

## Lesson 8 SURVIVORS AND LIBERATORS

### Making Connections

The additional activities and projects listed below can be integrated directly into the lesson or can be used to extend the lesson once it has been completed. The topics lend themselves to students' continued study of the Holocaust as well as opportunities for students to make meaningful connections to other people and events, including relevant contemporary issues. These activities may include instructional strategies and techniques and/or address academic standards in addition to those that were identified for the lesson.

1. Visit IWitness ([iwitness.usc.edu](http://iwitness.usc.edu)) for activities specific to Lesson 8: Survivors and Liberators.
2. Like personal diaries, photographs, and oral histories, personal letters can provide us with a more complete understanding of historical events, including valuable insight into the wartime experience. As with other primary documents, letters reflect only the viewpoint of a single individual and may contain mistakes. Their value, however, is that they offer readers a glimpse into the wide range of emotions that people felt as historical events were unfolding. One such letter was written by staff sergeant Horace Evers. As a member of the US Army, Evers was in Munich, Germany hunting down members of the Nazi high command in 1945. Two days after Adolf Hitler committed suicide, Evers and his unit found themselves in Hitler's private residence. Finding sheets of Hitler's personal stationery with the Nazi swastika embossed over his name, Evers sat down and wrote a letter home to his mother and stepfather about his experience walking through the Dachau concentration camp the day before.

Show or distribute a copy of *A Liberator's Letter Home, May 2, 1945* (provided in transcript and original letter form) available on the website in the [Additional Resources](#) section of the [Lesson Components](#). Discuss the letter using some or all of the questions below.

- What do you learn about Horace Evers from his letter?
- What does Evers say his unit was doing in Germany in May 1945?
- In the letter, Evers describes in vivid detail what he witnessed at the Dachau concentration camp. What were some of the details, and why do you think he included them, especially in a letter to his family?
- Do you get a sense from the letter that Evers is struggling with what he saw? If so, what line or lines support your answer?
- What is the irony of Evers writing this letter on Hitler's personal stationery?
- What is the value of studying personal letters when learning about a historical event? Are personal letters evidence of what happened or should they be studied within the context of other sources? Explain your answer.
- In addition to letters, what other written communication can be viewed as primary sources (e.g., email)? Do you think when someone is writing a letter, email, text message, etc., they are aware that they are creating a primary source? If they knew the communication would be read many years later, do you think they would write differently? If so, how might what they write be different?

[NOTE: Encourage students to visit The Center for American War Letters at Chapman

University ([chapman.edu/research-and-institutions/cawl/index.aspx](http://chapman.edu/research-and-institutions/cawl/index.aspx)). The Center currently houses nearly 10,000 previously unpublished letters from the Revolutionary War through emails sent from Iraq and Afghanistan.]

3. As a whole class, read Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness* (Schocken Books, 1997). In the book, a dying Nazi soldier brings Wiesenthal, a concentration camp prisoner, to his deathbed and asks forgiveness for crimes against the Jews. Wiesenthal says nothing and leaves the soldier's bedside, but later questions his own response. Following the class reading, have students read a sampling of the fifty-three responses to Wiesenthal's question to readers: "What would I have done?" Encourage them to read at least one response that supports forgiveness (e.g., The Dalai Lama, José Hobday), one that does not (e.g., Primo Levi, Herbert Marcuse), and one that is nuanced and provides additional points to consider (e.g., Nechama Tec, Dith Pan), and then craft their own written argument on the topic. The piece of writing should introduce the situation/question, summarize opposing responses, and then state and support their own position with logical reasoning that demonstrates an understanding of the topic.
4. Contact the VFW's Veterans in the Classroom community outreach initiative ([vfw.org/Community/VFW-in-the-Classroom](http://vfw.org/Community/VFW-in-the-Classroom)). Through this program, a local VFW member is able to help make history "come alive," sharing personal experiences, appropriate memorabilia, uniforms, photographs, and other relevant material. US forces liberated the Buchenwald concentration camp, as well as Dachau, Mauthausen, Flossenbug, and Dora-Mittelbau; check with your local VFW to see if a liberator is available to speak to students. Many Holocaust museums and resource centers also have a Speakers' Bureau of local liberators available to visit the classroom. As a class, generate a list of relevant questions to ask the liberator in advance of his or her visit.
5. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provides protection, shelter, emergency food, water, medical care and other life-saving assistance to millions of people worldwide, who have been forced to flee their homes due to war and persecution. When possible, UNHCR helps refugees and other displaced people return to their homes voluntarily, safely, and with dignity. Have students research the UHHCR and share their findings in a presentation format of their choice (oral, written, multimedia). The following questions can help guide their research:
  - When and why was the UNHCR created?
  - On what continents has UNHCR worked over the years?
  - What does UNHCR do to assist refugees and internally displaced persons?
  - What challenges does the UNHCR face as it works?
  - In what countries is the UNHCR currently operating and why?
  - Identify one country where the UNHCR is currently operating. Explain the situation and how UNHCR is assisting.