

# **SURVIVOR STORIES:** An Interactive Dialogue



## **PREVISIT TEACHER'S GUIDE**



MUSEUM OF  
JEWISH HERITAGE  
A LIVING MEMORIAL  
TO THE HOLOCAUST

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

**USC** Libraries

**USC** Shoah Foundation  
*Witness for the Future* | 1994-2024

MJHNYC.ORG | MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE | 36 BATTERY PLACE, NYC

## **ABSTRACT**

In this lesson plan, students will engage with the Museum of Jewish Heritage’s new online exhibition, “Survivor Stories.” Students will interact with the exhibition’s AI-powered interface to ask questions of ten Holocaust survivors who have been sharing their stories with students for many years. Students can either speak or type questions to the survivors, who answer in their own words.

Survivor Stories is an initiative developed in partnership between the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, the USC Libraries, and the USC Shoah Foundation with support from The Myron and Alayne Meilman Family Foundation.

## **IMPACT STATEMENT**

This lesson plan is designed to utilize Holocaust survivor testimony as a means for introduction to Holocaust education. The program is best for students who know the basics of the Holocaust, but do not have in-depth knowledge. The Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust is committed to deepening students’ knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust through educational initiatives. One of the most consistent pieces of feedback we hear is that survivor testimony helps students connect to history on a deeper level. Hearing survivors’ experiences in their own words adds depth and context to the lessons that students learn in the classroom, which can be further contextualized with a visit to the museum.

## **AUDIENCE**

Sixth to Twelfth graders who plan to visit the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust

## **LESSON OBJECTIVES**

- Students will explore stories from the Holocaust as told by Holocaust survivors in their own words.
- Students will access primary resources in the form of survivor testimonies to provide firsthand descriptive accounts that shed light on the realities of living through the Holocaust.
- Students will gain digital literacy through exposure to a new source from a trusted institution.
- Students will gain practice with interview skills.
- Students will experience history through a new lens, through which to view it as a series of personal events.

## **CREDITS**

Survivor Stories is an initiative developed in partnership between the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, the USC Libraries, and the USC Shoah Foundation with support from The Myron and Alayne Meilman Family Foundation.

## HOW TO USE SURVIVOR STORIES

### 1. Visit the Museum of Jewish Heritage's website

to find Survivor Stories: Survivor Stories - Experience: Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust

### 2. Speak or type a question into the chat box.

We recommend starting with "Tell me about yourself."

### 3. From there, you can ask more specific questions.

### 4. There are three ways of asking questions:

- A. To get to know one story well, ask questions to the same survivor: You can pose all questions to the same survivor. When you pose your first question, the program will identify the best answer to give, which will determine which survivor answers. Each survivor has a unique story to tell, so you will get different answers from different survivors.
- B. To see how survivors each had a unique experience, ask the same question to the group: Pose the same question to different survivors from the group using the "Next Survivor's Answer" function. This will generate a different response to the same question posed. This will show the students that no two stories of Holocaust survival are the same.
- C. To hear the most diverse set of answers, pose questions to the group: Using the "Ask the Group a New Question" function, students will hear answers from different survivors for each question. The AI-driven program will select an answer from the database of all the survivors' answers to supply the best response for the question posed.

### 5. There will not be an answer for every question.

We sourced our questions from our most frequently asked questions by students who have visited the Museum and heard survivor testimonies. The AI software that runs the exhibition is designed to pick up on key words from input questions to match the most relevant answer, but it is not perfect. If you think there should be an answer to your question, try rewording it or posing it to another survivor. Not all interviewees answered the same questions, as they did not all have the same experiences, so different survivors can speak to different experiences.

## DO'S & DONT'S

### Do's:

- Encourage students to ask their own questions, not just a preassigned list. The survivors interviewed answered over 120 of our most frequently asked questions, as well as questions specific to their personal stories, so if a student asks it, the survivors just might answer it! The power of AI also makes the program adaptive, so students do not need to ask pre-assigned questions, the computers will pick up on key words to locate the best response in the answer database.
- Keep the questions relevant. While we wish we could include more information about the survivors' lives, personalities, and experiences, we must prioritize the reason why we created this exhibition — to educate about the Holocaust.
- Remember that Holocaust survivors are real people speaking to their own experiences. They can get things — like dates, places, and names — wrong. And they were interviewed 80 years after the end of the Holocaust. If you see an inconsistency or error in one of the survivors' answers, remind the students that these people can only speak to their own experiences.

### Don'ts:

- Do not give students a pre-set list of questions to ask. Part of the point of this exhibition is to encourage students to come up with their own questions and follow their curiosity.

*If the students get really stuck coming up with questions, there are example questions on the landing page of the exhibition.*

# New York State Learning Standards Alignment

GRADE 6: SOCIAL STUDIES PRACTICES	
STANDARD	GR 6
Gathering, Interpreting, & Using Evidence 1	•
GIUE2	•
GIUE3	•
GIUE 4	
GIUE 5	
GIUE 6	
Chronological Reasoning 1	
CR2	
CR3	
CR4	
CR5	
CR6	•
CR7	
CR8	
CR9	•
Comparison and Contextualization 1	
CC2	•
CC3	•
CC4	•
CC5	•
CC6	•
Geographic Reasoning	
Economics and Economics Systems	
Civic Participation 1	
CP2	
CP3	•
CP4	•
CP5	
CP6	
CP7	
CP8	•
CP9	

GRADE 7: SOCIAL STUDIES PRACTICES	
STANDARD	GR 7
Gathering, Interpreting, & Using Evidence 1	
GIUE2	•
GIUE3	•
GIUE 4	
GIUE 5	
GIUE 6	
Chronological Reasoning	
Comparison and Contextualization 1	
CC2	•
CC3	
CC4	
CC5	•
CC6	
Geographic Reasoning	
Economics and Economics Systems	
Civic Participation	

GRADE 8: SOCIAL STUDIES PRACTICES	
STANDARD	GR 8
Gathering, Interpreting, & Using Evidence 1	
GIUE2	•
GIUE3	•
GIUE 4	
GIUE 5	
GIUE 6	
Chronological Reasoning	
Comparison and Contextualization 1	
CC2	•
CC3	•
CC4	
CC5	•
CC6	
Geographic Reasoning	
Economics and Economics Systems	
Civic Participation	

New York  
State Learning  
Standards  
Alignment

NYS 9-12 SOCIAL STUDIES FRAMEWORK				
STANDARD	Gr 9	Gr 10	Gr 11	Gr 12
Gathering, Interpreting, & Using Evidence 1	•	•	•	•
GIUE2	•	•	•	•
GIUE3	•	•	•	•
GIUE 4				
GIUE 5				
GIUE 6				
GIUE 7	•	•	•	•
Chronological Reasoning & Causation 1				
CRC2				
CRC3				
CRC4				
CRC5				
CRC6				
CRC7	•	•	•	•
CRC8				
Comparison and Contextualization 1				
CC2	•	•	•	•
CC3				
CC4	•	•	•	•
CC5				
CC6	•	•	•	•
Geographic Reasoning				
Economics and Economics Systems				
Civics Participation				

## GET TO KNOW THE SPEAKERS



**Lisa Baer**, born in Germany in 1926, fled to the United States to escape the rising dangers of Nazi Europe.



**Bronia Brandman**, born in Poland in 1931, was deported to Auschwitz during the Holocaust.



**Alice Ginsberg**, born in Czechoslovakia in 1930, survived several years in Auschwitz during the Holocaust.



**Celia Kener**, born in Poland in 1935, hid with a Christian family to avoid wartime persecution.



**Toby Levy**, born in Poland in 1933, hid in a barn with her family to escape Nazi occupation.



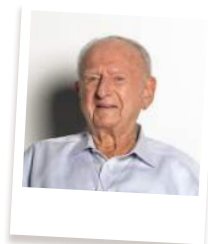
**Jerry Lindenstrauss**, born in Germany in 1929, escaped to Shanghai, China, seeking refuge from World War II.



**Mark Schonwetter**, born in Poland in 1933, hid across the Polish countryside during the war to avoid Nazi persecution.



**Maritza Shelley**, born in Hungary in 1928, was forced into a labor camp before surviving a death march during the Holocaust.



**Norbert Strauss**, born in Germany in 1927, witnessed Kristallnacht before fleeing to the United States to avoid further persecution.



**Ruth Zimble**, born in Austria in 1928, was sent on one of the earliest Kindertransports, which provided refuge from Nazi threats.

## STUDENT WORKSHEET

# WHAT DO YOU WANT TO ASK A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR?

In this activity you will get the chance to ask questions to a group of ten Holocaust survivors. These survivors experienced persecution by the Nazis firsthand and have volunteered to share their stories with you.

Now you are going to come up with your own questions for a Holocaust survivor. In small groups, talk about what you might ask a Holocaust survivor if you met one. If you get stuck, here are some ideas for coming up with questions.

*What is one question you have for a survivor about their life before the Holocaust?*

*What is one thing you are curious to know about the Holocaust?*

*What is one thing you want to ask a survivor about their life after the Holocaust?*

*What was your first encounter with a Nazi?*

### QUESTION 1:

---

---

---

### QUESTION 2:

---

---

---

### QUESTION 3:

---

---

---

### QUESTION 4:

---

---

---

### QUESTION 5:

---

---

---

Now it is time to meet a Holocaust survivor. Speak or type into Survivor Stories, starting by asking "Tell me about yourself."

**SURVIVOR NAME:**

**AGE:**

**PLACE OF BIRTH:**

Now it's your turn to ask your own questions. Go ahead and speak or type to ask the Holocaust survivors your first question.

**QUESTION 1: What did you learn?**

**QUESTION 2: What did you learn?**

**QUESTION 3: What did you learn?**

How do we ask good questions? We listen first. The more questions you ask one survivor, the more you will come to know their story.

**Try coming up with a follow up question based on the survivor's last answer.**

**What did you learn from your follow up question?**

Now it is time to ask the rest of the questions you came up with. Jot down some notes from the survivor's answers.

**QUESTION 4: What did you learn?**

---

---

---

**QUESTION 5: What did you learn?**

---

---

---

If you have more questions for the survivors, spend as much time as you would like to ask them. Try taking down notes on the answers on a separate piece of paper.

**REFLECTION: What is one thing you learned that was surprising?**

---

---

---

**Why do you think it is important to ask questions to people who lived through history?**

---

---

---

Now it is time to ask one last question, if you have not asked it already.

**Speak or type in the question: "What do you think is the most important lesson from the Holocaust?"**