembrances of life in the Krakow Ghetto and various concentration camps including Plaszow and Auschwitz.

For more information about bringing the history of the Holocaust to the classroom, contact the national offices of Facing History and Ourselves:

- 16 Hurd Road, Brookline, MA, 02445 (617) 232-1595
- 200 East Randolph Street, Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60601 (312) 726-4500
- 1276 East Colorado Blvd, Suite 207, Pasadena, CA 91106 (626) 744-1177
- Campus Box 354, 650 East Parkway South, Memphis, TN, 38104 (901) 452-1776
- 225 West 34th Street, Suite 1416, New York, NY 10122 (212) 868-6544
- 24301 Southland Drive, Suite 318, Hayward, CA 94545 (510) 786-2500
- Heights Rockefeller Bldg., 2475 Lee Blvd., Suite 2D, Cleveland Heights, OH 44118 (216) 321-9220

Other national organizations that provide information on teaching the history of the Holocaust include:

- Joseph H. and Belle R. Braun Center of Holocaust Studies, Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 823 United Nations Plaza, New York City, NY 10017 (212) 490-2525
- Simon Wiesenthal Center, 9760 West Pico Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90035 (310) 553-9036
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 100 Raou1 Wallenberg Place SW Washington, D.C. 20024 (202) 488-0400

The following books can also be used by students and teachers to explore specific topics and/or concepts highlighted in this guide:

Bar-On, Dan, *Fear & Hope: Three Generations of the Holocaust.* Harvard University Press, 1995.

Berenbaum, Michael, *The World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust as Told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.* Little Brown, 1993.

Block, Gay and Malka Drucker, *Rescuers: Portraits of Moral Courage in the Holocaust.* Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1992.

Browning, Christopher, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland.* HarperCollins, 1992.

Dwork, Deborah, *Child With a Star.* Yale University Press, 1991.

Hilberg, Raul, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders.* HarperCollins, 1992.

Isaacson, Judith, *Seed of Sarah.* University of Illinois Press, 1991.

Langer, Lawrence L., *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory.* Yale University Press, 1991.

Levi, Primo, *Survival in Auschwitz.* trans. by Stuart Woolf. Macmillan, 1993.

Rittner, Carol and Sondra Myers, ed., *The Courage to Care: Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust.* New York University Press, 1986.

Vishniac, Roman. *A Vanished World.* Schocken Books, 1983.

Wiesel, Elie, *Night.* Hill and Wang, 1960 (paper, Avon).

See also:
*Social Education*, Volume 59, Number 6, October, 1995, "Teaching About the Holocaust."

PRE-VIEW

## From "Race" to Racism

**Between 1933 and 1945, the Nazis murdered about one-third of all of the Jews in the world. Young and old alike were killed solely because of their ancestry. How could it happen in the twentieth century in the heart of Europe? Historians, psychologists, and theologians are still debating that question. So are the survivors. One survivor traces the Holocaust to hate. In the documentary, Shari Braun warns, "Don't hate anybody. Just don't hate anybody. Well, look what happened from the hatred. Because somebody has a different religion or a different race, you shouldn't look at that. You should look for the person, the human being, what is inside."**

For centuries, communities and nations have been divided over religion, culture, and ethnicity. In the 1700s and 1800s, a new idea deepened those divisions by strengthening prejudices and giving new life to old myths and misinformation. That idea was *race*. Until the 1800s, the word referred mainly to people who shared a nationality or were related to one another in some way. Now scientists used the term to refer to those who share a genetic heritage. Some scientists, however, were so certain that "race" explained all of the cultural differences they observed in the world that they distorted facts or made claims they could not substantiate.

Among these "scientists" was an American named Samuel Morton. In the early 1800s, he hypothesized that there was a link not only between skull size and intelligence but also between skull size and "race." After measuring a vast number of skulls, he concluded that the "white race" had larger skulls and was therefore superior to the "African race." He also maintained that each race is intrinsically different from others and incapable of being changed. Few white Americans questioned his research even though they were surrounded by people of "mixed races." Many liked the idea that they were part of a superior race.

Many Europeans were also intrigued with that notion. They, however, looked for differences within the "white race." Some traced their ancestry, to the "Aryans," a mythical people that supposedly left India in the distant past and carried its language and culture westward. Increasingly, these Europeans believed that as descendents of the "Aryans," they were superior to members of other "races," including the Jewish or "Semitic race." In the past, Jews were considered outsiders because of their religious beliefs. Now, they were excluded because of their "race." The word *antisemitism*, which literally, means "against 'Semites,'" described this new opposition to Jews.

Scientists who showed the flaws in racist thinking were ignored. In the late 1800s, the German Anthropological Society studied seven million Jewish and "Aryan" children. They found the two groups were more alike than different. Historian George Mosse writes:
*This survey should have ended controversies about the existence of pure Aryans and Jews. However, it seems to have had surprisingly little impact. The idea of race had been infused with myths, stereotypes, and subjectivities long ago, and a scientific survey could change little. The idea of pure, superior races and the concept of a racial enemy solved too many pressing problems to be easily discarded.*

As racist ideas were preached from pulpits and taught in schools around the world, "race" increasing became the distorted lens through which people viewed the world. And as racist thinking became accepted, attacks against Jews and other minorities increased sharply. Some Jews responded by turning inward to their own community and their faith for support. Others tried to assimilate—become more like the majority. They were confident that as differences diminished, so would discrimination. When it did not, many became bitter and angry. Walter Rathenau, a prominent German businessman and politician, wrote in the early 1900s, "In the youth of every German Jew there comes the painful moment which he will remember for the rest of his life, when for the first time he becomes conscious that he has come into the world as a second-class citizen, and that no ability or accomplishment can liberate him from this condition."

Some Jews tried to ignore the attacks. Others publicly protested. Neither approach worked. And as a worldwide depression deepened in the 1930s, prejudices and discrimination intensified. So did the separation between *us* and *them*. In times of stress and uncertainty, it was all too easy to blame *them* for society's problems. People responded favorably to such attacks in part because they tapped old prejudices and offered easy answers to complex problems.

In 1933, for example, a Protestant minister in Germany wrote, "In the last 15 years in Germany, the influence of Judaism has strengthened extraordinarily. The number of Jewish judges, Jewish politicians, Jewish civil servants in influential positions has grown noticeably. The voice of the people is turning against this." Were such fears justified? Did Jews control Germany? In 1933, Jews made up less than one percent of Germany's population. And of the 250 Germans who held important government posts between 1919 and 1933, only four were Jews. The myth of a Germany dominated by Jews was fostered by groups like

Adolf Hitler's National Socialist, or Nazi, party. In speech after speech, they maintained that the Jews were everywhere, controlled everything, and acted so secretly that few could detect their influence. The charge was absurd; but after hearing it again and again, many came to believe it.

► Less than 1 percent of Germany's population was of Jewish descent. In other parts of Europe, the percentage ranged from 10 percent in Poland to less than 1/2 percent in Sweden, Denmark, Italy, and Yugoslavia. Although a few European Jews were rich, many barely made a living. They disagreed on many issues, including the best way to counter discrimination. Some urged "a low profile," while others challenged antisemites on the street, in the courtroom, and in the voting booth. Despite such differences, many Europeans saw Jews as united, rich, and dangerous. What does this suggest about the vulnerability of minorities in times of economic or social stress? About the power of myths? What are *myths*? How do they help us find explanations for complex problems? How do they help us place the responsibility for those problems on someone else?

► In July, 1932, Adolf Hitler ran for president of Germany against a Communist candidate and Paul von Hindenburg, the incumbent president. Although Hitler lost the election to Hindenburg, he did surprisingly well. He was so popular that in January of 1933, Hindenburg named Hitler chancellor, or prime minister. The man he succeeded had tried and failed to end the depression. Now Hitler would have a chance to end the depression. Hindenburg and his advisors were certain that Hitler, too, would fail and when he did, they would step in to save the nation. In the meantime, they convinced themselves that they could control Hitler. They were wrong.

Within weeks, Hitler had set into motion a series of laws and orders that destroyed Germany's democracy and replaced it with a dictatorship based on "race" and terror. In 1933, Martin Niemoeller, a Protestant minister, was among the supporters of Hitler's Nazi party. By 1938, he was in a concentration camp. After the war he is believed to have said:

*In Germany, the Nazis came for the Communists and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak for me.*

What is the moral of Niemoeller's words? How did his views affect the choices he made? What do the consequences of his decisions suggest about the ways individuals and groups in a society are linked? Find examples of the ways Niemoeller's remarks relate to the choices people make today. How do those examples support the moral of Niemoeller's words?

## POST-VIEW

**"My father was an extremely smart man. In the cattle car, sitting there, I talked to him. 'Daddy, what's going to happen?' And he always assured me, 'Don't worry. This is the twentieth century. They're not going to kill us.'"**
**--Fred Bloch**

***Survivors of the Holocaust*** **documents the effect that Adolf Hitler and his followers had as they applied their ideas about "race" to the Jews of Europe. Almost from the start, the Nazis waged two wars. One was fought openly on the battlefields of Europe and North Africa. The other took place in secret and its victims were not soldiers but civilians—children, women, and men whose only "crime" was their "race." The stories of the survivors provide a glimpse into the death camps, where as Professor Lawrence Langer reminds us, moral choices as we know them did not exist and "the inmates were left with the task of redefining decency in an atmosphere that could not support it."**

► The survivors who tell their story in this documentary were children or young teenagers when the war began. What do they remember of their childhood before the world changed for them? How important do you think it was to them that they "belong"? How vulnerable were they to the violence around them?

► One survivor describes his *bar mitzvah* in 1938. A *bar mitzvah* is a religious ceremony that marks a boy's coming of age. He reads a portion from the Torah, the Five Books of Moses, to celebrate his becoming a full member of the Jewish community with all of the privileges and responsibilities of membership. Why did his rabbi beg him "never to forget"? What does he remember?

► In the documentary, a survivor reads aloud a poem he wrote:
*How can I forget Auschwitz, Majdanek, Bergen-Belsen, Theresienstadt, Buchenwald... and so many others?*
*How can I forget Moshe, Yankel, and Rivka... and so many names?*
*And I hear so many "Sh'ma Yisroels, Adonai Elohenus, Adnoi Echods."*
*How can I forget the sound of Shabbos in the wind that carried the endless sound of "Visgadal, Ve' yiskadash Sh'mey Rabbo"?*
*It is so much pain to remember, so much pain,*
*But it's so hard to forget.*

The places he lists are places where Jews were murdered. The names represent individuals who died there. He also recites passages from two prayers. The first is said twice each day by religious Jews to affirm their faith in God. The prayer begins with these words: "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God. The Lord is one." The second prayer is recited in memory of loved ones. It too praises God and reaffirms a belief in one God. What words do other survivors use to describe the pain they remember because "it's so hard to forget"?

► Primo Levi, a Holocaust survivor, fought the Nazis until he was captured and sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, an extermination camp. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were murdered there; others were kept alive until they were no longer useful as slave labor. After the war, Levi wrote a book called *Survival at Auschwitz*. In it, he states:
*Then for the first time, we became aware that our language lacks words to express this offense, the demolition of a man. In a moment, with almost prophetic intuition, the reality was revealed to us: we had reached the bottom. It is not possible to sink lower that this: no human condition is more miserable than this, nor could it conceivably be so. Nothing belongs to us any more; they have taken away our clothes, our shoes, even our hair; if we speak, they will not listen to us, and if they listen, they will not understand. They will even take away our name: and if we want to keep it, we will have to find ourselves the strength to do so, to manage so that behind the name something of us, of us, as we were, remains....*

*Imagine now a man who is deprived of everyone he loves, and at the same time of his house, his habits, his clothes, in short, of everything he possesses: he will be a hollow man, reduced in suffering and needs, forgetful of dignity and restraint, for he who loses all often easily loses himself. He will be a man whose life or death will be lightly decided with no sense of human affinity, in the most fortunate of cases, on the basis of pure judgment of utility. It is in this way that one can understand the double sense of the term "extermination camp," and it is now clear what we seek to express in the phrase: "to lie on the bottom."*

Levi believed the Holocaust altered the very meaning of even everyday words:
*Just as our hunger is not the feeling of missing a meal, so our way of being cold has need of a new word. We say "hunger," we say "tiredness," "fear," "'pain," we say "winter" and they are different things. They are free words, created and used by free men who lived in comfort and without suffering in their homes. If the [camps] had lasted longer, a new, harsh language would have been born; and only this language could express what it means to toil the whole day in the wind with the temperature below freezing, and wearing only a shirt, underpants, cloth jacket and trousers, and in one's body nothing but weakness, hunger, and knowledge of the end drawing near.*

Among the words that took on a new meaning was the word *bread*. One survivor describes a son who killed his father over a piece of bread. Another recalls the tiny slivers of bread he and his father saved to keep themselves alive on an upcoming death

march. He says that he cried the day he learned that his father had traded the bread for a prayer book. A few days later, the father used the prayer book to hold a Passover *seder*. A *seder* is a ceremony held in Jewish homes to remember a time when Jews were slaves in Egypt and recall how they acquired their freedom. Was the *seder* the survivor describes an act of resistance or an act of faith? Can it be both?

► Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor and author, writes, "Ask any survivor, he will tell you, he who has not lived the event will never know it. And he who went through it will not relate it, not really, not entirely. Between his memory and his reflection there is a wall—and it cannot be pierced." What is the wall to which Wiesel refers? Why can't it be pierced? How do the testimonies of the survivors affect that wall?

► Historian Deborah Dwork writes that survival was a matter of luck. In her view, the choices Jews made were "so alien, so different from anything Jews experienced personally, or had learned through education that they could not apply their knowledge to it." Professor Lawrence Langer refers to those decisions as choices made in the "absence of humanly significant alternatives—that is, alternatives enabling an individual to make a decision, act on it, and accept the consequences, all within a framework that supports personal integrity and self-esteem." He calls them "choiceless choices." What examples of choiceless choices do the survivors describe? What distinguishes those choices from other decisions?

► Langer believes that the moral turmoil in the camps silences judgment of the behavior of the victims. Elie Wiesel agrees. He says of *kapos*—prisoners forced to oversee other prisoners: "Of course, in the camps I saw men conquered, weak, cruel. I do not hesitate to admit I hated them, they frightened me; for me, they represented a danger greater than the Germans .... But, though they played the executioner's game, they died as victims.... What would have become of me had I stayed in the camps longer, five years, or seven, or twelve? I have been trying to answer that question for more than twenty years and at times, after a sleepless night, I am afraid of the answer." Why did the *kapos* represent for Wiesel a "danger greater than the Germans"? How does he help us understand why it is difficult to judge them?

► One survivor recalls screaming as she was pulled from her mother. Another speaks of the hug he gave his grandfather at Auschwitz as "the biggest satisfaction of my life." Still another tells of crying as she listened to the Yiddish song, "My Yiddishe Mama." What does the mother in the song represent? Why did family connections become so important that a hug is still recalled as an individual's "biggest satisfaction"?

*My Yiddishe Mama*
*O, how terrible when she is gone.*
*How beautiful and bright is the house*
*When my mother is there.*
*How sad and dark*
*When God takes her from the world.*

► In the documentary, one survivor remembers: "They sang the Hatikvah in the gas chamber, and we heard it because that camp was not far from the crematorium. And so it was so cold and it was so lonely, you could hear a pin fall...." The Hebrew word *Hatikvah* means "the hope." At the time, the song was the anthem of the Zionists, those who hoped to some day build a Jewish state in what was then Palestine. How do you explain a song of hope in a gas chamber?

► When the war ended, few survivors could return to their homes. Most had become refugees or DPs—displaced persons. Some would spend years in DP camps waiting to find a new home in a new land. A Yiddish song popular after the war reflects the feelings of these survivors:

*Where shall I go?*
*Who can answer me?*
*All doors are closed.*
*To the left, to the right.*
*It's the same in every land.*

How do the words confirm Elie Wiesel's belief that "the victims suffered more, and more profoundly, from the indifference of the onlookers than from the brutality of the executioner"? He writes: "The cruelty of the enemy would have been incapable of breaking the prisoner; it was the silence of those he believed to be his friends--cruelty more cowardly, more subtle—which broke his heart."

How do the words also explain the feelings of another survivor? She says: "I shelter in my heart any little thing that was done for me, and I don't mean materially or financially or anything. A kind word meant so much to me. They're so nice to me. And that's something that stays with you all the time."

► On the fortieth anniversary of World War II, President Richard von Weisaecker, of the former West Germany, said of the Holocaust: "It is not a case of coming to terms with the past. That is not possible. It cannot be subsequently modified or made not to have happened. Anyone who closes his eyes to the past is blind to the present. Whoever refuses to remember the inhumanity is prone to new risks of infection." Why does Weisaecker argue against "letting bygones be bygones"? What does he suggest about the way education and memory are linked? What do the survivors want us to remember and why? What can we learn from their stories about the dangers of racism and antisemitism in the world today? About the power of old myths and misinformation?