

# BOOK LIST FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

## Recommended Books for Elementary School Holocaust Education

The following list includes selected texts that have been reviewed by the Echoes & Reflections team. The texts below allow educators to choose resources that approach this history in accordance with our recommended guidelines. This list is not meant to be exhaustive and will be updated as time permits.

### Non-Fiction

***The Boy on the Wooden Box*, by Leon Leyson. Published by Atheneum Books for Young Readers. Recommended for grades 4-9.**

This is the only memoir published by a boy who was on Schindler's List as a child. The author was 10 when WWII started. He tells the story of his family's imprisonment in the Krakow ghetto and how he survived due to the kindness and generosity of Oskar Schindler, who has been recognized as a Righteous Among the Nations. Schindler saved Leon's life, and the lives of his mother, his father, and two of his four siblings, by adding their names to his list of workers in his factory—a list that became world renowned: Schindler's list. The story is told in first person with childish innocence, which creates a connection with, and a great deal of empathy for, Leon and his family. The book was a NY Times bestseller, and won the Christopher Award.

***The Children of Willesden Lane Books*, by Mona Golabek and Emil Sher. Hachette Book Group. Editions available for grades K-2, 3-5 and 6-8**

These books are based on the story of Lisa Jura, who was a musical prodigy. In Vienna before WWII, Lisa dreamed of becoming a concert pianist. Threatened by the invading German army, Lisa's parents make the difficult decision to send Lisa to London for safety through the Kindertransport—a rescue effort that relocated Jewish children. The story of Lisa's life as a refugee in London is not always happy, but it is full of emotional anchors like courage and determination. Lisa's music becomes her hope and gives hope to the children around her. *Hold On To Your Music* (K-2), *Lisa of Willesden Lane* (3-5) and *The Children of Willesden Lane* (Young Readers Edition) (6-8)

***The Children's Tree of Terezin*, by Dede Harris. Published by Legacy Publishing. Recommended for grades 4-6 (also appropriate for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade).**

This is a true and unique story about a teacher in the Terezin ghetto/concentration camp, who had the idea to plant a tree to give the children of the ghetto some hope. The story is beautifully illustrated. Seeds and saplings from the original tree have since been planted around the world. This story makes for a beautiful "safely out" of learning this history.

***The Daughter We Had Always Wanted*, by Naomi Morgenstern. Published by Yad Vashem. Recommended for grades 3-5, ages 7-11.**

Marta Goren, the protagonist, was a young Jewish child who lived in Czortkow, Poland, today located in Ukraine. At the age of eight, Marta was sent by her mother to live under an assumed identity with a non-Jewish family in Warsaw who risked their lives to protect her. After the Holocaust, Marta immigrated to Israel and began to rebuild her life despite various hardships. In this age-appropriate memoir, Marta recalls her childhood experiences before, during and after the Holocaust.

***Hana's Suitcase*, by Karen Levine. Published by Second Story Press. Recommended for grades 5-7.**

This “suspense-filled work of investigative non-fiction draws in young readers” to the story of the curator of a small Holocaust education center in Tokyo, who received an empty suitcase on loan from the museum at Auschwitz. On the outside, in white paint, were the words “Hana Brady, May 16, 1931, Orphan.” Readers become a part of the journey to discover who Hana was, accompanied by beautiful photos of Hana before the Holocaust. Note: Readers learn that Hana does not survive, thus recommended for students above grade 5.

***I Wanted to Fly Like a Butterfly*, by Naomi Morgenstern. Published by Yad Vashem. Recommended for grades 3-5, ages 7-11.**

This is the Holocaust story of Hanna (Hanechka) Gofrit. It begins with the author’s happy life before the war and ends with her survival. Empathy is created with the protagonist, who was 4 at the start of WWII. There are many emotional anchors in the book, including Hanna’s parents creating a homeschool for her when she was no longer able to attend school; her mother sewing a dress for her that helped her imagine she was flying like a butterfly, etc. It is also a story of kindness and assistance, despite the danger – Hanna’s father does not survive, but this detail is almost ameliorated by her mother remarrying at the end of the book. Despite this, the story is very appropriate for younger children. Yad Vashem’s website contains a lesson plan for teaching this book, [here](#).

***Jars of Hope: How One Woman Helped Save 2,500 Children During the Holocaust*, by Jennifer Roy. Capstone Press. Recommended for ages 9-12.**

This beautifully illustrated book tells the story of Righteous Among the Nations Irena Sendler. It deals with the importance of mutual assistance and kindness: positive human values even during atrocity. Although the ghetto is a backdrop, there is no emphasis on the horrors of the Warsaw ghetto, although there are a couple of illustrations that show some of this. Note: Because Irena Sendler is the main character, there is no protagonist that is the age of the children reading the book, and as such there is less opportunity to develop empathy for the Jewish characters.

***Somewhere There is Still A Sun*, by Michael Gruenbaum, with Todd Hasak-Lowy. Published by Aladdin, grades 5-9; reading age 10-14.**

What makes this book different and “riveting”, as it has been called, is that it is written in first-person present-tense narration by Michael “Misha” Gruenbaum, who was ten years old when his carefree childhood ended, and the Nazis invaded Prague. The Gruenbaum family was forced to move first into the Jewish Ghetto in Prague, and then to the Terezin concentration camp. Misha, who doesn’t understand what he is up against at first, narrates innocently as events unfold, creating empathy and making it easy for the reader to identify with him. The events detailed in the book are sometimes horrifying and incredibly sad, but the empathy created for Misha makes it a wonderful book. The photos added make it more real for the reader.

***When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, by Judith Kerr. 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition published by HarperCollins Children’s Books. Recommended for ages 9 years and up.**

The book is a partly autobiographical story about a Jewish family that flees from Germany just as Hitler is coming to power. It is less a Holocaust story than a story about being threatened and becoming a refugee. It fits our guidelines because the protagonist, Anna, is 10 years old, and because the story offers resilience and positivity in what could otherwise be a terrifying story.

***Yellow Star*, by Jennifer Roy. Published by Marshall Cavendish. Recommended for grades 4-6. Scholastic.**

Yellow Star is the true story of the author’s aunt, Sylvia Perlmutter, one of a handful of children to survive the Lodz ghetto. It is written in free verse style instead of in paragraphs. The author has written over 30 children’s books and is a former teacher herself. A timeline, historical notes, and an author’s note are included. The book has won a litany of literary prizes.

## **Historical Fiction**

The books listed here are excellent books of historical fiction: they accurately use true history as the context for stories about characters that are fictional. They are listed because many of them have won prizes and/or are popular with teachers. However, we recommend if these texts are used, they should be supported with accurate historical material.

### ***Adam and Thomas*, by Aharon Appelfeld. Penguin Random House. Recommended for grades 3-7. Illustrated.**

Adam and Thomas is the fictional story of two nine-year-old Jewish boys who survive World War II by banding together in the forest. They forage and build a small tree house. Adam's family dog, Miro, manages to find his way to him, to the joy of both boys. The book, winner of three prestigious book awards, is based on the author's own experiences, but the characters are fictional. It is a tender book because of the incredible resilience of the boys and the way they comfort each other; there is no feeling of terror or trauma though they are alone in the forest.

### ***Black Radishes*, by Susan Lynn Meyer. Published by Penguin Random House. Recommended for grades 3-7.**

Based in part on the experiences of the author's father, Black Radishes shares the story of a young French-Jewish boy, Gustave. On the eve of the Nazi occupation, Gustave is forced to move from Paris to the countryside. He is safe but following the Nazi occupation, he fears for the lives of his family and friends who are left behind in Paris. Through a new friend who is part of the French resistance, Gustave works to save those who matter most to him. This book won the Sydney Taylor Honor Award, and numerous other awards.

### ***The Brushmaker's Daughter*, by Kathy Kacer. Part of a series "The Holocaust Remembrance Series for Young Readers." Recommended for grades 4-7.**

This book is based on a beautiful story of a Righteous Among the Nations in Berlin, German businessman Otto Weidt, who runs a brush making factory that tries to protect blind Jews. The protagonist is a 12-year-old Jewish girl who must care for her blind father and is exposed to the fear and terror of Nazi Germany. The writing conveys a great deal of empathy for her.

### ***Number the Stars*, by Lois Lowry. Scholastic book, recommended for grades 5-6.**

This highly popular and well-reviewed book is a suspenseful page-turner that brings the reader directly into the events of the Nazi occupation of Denmark and creates empathy with the main characters who try to save their Jewish neighbors. (Note: more empathy is created for the characters who save the Jews than for the Jews themselves).

[This article](#) contains many suggestions for supporting Number the Stars with additional historically accurate resources, and other books of historical fiction should be treated similarly.

### ***Whitebird: A Wonder Story*, by R.J. Palacio. Knopf. Recommended for grades 5 and above. Graphic novel.**

This book connects the story of Julian, a contemporary American student, with that of his French grandmother, Sara Blum. Sara is an accomplished artist whose childhood is largely unknown to Julian. At the request of her grandson for a school project, Sara begins to unfold her story of growing up Jewish in Nazi-occupied France and the kindness of a local family that changed her life. Some of the panels in the book may be too intense for younger students, so care should be taken with knowledge of your students in mind.