

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1. General Information**

*EVERY PHOTO TELLS A STORY*

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### **2. Personal Information about the teacher who submitted the lesson plan**

Ulrike Lackner is an English, Art, History and Italian teacher at a secondary school in Austria. She visited Israel in 2003 with *erinnern.at*, and since then she has been working on the topic of how to teach the Holocaust. Ulrike attended a one-day Centropa seminar in Graz and the 2011 Centropa Summer Academy in Krakow, Vienna and Sarajevo.

### **3. Summary**

*A Family History Project – Working with Biographies*

Starting point: Franziska Smolka's biography

*What does this have to do with me?*

When engaging students with history in general, and with the history of National Socialism and the Holocaust in particular, teachers should not limit themselves to how European Jews died during the Holocaust, but should also concentrate on how they lived.

In this lesson plan, I use Centropa's approach and concentrate on the story of Franziska Smolka. First, I show the video *10 Years in 4 minutes* ([centropa.org](http://centropa.org)) to illustrate what Centropa is and how Centropa works.

So far, Centropa has not made film about Franziska Smolka, but there are a lot of family photos, and there is an extensive interview about her and her family's history.

For my lesson, I need several of Franziska Smolka's family photos. Stimulated by those photos, the students should think about what stories these pictures tell, bring photos of their own families, and compare them, to see how similar family photos often are. Then they should tell their own stories through their family photos. Using other photos from Franziska Smolka family, the students should try to reconstruct the history of their hometown, Graz, and visit the places where Franziska Smolka's family history took place.

### **4. Target Audience and total required time**

This lesson was taught in a History and Social Studies class (24 students, 8th grade) in a public school in Austria. Estimated time required: three to four lessons, 50 minutes each.

## 5. List of classrooms supplies required

The classroom must be equipped with an Internet-connected computer and a beamer. If there is no room with Internet connection available, a room with DVD player/beamer will work as well (then, of course, the teacher must prepare a DVD versions of the film and handouts with the photos).

Video: 10 Years in 4 minutes

(<http://centropastudent.org/?typ=sprache&fLang=ENG&movID=45&nID=78&q=m>)

Photos:

- Grandmother Regine Bendiner and her siblings  
(<http://www.at.centropa.org/index.php?nID=15&x=PXVuZGVmaW5lZDsgc2VhcmNoVHlwZT1waG90b2RldGFpbDsgc2VhcmNoVmFsdWU9QVRGU00wMDEuanBnOyBzZWYy2hTa2lwPTA=>)
- Grandmother Regine Bendiner in the office  
([http://www.at.centropa.org/index.php?nID=15&x=PXVuZGVmaW5lZDsgc2VhcmNoVHlwZT1waG90b2RldGFpbDsgc2VhcmNoVmFsdWU9QVRGU00wMTYuanBnOyBzZWYy2hTa2lwPTEw](http://www.at.centropa.org/index.php?nID=15&x=PXVuZGVmaW5lZDsgc2VhcmNoVHlwZT1waG90b2RldGFpbDsgc2VhcmNoVmFsdWU9QVRGU00wMTYuanBnOyBzZWYy2hTa2lwPTEw=))
- Grandfather Josef Bendiner  
(<http://www.at.centropa.org/index.php?nID=15&x=PXVuZGVmaW5lZDsgc2VhcmNoVHlwZT1waG90b2RldGFpbDsgc2VhcmNoVmFsdWU9QVRGU00wMDguanBnOyBzZWYy2hTa2lwPTA=>)
- Mother Philippine Fischer with her siblings  
(<http://www.at.centropa.org/index.php?nID=15&x=PXVuZGVmaW5lZDsgc2VhcmNoVHlwZT1waG90b2RldGFpbDsgc2VhcmNoVmFsdWU9QVRGU00wMDkuanBnOyBzZWYy2hTa2lwPTA=>)
- Mother Philippine Fischer as a baby  
(<http://www.at.centropa.org/index.php?nID=15&x=PXVuZGVmaW5lZDsgc2VhcmNoVHlwZT1waG90b2RldGFpbDsgc2VhcmNoVmFsdWU9QVRGU00wMDcuanBnOyBzZWYy2hTa2lwPTA=>)
- Mother Philippine Fischer as a woman  
([http://www.at.centropa.org/index.php?nID=15&x=PXVuZGVmaW5lZDsgc2VhcmNoVHlwZT1waG90b2RldGFpbDsgc2VhcmNoVmFsdWU9QVRGU00wMzEuanBnOyBzZWYy2hTa2lwPTMw](http://www.at.centropa.org/index.php?nID=15&x=PXVuZGVmaW5lZDsgc2VhcmNoVHlwZT1waG90b2RldGFpbDsgc2VhcmNoVmFsdWU9QVRGU00wMzEuanBnOyBzZWYy2hTa2lwPTMw=))
- Franziska Smolka as a small child in Moscow  
([http://at.centropa.org/index.php?nID=15&x=PXVuZGVmaW5lZDsgc2VhcmNoVHlwZT1waG90b2RldGFpbDsgc2VhcmNoVmFsdWU9QVRGU00wNDAuanBnOyBzZWYy2hTa2lwPTMw](http://at.centropa.org/index.php?nID=15&x=PXVuZGVmaW5lZDsgc2VhcmNoVHlwZT1waG90b2RldGFpbDsgc2VhcmNoVmFsdWU9QVRGU00wNDAuanBnOyBzZWYy2hTa2lwPTMw=))
- Franziska Smolka with her sister Susanne  
([http://www.at.centropa.org/index.php?nID=15&x=PXVuZGVmaW5lZDsgc2VhcmNoVHlwZT1waG90b2RldGFpbDsgc2VhcmNoVmFsdWU9QVRGU00wMjguanBnOyBzZWYy2hTa2lwPTlw](http://www.at.centropa.org/index.php?nID=15&x=PXVuZGVmaW5lZDsgc2VhcmNoVHlwZT1waG90b2RldGFpbDsgc2VhcmNoVmFsdWU9QVRGU00wMjguanBnOyBzZWYy2hTa2lwPTlw=))

## 6. Objectives

Through the family photos, the students should get to know a Jewish family and its history. Due to the fact that the Smolka family story at least partly takes place in the students' hometown Graz, certain buildings, streets and places can be visited – which makes this approach particularly interesting for the students.

They look at the Smolka family photos, speculate upon what story these pictures tell and exchange ideas – then they take a look at their own family photos. They become curious, ask questions, explore similarities and differences.

### LESSON PLAN DETAILS:

#### **Lesson 1:**

\* Introduction: [www.centropa.org](http://www.centropa.org)      Video: *10 years in 4 minutes*

The video is about the founding and the evolution of Centropa. By the example of Rosa Rosenstein's story, it also gives insight into how Centropa films are made.

Core statement: stories are universal and they connect us all. Based on this belief, teachers in Jewish schools and teachers in non-Jewish schools can use Centropa's materials and exchange their insights and experiences. Through New Social Media, good old "story-telling" can work across borders, in order to connect students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with 20<sup>th</sup> century history, and with each other.

\* Work with a partner:

Each student receives a handout with four photos from the Smolka family (there are two different handouts, i.e. eight photos altogether) – see draft below. Students pair up and discuss the photos.

After this discussion, the students briefly explain which photos they have chosen and what they were talking about. Different ideas are discussed in the classroom.

As a preparation for the next lesson, the students are asked to look for some of their own family photos and to bring them to the classroom.

## Handout 1 (draft):

Title: Franziska Smolka as a child in Moscow



Title: Dr. Philippine Fischer



Title: Philippine Fischer



Title: Regine Bendiner with her siblings

### Work assignments:

**Chose one picture.**

**Take your time and look at the picture carefully!**

-What do you see?

-When do you think the photo was made?

-What do you want to know about the person/s in the photo?

-Why did you choose this particular photo?

**Discuss these questions with your partner!**

## Handout 2 (draft):

Title: Franziska Smolka with her sister  
Susanne



Title: Regine Bendiner in Graz in her office



Titel: Josef Bendiner



Title: Philippine Fischer with her siblings

### Work assignments:

**Chose one picture.**

**Take your time and look at the picture carefully!**

-What do you see?

-When do you think the photo was made?

-What do you want to know about the person/s in the photo?

-Why did you choose this particular photo?

**Discuss these questions with your partner!**

## **Texts for Handout 1:**

In this photo, you can see my grandmother Regine Bendiner, next to her brother Samuel Singer, who was called Uncle Schmieder. Next to him there is my grandmother's sister, Klara Braun. The photo was taken in Köflach, in front of Aunt Klara's store. Köflach is a village on the border between Carinthia and Styria.

My grandmother and her siblings stuck together, and my grandparents' entire social life took place within the family. They often visited each other and sent their children to their siblings, sometimes on holidays, sometimes for education.

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This is my mother Philippine Fischer in a photo studio in Graz. She was my grandparents' first child.

My mother grew up with her parents and her five siblings in a bourgeois Jewish home in Graz. Her parents were kosher and as a child, my mother attended Jewish religion classes.

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This is me as a Kindergarten child in Moscow. Each morning, Ms. Fischer brought her grandchild Fredi (who was called Fedja) and me with a sled to the Kindergarten. Ms. Fischer lived in the janitor's apartment. She sat us down on the sled and then she pulled the sled all the way to the Kindergarten in the Hotel Lux. Almost every day, we had hering, mashed potatoes and bread for breakfast. I loved that.

In the evening, my mother picked me up. I remember the Metro; we had to get out at Majakowskaja Station. Even during the harshest winter, you could buy ice cream there. It was packed up like half a pound of butter – it was amazing. I loved it.

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This is my mother Philippine Fischer (maiden name Bendiner) at the age of 18, on the occasion of my grandfather's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. All six children had to get their photos taken.

My mother wanted to study History and become a teacher, but for purely practical reasons, she didn't. She and her parents were convinced that it was impossible for a Jewish woman to teach history in Styria. So she studied law at the University of Graz – stopgap solution, so to say. She was the only female student at the faculty of law in her year. And she was one of the first women – she was only 24 – to receive her PhD in Graz. I think she must've been the first Jewish woman.

## **Texts for Handout 2:**

This is my mother with her siblings having their photo taken by a photographer. To the right, with the long hair, that's my mother. She was the oldest one. Next to her you can see her younger brother Fritz, behind him Franz, and to the left, there's Irma. The twins, Grete and Anni, had not been born then.

My mother got along very well with her siblings. Of course there was a certain pecking order – like in every family! But I've never heard about any serious quarrels – on the contrary. Grandmother managed, and of this she was very proud, that her children really stuck together, even though they were scattered all across the world after the Holocaust.

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This is a photo of my grandmother in her apartment in Graz, Keplerstraße 49. She is sitting at the desk in her office.

She was the procurator of the wholesale trade my grandfather founded in 1916. Everyone told me that my grandfather was the one representing the trade on the outside, but she was the soul of the business. The photo was taken in 1937. In 1934, my grandfather had died and my grandmother took over the business, together with her son Franz and her daughter Anni.

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This one was taken in the spring of 1942 during our evacuation, close to the Bashkirian capital Ufa. My sister, who is three years older than me, is holding my hand.

My mother was working in the forest. I know from a letter she wrote to my father that she was really worried, because she couldn't make the quota. The others were much better than she was, so she was paid less. Then she worked in a military hospital, where she deloused wounded soldiers of the Red Army coming from the front line. Their clothes were disinfected and the bandages were washed and disinfected as well. That way she earned some money for the family.

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This is my grandfather Josef Bendiner. When this photo was taken, he was a wholesale tradesman.

My grandfather told me that grandfather was never very lucky with his profession. In truth, she was the soul of the business. For instance, he really had problems reaching a compromise with his business partners. When it took too long, my grandmother went into the room and said: "Pepi, when is Mr. Sof coming?" – "sof" means "end" in Yiddish. She didn't know

any Yiddish, but this word she knew.

## Lesson 2:

- \* Once again, the students take a look at the handout and at the photos of the Smolka family.
- \* Then they are given the short texts and are asked to read them. They chose the one text they think fits the photo they have chosen. The texts are read out loud. Afterwards, the students are asked to put the pictures in a chronological order, so that they get a rough overview of the Smolka family's history.
- \* Afterwards, the teacher shows his/her own family photos to the class (baby photos from Mom/Dad, wedding photos of parents/grandparents...) and briefly explains – like in the explanatory texts above – who is in the photo, where and when it was made, etc.
- \* Now the students assemble around a table. They put their family photos on the table, show and explain them to their peers.
- \* Then we discuss what some „typical family photos“ look like. We look for categories: children's photos, kindergarten/school photos, family in the backyard, portraits, men in uniform, wedding photos, etc.

**Preparation for the next lesson:** the students are asked to write a brief explanatory note for three of their photos. Additionally, they should do some research (ask parents, grandparents, etc.): are there any interesting stories connected to the photos?

### Example:

**The teacher reads an excerpt from Franziska Smolka's biography** (how Regine and Josef Bendiner got to know each other):

Since she was 13 (in 1890), my grandmother lived in Graz and attended a secondary modern school. When she was 17 (in 1894), she got an internship position at one of the biggest poultry wholesale companies in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Simon Jank, the owner, was a protestant, and single. I suppose, judging from the way my grandmother talked about him, that he was gay. It was highly unusual that he offered an internship to a young woman, and a Jewish one at that. Soon, Mr. Jank employed my mother and when she was 24, she became the company's attorney. Because Mr. Jank often had to go out to meet with old clients and to acquire new ones, my grandmother ran the business.

In the evening, my grandmother brought the day's sales to the bank on the Main Square. In the booth, behind the glass, sat my grandfather Josef Bendiner. For seven years, each day, she saw him and appreciated him. She adored him, but he never looked at her.

When Mr. Jank killed himself in 1905 – he hung himself at Hotel Straubinger in Bad Gastein – his will was even published in the Kronen Zeitung, one of the biggest Austrian newspapers. Everyone who worked for or with him, from hired servants to the daily help, received a part of the heritage. But my grandmother, Ms. Regine Singer, who had run the business on her own for years, was instituted as the universal heir. You can imagine what turmoil that caused in Graz. A Jewish girl from the countryside, instituted as the universal heir by a protestant single man. Everyone in Graz was talking about this for weeks. From one moment to the next, my grandmother had become a wealthy young woman, because she inherited 70.000 Kronen (editor: back then 1 Krone = 2€). That was a lot of money! My grandmother told me that from the moment she got the money, she was bombarded with wedding proposals. And she said: "I was just sitting there, waiting for the one; for Josef Bendiner, whom I brought money every day. And he came. And he became your grandfather."

My grandparents got married on September 24, 1905 in St. Gotthard in Hungary.



### Lesson 3:

*Sitting in a circle, photos and texts on a table*

The students present their texts and tell their stories.

Possible approach: in my class, 11 students prepared family photos and texts. They were then presented like in an exhibition; everyone could look at the photos and texts that appeared most interesting to them.

Five students had an interesting / touching / funny story to tell. These were presented to the whole class.

One student asked, if the rest of the class would be interested in having her grandma come to class, so that she could tell her story herself.

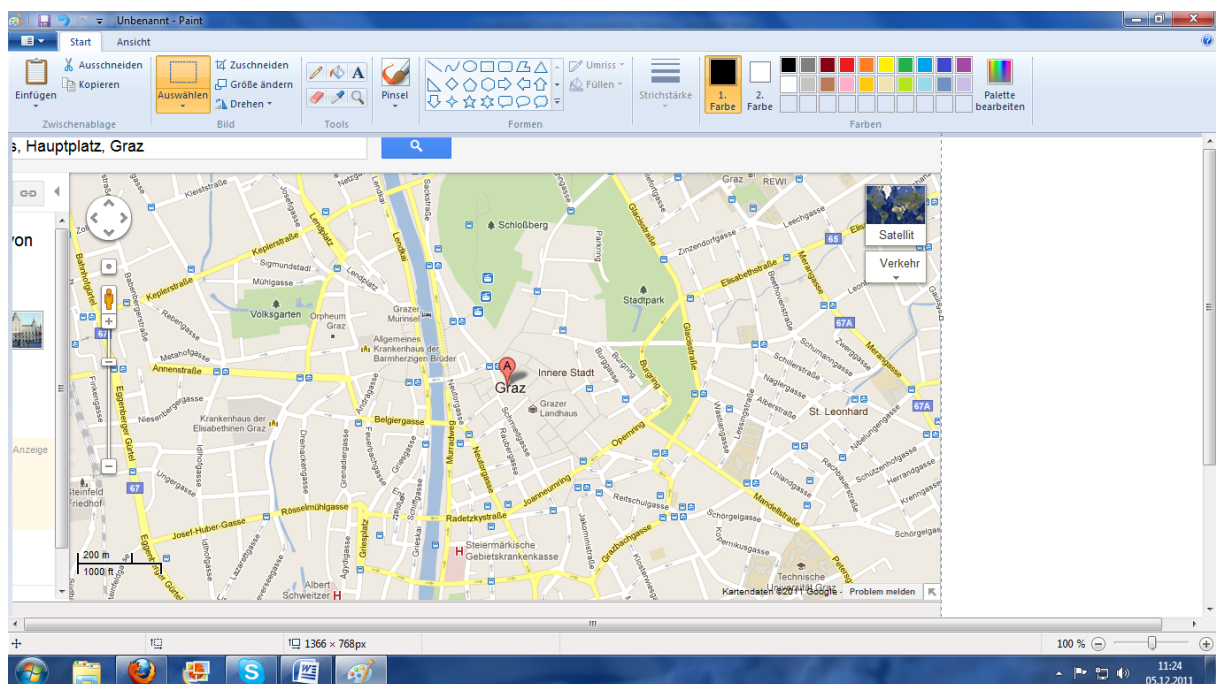
### Possible Extension of Topic

\* in-class dialogue with a contemporary witness

\* read the short version of Franziska Smolka's biography

#### Tasks:

a) In this city map, mark all the sites mentioned in Franziska's biography, e.g. **A:** Bank (Main Square), **B:** Apartment (Keplerstraße 49), **C:** Girl's High School (today: City Museum) etc.



b) City tour of Graz: get the city map „Traces of Jewish and Muslim Life in Graz“ (by Barbara Lorenz and Ulrike Bechmann, available at Graz tourism) and add the sites mentioned in Franziska’s biography. Take the tour.

At the respective sites, the relevant text passages from the biography are read aloud.

Example: at the City Museum (Palais Khuenburg):

In 1917, my Mum took her entrance exam for secondary school. The girls’ school was located in the Palais where Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne, was born. The classrooms were enormous, with hardwood floors and huge windows. But the bathrooms were wooden sheds, built into the old corridors.

Until the later years of secondary school, was mainly situated within the Jewish society. But then, there were only four Jewish girls left in her class: my Mum, her cousin Elisabeth, her friend Klari and another girl who fled to New Zealand before the Holocaust. Klari and Elisabeth were killed during the Holocaust.

My mother kept telling me that, at school, she had never been attacked in any way because of her Jewish heritage. There were some girls in her class who were in touch with Couleur-Students [a national-socialist fraternity], but my mother, her cousin and her friends were never bothered in any way. They were all very good students, and the teachers liked them a lot, even though some of them also showed nationalistic tendencies.

\* Film: [www.centropa.at](http://www.centropa.at) – *Otto and Kitty Suschny*

In a letter to Otto and Kitty, write up further questions about their life that you would like to be answered.