



GUIDANCE FOR HOSTING A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR OR DESCENDENT IN THE CLASSROOM

Hosting a Holocaust survivor or family member as a guest speaker at a school is a unique opportunity for students to gain a personal understanding of history. With fewer survivors still able to give their first hand accounts, it is fortunate that some children and other descendants of survivors are also able and willing to share their oral history. Children of survivors are often called 2Gs; grandchildren are called 3Gs and great-grandchildren, 4Gs.

Bringing a survivor or a descendent of a survivor to speak to students does require some preparation. By setting a respectful and thoughtful tone, students can gain a powerful educational experience that they're likely to remember for years to come. Here are some tips to help ensure that the experience is successful.

1 PROVIDE HISTORICAL CONTEXT AHEAD OF TIME

- Define the Holocaust:

Check out [Unit 1 from Echoes & Reflections](#) which includes a great introductory activity on defining the Holocaust.

- Review Key Events:

Explore the [timeline of the Holocaust](#), focusing on significant events and terms like *Kristallnacht*, concentration camps, ghettos, and liberation. This will help students have a foundational understanding and better appreciate the speaker's personal account.

- Discuss the Importance of Personal Narratives:

Explain that these stories personalize history, helping students understand the human impact of large historical events.

2 PREPARE A RESPECTFUL AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

- Set Expectations for Emotional Content:

Explain that the Holocaust is a deeply painful topic and that the individual's story may include difficult or emotional details. Encourage students to handle these moments with maturity and respect.

- Encourage Sensitive Listening Skills:

Prepare students to listen attentively without interrupting, and avoid behaviors that may seem disrespectful, like whispering or using devices.

- **Discuss Empathy and Respect:**

Explain that feeling sadness, empathy, or even anger is normal when hearing a survivor's story. Encourage students to handle these emotions constructively, such as through writing, art, or group discussion.

- **Have Support Resources Available:**

Some students may need extra support processing the experience. Consider having counselors or staff available for follow-up discussions. Be sure to notify families in advance of this visit. Additionally, consider making space available for students who have recently experienced trauma or for whom the teacher may know this could be overwhelming.

3 PREPARE THOUGHTFUL AND RESPECTFUL QUESTIONS

- **Focus on Learning and Insights:**

Encourage questions about what students can learn from the speaker's experiences or how those experiences shaped the speaker's views on topics like resilience, tolerance, and justice.

- **Avoid Graphic Questions:**

Advise students to avoid questions that could be too personal or graphic. Instead, they can focus on questions about resilience, lessons learned, or reflections on life after the Holocaust.

- **Examples of Appropriate Questions:**

- "How did you or your parent/grandparent find the strength to rebuild his/her life after the war?"
- "How did having a parent(s)/grandparent(s) who was a survivor impact your life?"
- "What do you hope students today take away from hearing your story?"
- "How can young people help prevent hatred and intolerance in today's world?"

4 ENSURE PRIVACY AND COMFORT FOR THE SPEAKER

- **Avoid Photography or Recording Without Permission:**

Check with the speaker or their representative about any guidelines around recording or taking photos to ensure their comfort.

- **Provide a Supportive Environment:**

Arrange for a comfortable space for the speaker, with access to water, breaks, and seating that allows them to speak easily to the students.

5 ENCOURAGE REFLECTION AND JOURNALING BEFORE AND AFTER

- **Pre-Speaker Reflection:**

Ask students to write a short piece on what they know about the Holocaust and how they feel about meeting someone who lived through this event (or meeting a member of their family).

- **Post-Speaker Reflection:**

After the talk, provide time for students to write about what they learned, how it made them feel, and how they can apply these lessons in their lives.

6 FOCUS ON HUMANITY AND RESILIENCE, NOT JUST SUFFERING

- Discuss Life After the Holocaust:

If possible, talk with students about what many survivors achieved since the war. Emphasizing resilience and the strength to rebuild can help students appreciate the survivor's life as a whole. Echoes & Reflections provides content to explore post-war and rebuilding experiences in the [Justice, Life and Memory After the Holocaust](#) and [Gringlas Unit on Antisemitism After the Holocaust](#).

- Highlight the Survivor's Legacy:

Talk about the significance of sharing these stories so that future generations remember and learn from the past. If your speaker is a descendent of a survivor, ask students to consider why that individual may choose to continue speaking for their family member.

7 ENCOURAGE POST-VISIT ACTIONS AND FURTHER LEARNING

- Engage in Follow-Up Activities:

Organize activities like writing letters to the speaker, creating artwork, or joining initiatives against intolerance to help students actively reflect on what they learned.

- Encourage Appropriate Connections to Present Day:

Provide opportunities for further learning, such as the [Gringlas Unit on Antisemitism After the Holocaust](#) to illuminate why learning about the dangers of antisemitism is critical. This unit also includes an Action Plan to allow students to consider how to combat antisemitism and other forms of hate and intolerance in their community.

8 REFLECT ON THE PURPOSE AND POWER OF STORYTELLING

- Discuss the Role of Witnessing History:

Remind students that hearing a story firsthand is a privilege that they should honor by becoming informed witnesses to history.

- Encourage a Lifelong Commitment to Learning and Advocacy:

Encourage students to take their newfound understanding as a steppingstone to further learning about human rights, tolerance, and standing up against hate.