

Workshop for Day One
The Face of the Individual within the Historical Narrative—
Educational Uses of Holocaust Art, Literature, and Film

**Writing as Witness Project at the
Richard Stockton College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center:
Individual Stories – Unique Lessons**

Our educational activity and presentation is based upon a project initiated for Holocaust survivors by the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey is a New Jersey public funded college in a rural setting in the southern section of the state 12 miles north of Atlantic City. The college is located near Vineland, New Jersey where many Holocaust survivors settled, in 1946-1952, upon arrival in the United States. For many, funds were provided by the Baron de Hirsch Fund, the Jewish Agricultural Society, and HIAS for Holocaust Survivors to purchase chicken farms. One Holocaust survivor told us that the chickens spoke Polish so this, therefore, would mean an easy transition to life in the United States.

Our **Writing as Witness Project** began in April of 2001 after we had been inspired at a Yad Vashem Educator Conference. There we met representatives from Drew University who shared their Holocaust survivors writing project. We agreed with them that Holocaust survivors are pertinent to Holocaust education. Because our Holocaust survivors are aging and will eventually be unable to speak in classrooms, we developed our own writing project—**Writing as Witness Project**.

Stockton's **Writing as Witness Project** began as a result of working with Holocaust survivors who had given testimony in classrooms. Dr. Maryann McLoughlin, Professor of Writing and Literature, followed up with these survivors and eventually some of them decided to write memoirs with her guidance. This group expanded to other Holocaust survivors who did not feel comfortable giving testimony in a classroom but were willing to talk one-on-one with her. This has resulted in nine published memoirs with ten pending publication. This activity extended into the classroom with students who were third generation Holocaust survivor members who had never heard their grandparents' stories. Individual stories of triumph and hope followed and a number have become complete published memoirs. We now use all these memoirs from **The Writing as Witness Project** as part of our curricular units on Holocaust education. Teacher Guides have been developed for classroom use with the memoirs (Grades 5-12 and college).

Stories and memoirs read by students (grades 5-12 and college) facilitate discussion of the Holocaust. Holocaust survivors often

participate in classroom discussions after the students have read the memoir. These memoirs provide models for student writing projects based upon the interviewing of Holocaust survivors who have visited their classroom. Students benefit from reading Holocaust survivor memoirs which connect them to history, geography, art, literature, film, and music. The suggested activities, listed below, are designed to be presented across the curriculum in the middle and high school classroom.

The following classroom activities can be incorporated into curricular units for Holocaust education when using the memoirs from **Writing as Witness**:

- • Development of strategies for interviewing Holocaust survivors and interview follow-up techniques supplemented by Holocaust survivor commentary.
- • Writing and publishing of these Holocaust survivor interviews—on the computer.
- • Developing websites from these Holocaust survivor interviews.
- • Developing video projects from these Holocaust survivor interviews.
- • Construction of Reading Guides based upon Holocaust survivor memoirs.

The following teaching tips for using memoirs developed by the **Writing as Witness** Project supplement the above information:

- • Memoirs provide parallel stories for today for discussions of other genocides.
- • Memoirs provide information about European life before the Holocaust.
- • Absence will become a theme as students learn about the loss of culture, heritage, and religion of the victims.
- • Issues of personal responsibility and moral dilemmas are clearly illustrated in memoirs.
- • Critical thinking skills and problem solving techniques are taught when using memoirs.
- • Reading memoirs personalizes the history of the Holocaust.

The following evaluation techniques and ideas for using memoirs developed by the **Writing as Witness** Project supplement the above information:

- • Students are challenged to examine related contemporary issues of conscience and moral responsibility.
- • Ethical behaviors can be studied by students.
- • Students can discuss the individual and collective responsibilities for events leading up to the Holocaust.

- • Students can study the life of a Holocaust survivor—from despair comes hope.
- • Students can write an essay about the history of the Holocaust through the eyes of Holocaust survivors.
- • Students can be challenged by using the internet to supplement a Holocaust survivor's memoir.
- • An evaluation assignment could be the development of a dictionary or glossary of words that the student has learned while reading the memoir.
- • Journal writing assignments can be done by students after reading memoirs.

The Holocaust was a bleak period of ashes and tears. From this evil, we as educators have a responsibility to teach respect for all human life. This respect can be taught by adopting **Writing as Witness** memoirs so that students use Holocaust survivors as role models for today. These memoirs address moral questions and dilemmas. The concepts can be taught without answers because of their complexity. Our approach in teaching Holocaust and Genocide Education is not based on the evil in the Nazi regime or other regimes. Our approach is based on memoirs of Holocaust survivors, showing their resilience—many survivors when faced with evil later became triumphant. Yes, from despair can come hope.

Presenters:

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