

Using Storytelling & Filmmaking to Remember Local Holocaust Survivors

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Type of Institution: Hebrew High School, United States

Course: The entire course consists of this project. This lesson plan describes a course offered through Beit Hamidrash, an area “Hebrew High School”.

Primary Lesson Category: Jewish identity and Holocaust history (equal parts)

Grade level of students and academic level: 8th grade

Total required time to teach lesson: 10 forty-five minute sessions

Summary:

In this project Jewish middle/high school students explore Jewish life in Europe, the Holocaust, and post-war immigrant life in America through the experiences of local Holocaust survivors from Central or Eastern Europe. The students take primary source material from the survivors’ oral history testimonies and combine that with background historical study. They use this material to create short films telling the life stories of the survivors before, during, and after the Holocaust. Essentially, students perform the work of historians in transforming the raw data of history into compelling narratives, creating and preserving respectful memories of valued members of the community for posterity. Centropa interviews and photo archives serve as a model and source for research and Centropa films do the same for the final student product.

Background Lesson Information

1. Context for lesson:

This lesson constitutes the entire course for the Beit Hamidrash, the Orlando area Hebrew High School. The course itself reflects the goals from the Beit Hamidrash:

- Exploration of Jewish topics that raise historical, cultural and ethical questions
- Development of positive Jewish identity and values
- Interaction with the larger Jewish community, locally and worldwide
- Deepening feelings of belonging, loyalty and responsibility to the local Jewish community

2. Enduring Understanding:

- It is our responsibility to preserve and transmit the Jewish memories in 20th century Europe, the US and Florida.
- As American Jews, we are part of a larger Jewish community with roots in Europe.

The lesson encourages Jewish students to identify as members of a larger Jewish community that has deep roots in European history. It further aims to help them to identify with the victims of the Holocaust as Jews and as fellow human beings with life stories anchored not only in tragedy, but also in events common to all people. The ultimate goal is to motivate students to

embrace the responsibility to preserve and transmit the memory of Jewish experience in Twentieth Century Europe, the United States, and Central Florida for the sake of posterity.

3. Goals/Objectives:

a. Knowledge:

- Students will describe general and particular aspects of Jewish life in 20th century Europe in the Twentieth Century.
- Students will describe the impact of World War II and the implementation of Nazi anti-Jewish policies under German occupation on Jewish individuals, families and communities in Europe.
- Students will describe conditions under which Jewish immigration to the United States occurred during the Holocaust era and the circumstances/living conditions of the immigrants upon arrival.
- Students will describe and document the assimilation of the immigrants into the American Jewish community and American life in general

b. Skills:

- historical inquiry through the interpretation and evaluation of primary and secondary sources, including photos, filmed testimonies, interview transcripts, maps, and historical research
- evaluation of the role of history in shaping identity, character and culture
- construction of biographical narratives of Holocaust survivors based on available primary and secondary sources
- integration of visual information with historical content in their final project

c. Students' Behavior:

- A greater willingness to discover and learn from the experiences of Holocaust survivors, from members of the Orlando community and also from those who moved elsewhere or remained in Europe.
- I hope students will open themselves to understanding the diversity of Jewish life and the unity of Jewish people throughout the world.

d. Students' Feelings:

As a result of this lesson, hopefully students will feel a greater connection to the history and cultural heritage that comes to them through the depth and breadth of the European-Jewish experience. Even more, I hope they feel that connection personally with those who brought this experience to our community.

4. Centropa Resources:

- Film: "Introduction: Central Europe"
- Film: "Ten Years in Four Minutes"
- Film: "Maps, Central Europe and History"
- Film: "Kurt Brodmann"

- Film: “Haya-Lea Detinko”
- Centropa Database: Biography and photos of Haya Lea Detinko

Other Resources and Materials Needed:

- Holocaust survivor interview(s) from the archives of the Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center of Florida
- Film: “Camera of My Family” (for an overview of the Holocaust in Germany)
- Family Tree Activity – excerpted from the Middle School Curriculum Guide of the Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center of Florida (<http://www.holocaustedu.org/pdf/Unit One - Before the Holocaust.pdf>)
- Computers with internet access (shared – one computer for every two students)
- “Storyboard of My Life” worksheet (described in the Lesson-Session 2 section below)

5. Background skills or knowledge required:

- a very basic knowledge of the Holocaust and WWII history
- map reading skills
- use of the internet
- basic video editing software.

The Lesson:

Pedagogy:

Instructional strategies used throughout the lesson will include brief lecture, films, class discussion, small group activities, and technology demonstration/guided practice.

Sessions 1-10

Session One: Introduction to Storytelling and Centropa

Opening Hook (10 mins)

- In pairs, students discuss the following:
 - What favorite story do you remember hearing as a child? What made it interesting to you?
 - What role does storytelling play in our society?
 - How do stories convey cultural and spiritual values?
 - How would you tell your own life story to make it interesting?
- Share responses with the full class.

Introduction to Project (5 mins)

- 1) Teacher describes the storytelling and filmmaking project, including the various tasks that will be required to produce the final product (5 minutes)
- 2) Assigning Tasks (10 mins): Introduce students to the work needed for the project by having them fill out surveys to rank their interest and skills in the following tasks:

- (a) Background research, general history
- (b) Background history, survivor story
- (c) Storyboarding
- (d) Script writing
- (e) Compilation of photos
- (f) Photo editing
- (g) Map selection, editing and animation
- (h) Narration
- (i) Video production

The teacher describes the tasks individually and the role of each in bringing together the final product.

3) Introduction to Centropa: Show the Centropa film “Introduction: Central Europe” (2 minutes). Discuss with the class Centropa’s goals as an organization and their methods for teaching about the Holocaust.

Homework: Explore the Centropa website, making sure to watch at least one biographical film in its entirety, skim one biography, and view one set of family photos.

Sessions 2-3: Analyzing a film to learn how to tell a story

- Set Induction: In pairs, discuss the homework assignment – exploring the Centropa website. Share your observations with the class. (10 minutes)
 - (1) Which film, interview transcript, and photo set did you choose?
 - (2) What did you find most compelling about the stories of the people you chose?
- Activity: Using Centropa’s “Making Us Care: Analyzing a Film to Understand How to Make a Film,” students will watch one Centropa film three times, each time analyzing a different aspect of how the film is made. This will take 1-2 sessions, depending on which options you use for this activity.

Session 4: Historical Background: Holocaust

- Set Induction – Discussion: Based on what you have already learned, why do you think Jewish people/communities relocated as often as they did throughout European history? Describe both “push” and “pull” factors. (5 minutes)
- Activity 1 – Film “Camera of My Family” (20 minutes) This film provides pre-holocaust and Holocaust-era background for students.
- Activity 2 – Class discussion: (20 minutes)
 - (1) How did the filmmaker describe Jewish life in Germany prior to the Holocaust era?
 - (2) How did the filmmaker obtain her information about her family history?
 - (3) What explanations did the filmmaker give for the popularity of the Nazi movement and for its anti-Semitism?
 - (4) How did the filmmaker describe the impact of the Holocaust on her life and her family?

Homework: Students will work with their parents to create a basic family tree, going back to the generation of the student's great-grandparents, if possible.

Session 5: Communism and Nazism

- Set Induction – Homework Discussion (5 minutes)
 - (1) How many of your great-grandparents were born in Europe? How many of your grandparents were born in Europe? Did either of your parents come from Europe?
 - (2) What do you know about the lives of the people you discovered in your family tree? How would you go about finding more information than your parents know?
 - (3) Describe any connections your family has to the European places of your ancestors?
- Activity 1 - Centropa film “Haya Lea Detinko” (18 minutes)
- Activity 2 - Discussion: Was Haya Lea Detinko a Holocaust survivor, even though she was imprisoned by the USSR and not by Nazi Germany? Explain. (12 minutes)
- Teacher lecture (10 minutes) Topics:
 - (1) Summary of the impact of Communism in the Soviet Union and Nazism in Germany on Central and Eastern European Jews before, during and after the Holocaust.
 - (2) The complex nature of the relationship between these two ideologies and nations and how Jews were caught between the two with devastating effects on their lives and communities.
 - (3) Description of the similarities and differences between the life story of Haya Lea Detinko and a selected Central Florida Holocaust Survivor (Lili Morgen-Taler)

Homework: Students will view segments of a local Holocaust survivor's interview from the Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center of Florida archive. (Eva London Ritt)

Sessions 6 and 7: Meeting a Local Holocaust Survivor

These sessions are devoted to a local Holocaust survivor meeting with the class. (90 min.) The survivor will tell his or her entire life story (not just Holocaust experiences) from childhood to the present day while showing the students family photographs.

Afterwards, students will have an opportunity to ask questions.

Session 8: Storyboarding

- Set induction: In pairs, discuss the most memorable parts of the local Holocaust survivor's life story. Share your observations with the class. (10 minutes)
- Activity 1: Create a 7-10 point biographical sketch of the Holocaust survivor's life story, using the below template. Be sure to explore the connections between the survivor's Holocaust-era experiences and her own view of her Jewish identity, values, activities and commitments. (25 minutes)

- Activity 2: Select appropriate photos from the Holocaust survivor’s collection to go with each line on the storyboard. (10 minutes)

Storyboard				
Events:	When?	Where?	Who was involved? (Include primary and peripheral participants)	Points of Interest: (Drama, Conflicts, Amusing Anecdotes, etc.)
Birth				
(Add as many rows as needed)				

Homework:

- (1) The students who volunteered to write the script should begin working on the text and bring a rough draft to the next session.
- (2) Students who volunteered to research music for the soundtrack should make their final selections.
- (3) Students who volunteered to do the map work should make their final selections of the maps that will best help to clarify details of the survivor’s story.

Sessions 9 and 10:

Students will use these classes to work on the film. (90 minutes) The component parts are:

- Photo editing
- Video editing
- Map editing and animation
- Voice over narration
- Musical soundtrack overlay
- Revisions and troubleshooting

Concluding Activity: Film Festival!

Option 1: The class will watch the film they have made, discuss their experience making the film and what they learned about the survivor during the course of telling his/her story.

Option 2: Invite the entire school and the survivor to view the film, ending with a panel discussion by the students about what they learned about telling stories and the survivor’s life in the making of the film.

Reflection:

The students who attended this class were not compelled to do so and often saw the school as a more “club-like” learning environment than “regular” school, which had two effects on the course:

- 1) Several students did not attend regularly. When they returned, it was difficult to get them back up to speed, especially since the class met only once per week.
- 2) A few sessions involved more academic work than some students expected in a Hebrew school. Though they remained involved I will probably lessen some of the requirements in the future.

I also recommend that anyone teaching this lesson create a file sharing environment that all students can access from home. At first, I tried having students bring flash drives to class to share work, but this was cumbersome and too easy for students to forget. After I moved all file storage to my "Drop Box" this problem diminished.

In many circumstances, survivors will not be available to meet with students so this project could be used with any Holocaust survivor testimonies, including Centropa biographies. In that case, sessions 6 and 7 would be restructured. For Hebrew schools I would use the extra time to move homework activities. In general, the class sessions as planned were packed and should perhaps be made less dense next time around.

There were seven students in the class and all worked on a single film project. In the future, I think I will have no more than four students on one project and will use more than one survivor testimony as primary source material.

On the positive side, the students really did seem to appreciate the overall value of the project and the opportunity it afforded to meet a Holocaust survivor and to learn from her experiences. The Centropa films and other resources were very well received. I even have some students who are interested in doing the project again next term.