

The Holocaust: The Art of Memory

Overview

Students will explore the concept of memory and the various ways people choose to process and share their memories. Focusing on memories from those who experienced the Holocaust, students will explore the way various mediums (testimony, art, poetry, etc.) can teach us about the past. Finally, students will focus on poetry and art written by children of the Terezin concentration camp in which the authors share various memories and write a letter to their chosen child sharing what they wish they could say to him/her.

Grade

9

North Carolina Essential Standards for World History

- WH.1.2- Use historical comprehension...
- WH.1.3- Use Historical analysis and interpretation...
- WH.1.4- Use historical research...
- WH.8.1- Evaluate global wars in terms of how they challenged political and economic power structures and gave rise to new balances of power (e.g., Spanish American War, WWI, WWII, Vietnam War, Colonial Wars in Africa, Persian Gulf War, etc.).
- WH.8.2- Explain how international crisis has impacted international politics (e.g., Berlin Blockade, Korean War, Hungarian Revolt, Cuban Missile Crisis, OPEC oil crisis, Iranian Revolt, “911”, terrorism, etc.).
- WH.8.3- Explain how liberal democracy, private enterprise and human rights movements have reshaped political, economic and social life in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, the Soviet Union and the United States (e.g., U.N. Declaration of Human Rights, end of Cold War, apartheid, perestroika, glasnost, etc.).

Materials

- *Memories from the Holocaust*, worksheet attached
- “The Holocaust: The Art of Memory” accompanying Power Point, available in the Database of K-12 Resources (in PDF format)
 - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click “View” in the top menu bar of the file, and select “Full Screen Mode”
 - To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu
- Memory 1, Art, image available on slide 2 of the accompanying PPT
- Memory 2, Testimonial, copy attached
- Memory 5, Poetry, copy attached
- Copies of the book *I Never Saw Another Butterfly, Children’s Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp*, or copies of the poems from the book

Duration

60-90 minutes

Preparation

Students should have an understanding of the events of the Holocaust as well as its contributing factors before completing this lesson. See Carolina K-12’s “Introduction to the Holocaust,” available in the Database of K-12 Resources.

Procedure

Exploring Memories

1. As a warm up for this lesson, ask students to think of a childhood memory and describe it in a paragraph or more, noting the age at which the memory took place. (Alternatively, teachers can instruct students to draw a sketch or symbol that visually represents their memory.) Explain that the memory can be happy or sad, special or mundane – it might be of a holiday or a school event - there is no right or wrong, as long as it is an actual memory from childhood. Tell students they should choose a memory that they wouldn't mind sharing with the rest of class and that they should describe the memory in as much detail as possible.
2. Once students have had time to collect their thoughts, allow a few volunteers to share what they wrote. Afterwards, discuss:
 - What is a memory?
 - The memories you shared were from childhood, most of which happened many years ago. How is it that you are able to describe the events in detail today?
 - Consider the details you provided. Do you think that is actually how the event you remember took place, or might some of the details be altered in some way? Why might the way we remember details be a bit different than how the actual event took place?
 - What types of things determine what we hold as memories and what we simply forget?
 - How many of you chose to write about a good memory? A bad memory? A neutral memory? How do you think recounting a good memory from a bad memory might be similar or different?
 - What are some of the various ways we remember? Meaning, other than just thinking about something and writing it down, how else might we express memories?
3. Remind students that much of what we learn about the Holocaust, we learn by “bearing witness to the witnesses;” meaning, we learn from the first-hand accounts, the memories, from those who experienced the Holocaust. Ask students to discuss the various ways people, including Holocaust survivors, may choose to share their memories. For example:
 - Testimonials (written and video)
 - Artwork
 - Memoirs
 - Poetry
 - Music
4. Further discuss:
 - Why might people choose to share memories in creative forms, such as through artwork or poetry?
 - Can we learn as much from such creative mediums as we can from first-person testimonials? Explain.
 - How might these various ways of sharing memories be more effective or less effective than the others?
5. Distribute the “Memories from the Holocaust” notes sheet (attached) to each student. Explain to students that you are about to share different memories of the Holocaust with them, each from a varying medium. As each memory is shared, students should write 5 words or phrases that immediately come to mind on their note sheet. Stress that there are no wrong answers. Phrases or words can describe what they see or hear, how the memory makes them feel, or any other thoughts that come to mind. Ask students to keep comments to themselves until the exercise is complete, at which point they will have an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings. Share the following memories:
 - Memory 1, Art: Project the attached image on slide 2 of the accompanying PPT for students to view for approximately 1 min.
 - Memory 2, Testimony: Read the attached testimony by Blanka Rothschild (teachers can substitute this for a testimony excerpt of their choosing.)

- Memory 3, Video Testimonial: Play an excerpt from a video testimonial, such as one from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum: https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_list.php?MediaType=oh or one from the Holocaust Speakers Bureau: <http://www.holocaustspeakersbureau.org/videos.html>
 - **Teacher note:** To ensure that videos are appropriate for your classroom, teachers should pre-screen all testimonies before playing.
 - Memory 4, Music: Play an excerpt from a song by a Holocaust survivor, or a song that shares memories of a Holocaust survivor. See <http://www.lifeanddeath.org/holocaustmp3/index.htm> for examples.
 - Memory 5, Poetry: Read a poem by a Holocaust survivor, such as the attached example, *At Terezin*. (also found on page 3 of *I Never Saw Another Butterfly, Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp*.)
6. Once you have given students an opportunity to write down responses on their note sheets, ask students to share their thoughts. Discuss:
- Do you see any similarities between your answers for 1-5? Explain.
 - Even though we were seeing and hearing memories through different mediums (art, testimony, video, music, poetry) why were some of our responses similar?
 - Which of these was most powerful or moving to you and why?
 - Regardless of the form a memory takes, what types of things can we learn from Holocaust survivors?

Terezin Concentration Camp

7. Next, tell students they are going to be learning about the lives of several children who experienced the Holocaust through poetry and artwork they left behind. The children were prisoners at Terezin, also known as Theresienstadt, a small Czechoslovakian town located near the German border. Terezin was originally built as a fortress town to protect the Czechoslovakian border. The German army invaded Czechoslovakia, and in Nov. 1941 created a prison camp/ghetto for Jews at Terezin. Starting in 1942, Jews from towns all over Europe were arrested and deported by train to Terezin. Thousands died of disease and starvation, and thousands more were sent on to the Nazi death camps.
8. Use [slides 3-24](#) of the accompanying Power Point to share background information and images from the camp. (Detailed information can also be found in the foreword of *I Never Saw Another Butterfly, Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp*.)

I Never Saw Another Butterfly

9. After providing background information regarding Terezin, hold up a copy of the book *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* and explain to students that they will be reviewing the poems and artwork left behind by the children of Terezin. Project and read aloud the poem, *The Butterfly* (p.39 of the book *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*; also [slide 25](#) of the accompanying PPT) then discuss:
- How does this poem make you feel?
 - What images stand out in your mind after reading this poem?
 - Who do you think wrote this poem?
 - What type of situation do you think the poet was in? What experiences do you think generated this poem?
 - What might the butterfly symbolize?
10. Project [slide 26](#) and explain to students that the poem is by Peter Fischl, a young man who was held at Terezin. Peter was deported to Auschwitz in 1944 where he died.
11. Provide each student or pair of students with a copy of the book *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* and project the instructions on [slide 27](#). Give students a chance to explore the poems and art then instruct them to

choose a poem and piece of art that they are most drawn to or impacted by. (Ensure students note that the art is not connected to the poems that are found on the same page.) Students should then answer the following questions for both their poem and art choices:

- What is striking about the poem and artwork you chose?
- How does this poem and artwork make you feel? What made you pick this poem and artwork?
- What story is the poet and artist telling?
- What experiences do you think generated this poem and artwork?
- What is the artist trying to illustrate?
- What can we learn about the Holocaust based on this poem and artwork?

12. After students have answered the questions above, have students discuss their poem and art with a partner. Rather than just reciting their answers to the above questions, have students further discuss the following:

- What do you believe the children who created your chosen poem and art were like?
- Were there any examples of hopes, dreams, and fear in the work you studied?
- Can you relate to the poets and artists in any way?

Letter to the Poet

13. Instruct students to return to their poem and to imagine they could say something to the author. Perhaps they would like to share words of admiration, encouragement, consolation, etc. Or perhaps they want to try and cheer the child up, or let them know that they can rest assured that justice will be served one day. Tell students to write a letter to their child poet in which they share their thoughts.

➤ **Alternative:** Rather than writing a letter, have students create a “Blended Poem” in which they add their own line of creative poetry beneath each of the lines in the original poem they examined. Students should repeat this process on their paper until all lines of the original poem have been responded to. The final product may be something like this:

- The Butterfly, by Pavel Friedmann and <<insert student name>>

For seven weeks I’ve lived in here,
Penned up inside this ghetto.
Innocent child, brave and trapped.
But I have found what I love here.
For beauty and truth will persevere.
The dandelions call to me
And the white chestnut branches in the court.
Even with death at every corner, life is within you.
Only I never saw another butterfly.
One day, you will see many.
You will fly through a blue sky, just as that butterfly.
That butterfly was the last one.
You will fly away from all the pain.
Butterflies don’t live in here,
In the ghetto.

- Ensure students understand that the words they choose to add can be literal or abstract; there is no right or wrong. They should just infuse their own poetic thoughts into the poem.

14. Either at the end of class or the following day, allow students to share their letters or Blended Poems. (If students created Blended Poems, it is recommended that each student partner with a classmate for presenting their work. Their classmate should read the lines written by the original poet, while the student

reads his/her own lines.) Review expectations for respectful audience members before beginning the presentations. After the students have read their work, teachers may also want to read the information provided in the back of the book (starting on page 96) regarding the fate of each child poet. After each presentation, ensure the class applauds the presenters, then facilitate positive feedback for each student. (“What did you like about that presentation?” or “What did you learn from that presentation?”)

Additional Activities

- The Butterfly Project:
 - Provide students with art supplies such as colorful paper, glitter, glue, scissors, string, and other decorative items. Tell students to create a butterfly that is a representative of the author of the poem they read. Students should write the name of their child on the butterfly if the child’s name is available. Tell students they should be prepared to discuss why they chose the visual enhancements of their butterfly. Have students write the title and page number of the poem on the back of the butterfly.
 - As students finish, hang their butterflies from the ceiling on string or post them in prominent places around the room so that the class is covered with butterflies that represent the children of Terezin.
 - The following day in class, allow students to do dramatic readings of their assigned poems, and/or describe the poem, its author, and their butterfly to the class. After each child reads the poem they have been working with, the teacher should tell the fate of the child poet. (This information can be found on page 96 of the book.) If the child dies (out of 15,000, less than 100 live) have the student walk up and cut down their butterfly. Few butterflies will remain hanging from your ceiling or left on the walls by the end of the class period. (Adapted from the Butterfly Project Activity Guide.)

Memories from the Holocaust

Directions: Write down 5 phrases or words that come to mind after you see or hear each of the memories presented.

Memory 1: Art

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____
- e) _____

Memory 2: Testimonial

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____
- e) _____

Memory 3: Video Testimonial

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____
- e) _____

Memory 4: Music

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____
- e) _____

Memory 5: Poetry

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____
- e) _____

Memory 2: Testimonial

Blanka Rothschild

Born 1922

Lodz, Poland

"After the war was over and after my experience after the liberation, there was a period of time of two weeks that I was in Poland. There was--I don't know how to explain this—a Polish man that had several little carts, and they were leaving the German village. They had a large Polish flag, and they said anybody that wants to go and join him back to Poland can do so. And I lived with the Germans, with the French ex-prisoners of war at that time, and I said to myself, "I should go because maybe my mother came back. Maybe my aunt came back. My first responsibility is to see who came back, so I will go back to my city."

So I joined this caravan, and, indescribable journey, we finally reached Warsaw. Warsaw was reduced to rubble. It was unrecognizable, and I had to go to Lodz from Warsaw. I had no money, I had no clothes, I had no luggage, I had nothing. I was just--and there was a man with a semi truck, sort of. And I found out that this man standing there, he said, "Hop on, you can go with me." And I hopped on, and we traveled to Lodz. And he stopped on the way, and he went to eat. I didn't want to tell him I'm hungry. We drove all the way to Lodz. He never thought of giving me piece of bread, but I reached Lodz. And when I went to the house that we lived in before, the Polish superintendent who took care of the building reacted with tremendous surprise--not elation, but surprise that I survived and came back. And what for? He said, "You don't even have to go to your place because the Germans emptied it. They took the carpets and everything. There is nothing left and other people live there." I said, "Maybe something is left. I want to go up."

And I went up, and they wouldn't let me in.

**Memory 5:
Poetry**

“At Terezin”

When a new child comes
Everything seems strange to him.
What, on the ground I have to lie?
Eat black potatoes? No! Not !!
I've got to stay? It's dirty here!
The floor-why, look, it's dirt, I fear!
And I'm supposed to sleep on it?
I'll get all dirty!

Here the sound of shouting, cries,
And oh, so many flies.
Everyone knows flies carry disease.
Ooh, something bit me! Wasn't that a bedbug?
Here in Terezin, life is hell
And when I'll go home again, I can't yet tell.

From: “I Never Saw Another Butterfly, Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp”