

## 3.3 LESSONS OF THE HOLOCAUST



### FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- What can happen when bullying is not stopped?
- How can all of us work to ensure that no one is victimized?
- How do people confront chapters of their history that reflect prejudice, discrimination, persecution, and genocide?
- How may we learn from the past to create an ethical and civil present, and design a future that respects people everywhere?

### STANDARD #2 TIME, CONTINUITY AND CHANGE.

#### LESSON OVERVIEW:

Students will be introduced to the subject of the Holocaust through a discussion of bullying, an aggressive social behavior with which most students are familiar. After reading and discussing Eve Bunting’s picture book *Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust* (based on Martin Niemöller’s “First They Came ...” statement), students will explore and increase their understanding of the concept of a person’s responsibility to speak up and take action rather than standing by and watching when human dignity is threatened. With their background experiences with bullying in their own school, students are very aware of the verbal, emotional, and physical abuse that can be involved. After participating in a variety of activities students will gain an understanding of how bullying could lead to events as horrific as the Holocaust and learn strategies to prevent acts of genocide from occurring again. They will read one of two picture books on “upstander” actions during the Holocaust — *Rose Blanche* by Roberto Innocenti and *The Flag With Fifty Six Stars* by Susan Goldman Rubin, read about and discuss the Kindertransport, and examine sculptural representations by artist Frank Meisler. To explore the basis for this lesson plan and to learn more about how to teach about the Holocaust and bullying, please visit the following links:



- Facing History: <http://www.facinghistory.org/resources/strategies/word-wall-promoting-group-lit>
- Anti-Defamation League: [http://archive.adl.org/education/courttv/pyramid\\_of\\_hate.pdf](http://archive.adl.org/education/courttv/pyramid_of_hate.pdf)
- Partners Against Hate: [http://www.partnersagainsthate.org/educators/middle\\_school\\_lesson\\_plans.pdf](http://www.partnersagainsthate.org/educators/middle_school_lesson_plans.pdf)

#### TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Teaching the Holocaust can be an incredibly challenging endeavor for the teacher and even more so when determining the appropriate age at which children can possibly comprehend the magnitude of the event. According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Students in grades 6 and above demonstrate the ability to empathize with individual eyewitness accounts and to attempt to understand the complexities of this history, including the scope and scale of the events. While elementary students are able to empathize with individual accounts, they often have difficulty placing them in a larger historical context... Elementary school can be an ideal location to begin discussion of the value of diversity and the danger of bias and prejudice” (USHMM).

While the Holocaust may seem disconnected to students' lives, bullying, unfortunately, is not so foreign to our students. Many of our students have experienced bullying in one form or another and, obviously, some may



have acted as bullies. The following activities are designed to help students realize that bullying is the seed that can grow into horrific actions such as genocide, if not stopped. Only by having students acknowledge the suffering that people have endured, can they prevent the violence that caused such suffering from occurring again. Students will understand that they have choices to make and that the consequences of being a bystander rather than an “upstander” can be horrifying. (In Holocaust terminology, the term “rescuer” is often used; this word may be too strong in its application to students and their desired actions.) They must learn to fully accept people of other backgrounds and to fight discrimination and violence directed at those we feel are different than us. As a Johann Wolfgang von Goethe quote from *Maximen und Reflexionen* (inscribed on the wall of the Visitor’s Cafeteria at Buchenwald Concentration Camp Memorial) states: *Toleranz sollte eigentlich nur eine vorübergehende Gesinnung sein: Sie muss zur Anerkennung führen. Dulden heißt beleidigen.* (Tolerance should only be a temporary attitude; it must lead to recognition. To tolerate means to offend.)

The following terms will be used throughout the lesson:

- Victim - one who has been the target of negative actions
- Perpetrator - one who takes negative action against another
- Bystander - one who sees unacceptable behavior but does nothing to stop it
- Upstander - one who chooses to take positive action in the face of injustice in society or in situations where individuals need assistance
- Bullying - repeated harmful acts against a person(s) involving taunts, property destruction, exclusion, rumors, etc.

There are laws and expectations in Germany regarding teaching and learning about the Holocaust. Teachers who are interested in knowing more about how the Holocaust is taught in Germany should refer to the Transatlantic Outreach Program’s text for secondary educators: *Germany In Focus* found at [www.goethe.de/top](http://www.goethe.de/top).



### TIME:

7 (45-minute Class Periods)



### INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES:

- Sample Parent Letter (**Handout 3.3 A on Resource Disc**)
- A copy of Eve Bunting’s *Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust* (not available on Resource Disc)
- 4 copies of Susan Goldman Rubin’s *The Flag with 56 Stars* (not available on Resource Disc)
- 4 copies of Roberto Innocenti’s *Rose Blanche* (not available on Resource Disc)
- The Flag with 56 Stars Listening and Writing Activity (**Handout 3.3 B on Resource Disc**)
- Rose Blanche Listening and Writing Activity (**Handout 3.3 C on Resource Disc**)
- *Kindertransport* Excerpt (**Handout 3.3 D on Resource Disc**)
- *Kindertransport* PowerPoint (**PowerPoint 3.3 E on Resource Disc**)
- Blank index cards



## PROCEDURE:

**Week Prior:** Prior to starting the lesson, the teacher should send home a letter to the parents and guardians about the upcoming curriculum. This will allow parents to be prepared to discuss any questions or concerns their child may have. Parental support is an essential component for the success of this lesson. A sample letter is provided (**Handout 3.3 A on Resource Disc**).

### DAY 1:

- **Anticipatory Set:** The teacher should begin class by announcing to the students that he/she is going to read a story to them and would like for them to listen closely to the plot. The teacher should only tell the students the first part of the book's title, *Terrible Things*, and not indicate that it is an allegory of the Holocaust. As the teacher reads the book to the students, he/she should show the students the illustrations at the appropriate times.
- The teacher should then facilitate a discussion of the book using the following questions as a guide:
  - How did the animals in the woods get along before the *Terrible Things* came?
  - Who first notices the *Terrible Things*?
  - How did he know they were there?
  - How did the animals react to the *Terrible Things* when they first came for the creatures with feathers on their backs?
  - How did Little Rabbit's father respond to Little Rabbit's question: "Why did the *Terrible Things* want the birds?"
  - How did the animals explain the selections made by the *Terrible Things*?
  - Why do you think the *Terrible Things* take away the animals one group at a time?
  - Why does Little Rabbit's father disagree with Little Rabbit when Little Rabbit suggests that they leave the woods because the *Terrible Things* might return?
  - Of all the animals in the woods, which was the wisest? Explain.
  - The teacher should ask the students to select an animal mentioned in the story. Could that animal have done anything to stop the "terrible things" from happening?
  - Why didn't the animals in the woods join together to stand up to or resist the *Terrible Things*? What are some possible things that the animals could have done to help the others who were being taken away?
  - How does the author describe the *Terrible Things*? What verbs/action words does she use?
  - Why do you think the illustrations are in black and white and not color?
- Next, the teacher should write the phrase "terrible things" on the board and ask the students to identify what they would consider terrible things. The teacher should list their responses on the board and then to ask the students to reflect on whether "terrible things" can be avoided. Next, the teacher should introduce and define the term *allegory*, a story in which people, things or happenings have a symbolic meaning. The teacher should ask the students why they think this story is an allegory: what do the animals represent? Again, the teacher should ask the students to think about why the animals don't help each other. The students might brainstorm ideas with a partner and share their thoughts with the class.
- To bring closure to the discussion, the teacher should ask the students to reflect on these questions:
  - Why do people sometimes hurt each other? How do they justify doing so?
  - Can you connect the animals in the story to your life?

**DAY 2:**

- Ask students to divide a notebook sheet of paper into 4 parts. In each box students should write one of these letters: V, P, B, and U. Ask students the following questions:
  - 1) In section V, describe a time when someone's words or actions hurt you.
  - 2) In section B, describe a time when you saw an act of bullying, and you did nothing.
  - 3) In section U, describe a time when you saw an act of bullying, and you became involved.
  - 4) In section P, describe a time when your words or actions hurt someone.

Explain to students that most people can admit to having acted in each manner. Does anyone know what each letter stands for? The teacher should discuss each term with the students.

- *Victim* - one who has been the target of negative actions
- *Perpetrator* - one who takes negative action against another
- *Bystander* - one who sees unacceptable behavior but does nothing to stop it
- *Upstander* - one who chooses to take positive action in the face of injustice in society or in situations where individuals need assistance

In the center of the paper the students should write the word, Bullying. No one is perfect, but when these actions become repetitive, it becomes more serious. Perhaps the teacher may lead the class in a discussion asking the students to share their actions with the class. Prior to starting the discussion, the teacher should remind the students that everyone has the right to speak without negative comments from others. No tolerance for bullying starts now. The teacher might want to connect the allegory of the animals in the woods to the topic of bullying.

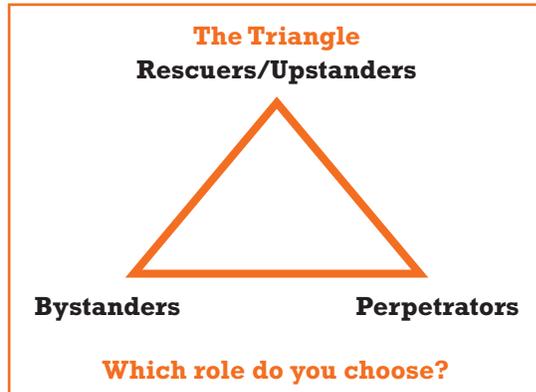
- Next, the teacher should draw a pyramid on the board with five rows or levels. From bottom to top, the categories of the rows should read: Stereotyping and Prejudice, Discrimination, Scapegoating, Violence and Hates Crimes and Genocide. This will stand for the "Pyramid of Hate" (as referenced by the Anti-Defamation League). As the teacher writes each category on the pyramid, he/she should discuss the terms and their definitions with the students. Even the younger students will be able to give examples of situations fitting each category after the teacher defines the term.
- For homework, the students should make a list of words that fit the topic of bullying, e.g., bias, hate, peer pressure.

**DAY 3:**

- As the students enter the room the teacher should hand them each a blank index card. Using their homework paper, the students should begin to share their words. The student writes the word on the index card, and it's placed on a bulletin board or on a wall to create a "word wall." This continues until student examples are exhausted. During this exercise the teacher may choose to have the students define the word or give an example of its meaning. Below are some examples the teacher may wish to include:

|                |               |             |             |           |
|----------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|
| beliefs        | belonging     | bias        | bullying    | bystander |
| discrimination | exclusion     | genocide    | hate        | inclusion |
| membership     | peer pressure | perpetrator | persecution | prejudice |
| cyberbullying  | scapegoat     | tolerance   | victim      | violence  |
| rescuer        | upstander     | acceptance  | conformity  | ostracism |

- The teacher should explain to students that they are going to create a skit that includes one of the bullying terms that the teacher hands them from the bulletin board of index cards. The skit will include 4 characters playing the parts of a *victim*, *perpetrator*, *bystander*, and *upstander*. On the board the teacher may draw the victim triangle from Holocaust Museum Houston on the board in order to better visualize the 4 roles of each skit. The three points of the triangle should be labeled with: Bystanders, Perpetrators, and Rescuers/Upstanders. The middle of the triangle should be labeled victims. Which role would the students choose?



- The teacher should divide the students into groups of 4 and give each group one of 7 scenarios. The students should work together to write a skit that shows a bullying situation and the way to diffuse the situation and stop the bullying from continuing by using one of the strategies. The bystander can eventually turn into an upstander. Each skit will be performed in 2 minutes or less. After each skit, the teacher should have the students explain the strategies used.

Scenario 1: A student walks into class. Another student looks at him, turns to a friend, whispers, and laughs.

Scenario 2: A student walks into the lunchroom and doesn't see anyone he knows. He starts to sit down at a table and is told that he's not wanted there.

Scenario 3: A student is on the playground and tells a rumor that he's heard about one of the other students.

Scenario 4: A student is waiting at the bus stop talking to some friends. Another student comes up and asks why the others are talking to this lowlife.

Scenario 5: A student is out of school for a religious holiday. Few if any of the other students are his same religion. When he returns to school a student says that he must be weird if he believes in that stuff.

Scenario 6: A student is in gym class but isn't very athletic. He misses the winning basket at the last second. A student starts calling him a loser!

Scenario 7: A student leaves his backpack outside his locker to quickly catch up with a friend down the hall. Another student reaches in and takes his cell phone.

#### **DAY 4:**

Each group presents its skit. The teacher should hold a debriefing after each skit by asking students the strategies that were used to stop, prevent, or avoid a potential bullying situation.

#### **DAYS 5-6:**

The focus will now shift to the Holocaust. This section presupposes that the teacher has basic familiarity with the events of the Holocaust. There are many resources that one can acquire to gain a fundamental knowledge of this genocide. Two major sources are the websites of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (<http://www.ushmm.org>) or the Florida Center for Instructional Technology (<http://www.fcit.usf.edu/Holocaust/default.htm>).



- This is an English Language Arts listening and writing activity. As a modification, the teacher may choose to read only one book and have the students complete the activity as directed on **Handouts 3.3 B** and **3.3 C** on the Resource Disc or the teacher may decide to divide the students into groups of three to complete the activity in small groups. The students would read the book orally to each other; therefore, the directions on the handout would need to be revised.

- The picture books are:

*The Flag with 56 Stars* by Susan Goldman Rubin — a group of Mauthausen concentration camp survivors created a hand-stitched U.S. flag, inadvertently adding an extra row of stars, as a token of gratitude for their liberators. The commanding officer ordered that the flag be flown over the camp as a symbol of freedom.

*Rose Blanche* by Roberto Innocenti — Rose Blanche discovers the horrors of a concentration camp in the woods. She takes food to the children incarcerated there until the town is liberated. When she travels to the camp on that day she is ironically shot by the soldiers.

- There are many age appropriate books that deal with the Holocaust. The teacher may wish to allow students an ELA period to read a variety of books independently and then share their favorite with the class. Some excellent choices are:

*Butterfly* by Patricia Polacco

*Star of Fear, Star of Hope* by Jo Hoestlandt, Johanna Kang and Mark Polizzotti

*Benno and the Night of Broken Glass* by Meg Wiviott and Josee Bisailon

*Best Friends* by Elisabeth Reuter

*When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* by Judith Kerr

*Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry

*The Devil's Arithmetic* by Jane Yolen.

#### DAY 7:

Children were the innocent victims of the Nazi genocide. It is estimated that 1.5 million children perished. But, about 10,000 Jewish children from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland were rescued as a result of the efforts of the British Committee for the Jews of Germany and The Movement for the Care of Children from Germany. The *Kindertransport* (the *children's transport*) was the largest and most successful rescue of endangered children from occupied Nazi territory during the outbreak of World War II. Starting in December of 1938 and continuing for a nine month period, children, three months to seventeen years, left their parents and they traveled on a journey to Great Britain in pursuit of freedom. The children traveled by train and then ship, from Berlin, Vienna, Prague and other central European cities in central Europe and ultimately brought into the Liverpool, Harwich Station in Great Britain.

- The teacher should explain that there were rescuers who sought to save Jewish children and to bring them to Great Britain. Before distributing a short reading, *Kindertransport Excerpt* (**Handout 3.3 D on Resource Disc**), the teacher should have the students analyze the compound word and try to figure out its meaning.
- In the ensuing discussion, the teacher should ask the students the following questions:
  - What made parents say goodbye to their children and send them off alone to a strange country, knowing that they might never see them again?
  - Does anything like this happen today in the conflicts occurring around the world?
  - Who made the *Kindertransport* possible and how was it done? What were the difficulties that had to be overcome?
  - What are the qualities of a person who is able to recognize a problem such as how to get Jewish children out of Germany and single-handedly do something to solve it? Are there people today who try to change the world for the better? Who are they and what do they do?

- One of the children of *The Kindertransport* was sculptor Frank Meisler, who was born in Gdansk (Danzig) (modern day Poland), educated in England and now lives in Israel. His *Kindertransport* project came about after he was commissioned to make a *Kindertransport*-themed piece for Liverpool Street Station, London, where the trains arrived. The resulting monument was unveiled in 2006 and depicts a group of Jewish children standing with luggage on railway tracks. (See *Kindertransport PowerPoint 3.3 E on Resource Disc.*) Meisler states, “What I wanted to do was reconstruct in a railway station, where people are rushing to and fro all the time and have no time for anything except their agenda — a picture of what it was like for a group of children to come out from wherever they came and just confront a moment of transition. We arrived on the train as children. When we stepped out we were adults, because we had then been handed the responsibility for our own lives” (The Jewish Chronicle). On November 30, 2008, 70 years to the day when the first *Kindertransport* to Britain began, commuters at Friedrichstraße Station witnessed the unveiling of Meisler’s sculpture, “Trains to Life and Trains to Death”. It depicts a boy and girl with luggage, moving towards the train that would save them. They stand with their backs to a group of five other children whose fate was very different. “You cannot really recreate a sculpture showing the departure of the children, rather than the arrival as we did in London, without acknowledging that 1.6 million children didn’t make it,” according to Meisler. (See *Kindertransport PowerPoint 3.3 E on Resource Disc.*) In 2009, the third memorial sculpture depicting the same children as the Liverpool statue was commemorated outside the Gdansk Poland station, the place where Meisler himself left for Great Britain. In December 2011 he unveiled a public sculpture in the port of Rotterdam, Holland called “Channel Crossing to Life”.
- The teacher should show the students the *Kindertransport* project (See *Kindertransport PowerPoint 3.3 E on Resource Disc*) and ask the students to indicate the similarities and differences among the four pieces. In what ways is the Berlin sculpture similar to those in Gdansk, Liverpool and Holland? In what ways is it different? Do they feel that they reflect the *Kindertransport*?
- If there is time, the teacher might assign the students to design and construct in groups a memorial to the children of the Holocaust who were not rescued.



### WHOLE GROUP REFLECTION:

- Expanding beyond the discussion of the Holocaust and returning to the topic of bullying as a means to tie the lessons together, the teacher might ask the students to reflect on the following questions:
  - Which is more important, freedom or safety?
  - What things in your life would you refuse to give up even if your life was threatened?
  - What items are necessary for your survival?
  - Would you speak up if you saw someone being bullied?
  - What can we all do to stop bullying?
- How may we learn from the past to create an ethical and civil presence and design a future that respects people everywhere?

### MODIFICATIONS:

- The teacher may choose to have students write personal narratives about bullying situations they have encountered, rather than create and perform a skit.
- As a modification, the teacher may choose to read only one book of the picture books and have the students complete the activity as directed on the handout, or the teacher may decide to divide the students into groups of three to complete the activity in small groups.
- With older grades, the teacher might introduce Martin Niemöller’s *First They Came...* statement as the last segment of the Anticipatory Set: this could be projected on the board or distributed and read aloud.

*“First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist,  
Then they came for the trade unionists, but I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist,  
Then they came for the Jews,  
But I did not speak out because I was not a Jew,  
Then they came for me--and there was no one left to speak for me.”*

*-Anti-Nazi pastor Martin Niemöller*

Next the teacher should instruct the students to read the passage silently to themselves, and then the teacher should conduct a group discussion beginning with the following questions:

- What is the author trying to say? Why?
- Is it the responsibility of people in a country or place to look out for each other? Why or why not?
- Should citizens of one country or ethnic group look out for citizens of another country or ethnic group?
- Why or why not?
- What is a socialist? A trade unionist?
- What does the word “they” refer to in each line?

The teacher should ask the students to discuss with a partner an experience they’ve had when they felt like they observed something that made them want to take action, but they didn’t.

Finally, the teacher should facilitate a class discussion in which the students connect the Niemöller statement to school life, and then national and international events. Are there times when some students are singled out by others? What do most students do when this occurs? What national moral obligations do we have to aid people in other countries?

## EXTENSIONS

- *Spielzeugland* (Toyland) is a short film by German director Jochen Alexander Freydank which won the 2009 Academy Award for Best Short Film (Live Action). This approximately 13 minute piece is an incredible film that students will understand. It’s short, has subtitles, and is very poignant. The teacher must decide if it is age appropriate for the class. The tone and message may be too serious for younger students. It’s about a young boy in 1942 Germany whose best friend is Jewish and is going to be deported. His mother tells him the family is going to Toyland. He wants to go. On the day of the deportation he is missing.

The film can be viewed at the following link: <http://vimeo.com/71179246>

After viewing the film, the teacher should ask the students to respond to the following questions:

- What is the relationship between David and Heinrich?
- What have the Silbersteins been told by the Nazi authorities?
- What does Heinrich’s mother tell him about the Silbersteins’ “upcoming trip?”
- How does Mr. Silberstein also prevent Heinrich from discovering the truth?
- What does Mrs. Meissner do when she discovers that Heinrich is not in his room and his toys and suitcase are missing?
- Why do the SS Officers stop her at the station?
- What does Mrs. Meissner discover when she sees the Silbersteins in the freightcar?
- What decision must the Silbersteins make?



- Why did Mrs. Meissner take the boy with her?
- What assumption can we make about David at the end of the film?

Optional activity: the teacher might ask the students to rewrite the ending of the film.

- *Stolpersteine* (tripping stones): From the large Memorial dedicated to the Murdered Jews of Europe to the smaller monuments and tributes in former Jewish neighborhoods in German cities and towns, memorials to honor those who perished during the Holocaust abound. Others commemorate the experiences of other groups such as homosexuals, Roma and Sinti, the disabled, etc. Perhaps the most unique are the *Stolpersteine*, small bronze plaques (10 cm<sup>2</sup>) placed about half an inch above the sidewalk in front of the last known residences of Jews and other Holocaust victims. These stones are designed and have been personally installed in the public sidewalks by Gunter Demnig, a German artist, beginning in 2004. “A person is only forgotten, if his name is forgotten,” he says. “Here lived” is the heading on each stone. Underneath there is a name, a date of birth and a date of deportation to a camp, followed by the fate of the individual, usually “murdered,” and the location if different than the place of deportation. After discussing the *Stolpersteine*, the teacher might suggest that the class sponsors the installation of a stone in a German city. The contact information is [gunter.demnig@stolpersteine.eu](mailto:gunter.demnig@stolpersteine.eu). The cost for one bronze plaque is 95 € and you can visit the following link for more information: <http://stolperstein.eu/en>
- *Paper Clips* (2004) is a documentary following a classroom in Whitwell, TN. As a part of their study of the Holocaust, the children of the Whitwell Middle School collected over 6 million paper clips representing the 6 million Jews killed by the Nazis. The teacher may show the short clip found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GP15cY3f7UA> and discuss ways in which we can remember those who perished in the Holocaust. Students could then research Holocaust memorials found around the world and give a presentation to the class. If possible, the teacher could show the entire documentary.



#### Sources:

The Jewish Chronicle (n.d.). I Turned My Great Escape into Art. Retrieved 27 January 2013 from: <http://www.thejc.com/arts/arts-features/i-turned-my-great-escape-art>

The *Kindertransport* Association (n.d.). *Kindertransport* and KTA History. Retrieved 27 January 2013 from: [http://www.kindertransport.org/history04\\_Britain.htm](http://www.kindertransport.org/history04_Britain.htm)

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