



## LESSON PLAN: Victims of the “Final Solution”: The Struggle to Survive

**1** Help students develop a framework for studying the “Final Solution” by using the K-W-L strategy. Have students create a graphic organizer with three columns labeled “K” (What I Know), “W” (What I Want to Learn), and “L” (What I Learned). Instruct students to list what they know about the “Final Solution” and the extermination camps in the first column and what they would like to learn about this topic in the second column. Tell students that as they listen to the testimonies and participate in the activities that follow, they should go back to the chart and add information to the “L” column.

**2** Introduce students to **Ellis Lewin (bio)** and **Abraham Bomba (bio)** and then show their clips of testimony. Follow with a discussion using the questions below.

- What are your feelings after hearing these testimonies?
- Both Ellis Lewin and Abraham Bomba talk about the sounds that they remember hearing upon arriving at the extermination camps of Auschwitz and Treblinka, respectively. What are some of the sounds they describe?
- How does Ellis describe the pace at which things moved when the train arrived at Auschwitz?
- Why does he think the Germans moved things at such a rapid pace?
- Why didn’t Ellis’s father want Ellis to hang on to him?
- What were the last words Ellis remembers his father saying to his mother?
- What is Ellis’s last image of his mother?
- How many people does Abraham say were on each train going to Treblinka?
- What is the significance of the description that Abraham shares about the people being forced to undress?
- Abraham explains that out of 18,000 people, only five were taken out to work. How was it that he was one of the five?
- In what ways are these two testimonies similar? In what ways are they different?
- After watching these two testimonies, is there anything that you can add to your K-W-L chart? If so, what are you able to add?

**3** Introduce students to Elie Wiesel using the information in the corresponding **Note** and then distribute the **Excerpt from Night** handout and have volunteers read the material aloud. Follow with a discussion using the following questions:

- In addition to being forcibly torn away from the rest of their family, what else did Elie Wiesel and his father “leave behind”?
- In this excerpt from Elie Wiesel’s *Night*, how did the Nazis dehumanize Jews?
- Why do you think the older men did not want the younger men to revolt?
- Why were Elie Wiesel and his father told to lie about their ages?
- Choose one moment identified in the excerpt that you think was a defining moment or a turning point in Elie Wiesel’s life. How did this moment change his perception of the world, relationships, life, other people, and even himself?
- How is Elie Wiesel’s account of arriving at Auschwitz similar to the account given in Ellis Lewin’s testimony? What is the value of having both of these accounts available?

**4** Prior to distributing a copy of the handouts **Poems from a Camp Survivor** and **Appell, 1944**, provide students with background on Dan Pagis and Zinovii Tolkatchev available in the corresponding **Note**.

**5** Divide the class into small groups and assign each group one of the poems or the piece of art. Working in their small groups, have students discuss the questions below (prepared in advance on the board or on a handout) that pertain to the piece they have been assigned. After completing the small-group assignment, have groups share their observations and analysis with the rest of the class. Encourage students to listen for any differences in how groups with the same document interpreted the words or images.

- What is the biblical story of Cain and Abel?
- Why do you think Dan Pagis chose Eve, Abel and Cain for the poem “Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car”? What is the role of each one of them?
- Eve appears to be attempting to convey a message to Cain. What might that message be?
- Read “Written in Pencil” several times. What is the feeling that you get reading this poem?
- What is the significance of the fact that Dan Pagis specifies that the letter written in the sealed railway car was written in pencil?
- What do you think Pagis was trying to say with the line, “No, no: they definitely were human beings” in the poem “Testimony”?
- What do you think Pagis was trying to convey with the lines, “I was a shade. A different creator made me”?
- Why do you think Dan Pagis titled this poem “Testimony”?

- What do you notice in *Appell, 1944*? What message(s) do you think the artist was trying to convey?
- How do you feel looking at this piece of art?
- How is studying a piece of art (e.g., a painting or a drawing) different from studying a photograph?
- What feelings emerge from all of these works? What do you learn about the artists through their works?
- What is communicated through poems and art that cannot be communicated in a textbook?

**6** Introduce students to **Itka Zygmuntowicz (bio)** and show her clip of testimony. Have students reflect on Itka’s testimony using the following questions:

- What does Itka mean when she says she “felt the bitter taste of slavery”? What is the significance of her saying, “I understood what my forefathers—what the Jews in Egypt— must have felt like”?
- What reason does Itka give for “writing a poem in her head”?
- What did Itka say “writing the poem” helped her realize?

**7** Ask students what an artifact is and what kinds of things are considered artifacts. Have students consider how, like diaries, photographs, government documents, etc., artifacts are primary sources. Ask them to brainstorm a list of items that might be considered artifacts to a historian (e.g., tools, jewelry, postcards, manuscripts) and explain what might be learned about people, institutions, or cultures from studying artifacts.

**8** Distribute the handout **Life in the Shadow of Death** and review the material with students. Follow with a discussion using the questions below.

- Which of the items on this handout would you identify as artifacts and why? If you did not identify the photograph as an artifact, why didn’t you?
- How do these seemingly simple items (e.g., a comb) take on additional meaning when studied within the context of the Holocaust?
- What do we learn from studying the comb? The prayer book? The photograph of Annie Fisk Levinger?
- How do these items help us understand what some inmates in the extermination camps were thinking?
- Why do you think this handout is titled “Life in the Shadow of Death”?

**9** Distribute the **Excerpt from Man’s Search for Meaning** handout and read the selection together. Ask students to share their thoughts about the selection and then continue with a discussion using the questions below as a guide.

- How does Viktor Frankl explain transcending his experience in the camp? What does Frankl want us to understand when he says: “I did not know whether my wife was alive, and I had no means of finding out [...], but at that moment it ceased to matter. There was no need for me to know; nothing could touch the strength of my love, my thoughts, and the image of my beloved”?
- After listening to Itka Zygmuntowicz’s testimony, studying the artifacts/photograph, and reading the selection from Viktor Frankl, what do you think made it possible for people to cope with life in a world that dehumanized them and denied their existence?
- Why is it important for those studying the Holocaust to understand how Jews struggled for life and dignity in a world of dehumanization?

**10** Have students review the K-W-L charts that they developed at the beginning of this lesson and share what they have added to the “L” column. Encourage students to add additional questions to the “W” column, reinforcing the idea that learning about a complex topic like the Holocaust often results in even more questions.

**ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 150-180 MINUTES**