

## **Azrieli Short Film Series**



### **Teacher Resource Package**

Prepared By Susan Starkman, B. A., M. ED.

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#### **Synopsis:**

Country of Origin: Canada

Release Year: 2012

Director:

Runtime: 45 minutes total runtime

Themes: Holocaust, Survival, Overcoming Adversity, Immigration, Heroism

Inspired by the award-winning memoirs of Canadian Holocaust survivors, the Azrieli Foundation created five short films in 2012 with the hopes of broadening the reach of these impressive life-stories through the medium of film and animation. In the short films, the authors reflect on their histories from childhood through to their experiences during the war to their present lives in Canada. More than half a century later, the diversity of stories allows readers to put a face on what was lost, and to grasp the enormity of what happened to six million Jews – one story at a time. The films are divided into an animated excerpt from the author's memoir and a four to five minute profile.

#### **Curriculum Links**

The *Azrieli Short Film Series* can be used to meet the requirements of the Media Studies component of English, Grades 9-12. It can also be used to meet the requirements of Grade 10 History (CHC2D), Grade 10 Civics (CHV2D), Grade 11 Canadian History and Politics since 1945 (CHH3C), Grade 11 Canadian Politics and Citizenship (CPC3O), Grade 12 Canada: History, Identity and Culture (CHI4U), Grade 12 World History: The West and the World (CHY4U), Grade 12 Adventures in World History (CHM4E) and Grade 12 Canadian and World Politics (CPW4U).

## **Ways into the Text: Context**

Before viewing any of the films in this series, students should have some knowledge of the Holocaust. There are numerous online resources relating to Holocaust education that students can access to learn more. Listed below are a few websites that can provide students with an introduction to learning about the Holocaust:

Yad Vashem

[http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/index.asp?WT.mc\\_id=ggcamp&WT.src\\_h=1](http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/index.asp?WT.mc_id=ggcamp&WT.src_h=1)

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<http://www.ushmm.org/education/>

Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Centre

<http://www.wsherc.org/>

USC Shoah Foundation Institute

<http://college.usc.edu/vhi/about/segmentsfortheclassroom/index.php?gclid=CiiCttuyzqcCFcW8KgodfBMmFA>

The Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme

<http://www.un.org/en/holocaustremembrance/emainpage.shtml>

Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behaviour

<http://www.facinghistory.org/resources/hhb>

## **The Azrieli Foundation**

Both the film series and the memoirs on which they are based are produced by the Azrieli Foundation, a Canadian philanthropic organization that supports a wide range of initiatives and programs in the fields of education, architecture and design, Jewish community, Holocaust commemoration and education, scientific and medical research, and the arts. To learn more about the Foundation itself, go the website at <http://www.azrielifoundation.org/>. For more information about the Azrieli Series of Holocaust Survivor Memoirs as well as educational resources related to them, please visit <http://www.azrielifoundation.org/memoirs/>.

## Azrieli Short Film Series General Questions

As a group, the five films in Azrieli short film series provides students with an overview of the devastating effect that the Holocaust had on the Jews across Eastern Europe. Each of the five survivors interviewed for the film was born in a different country, yet each of them endured similar experiences during the war years, marked by hardship, hunger, fear and, finally, displacement.

Teachers may want to view the series as a whole or they may want to focus on one or two of the stories more intensively. Listed below are questions/activities that relate to all five films. The rest of the guide is divided into sections that correspond to a specific survivor's story.

1. As the survivors reflect on their childhoods in Europe, the films transition from live action to animation. Why do you think animation was chosen as a vehicle for telling their stories? What effect does it have on the viewer?
2. Most of the animation is in black and white. Why do you think that is? Where is colour used? Why?
3. Animation is being used more frequently in documentaries over the last few years. Why do you think that might be? What other animated documentaries can you name? What are some of the themes that they share with the Azrieli short film series?
4. The films begin with the survivors speaking against a backdrop of the cover of his/her memoir that depicts them as a young person. What effect does that have on the viewer?
5. What evidence can we find in the films that indicate that life has turned out well for the survivors despite the hardships that they endured? List specific examples.
6. What are some of the common qualities that each of the survivors possesses that helped them to stay alive against the odds?
7. Why is it so important for each survivor to tell his/her story?
8. What do the survivors value most about living in Canada?
9. What countries do the survivors come from originally? How many Jews lived in Europe before WWII? How many were left afterward? Divide the class into groups and assign each one a specific European country to research vis a vis its relation to its Jewish population during the War. Have them report their findings back to the rest of the class.
10. How many Jews live in Canada today? What percentage of this population came after WWII? Have students research the history of Jewish immigration to Canada.

## Betty Rich: *Little Girl Lost*

1. The film begins with Betty recounting the story of bringing home a load of bread and being stopped by a German soldier. How is the soldier depicted? How does the illustration make him look sinister at first? How does his image change over the course of the story?
2. While most of the animation is in black and white, Betty's armband appears in bright yellow. Why? What effect is this designed to have on the viewer?
3. Betty says that one of the things that is helpful to her in her "survival kit" is her "ability to reach humanity in another person." What evidence do we have of this ability in the film?
4. Although Betty always kept a journal, she avoided writing about her wartime experience for many years. What made her finally decide to write her memoirs?
5. Betty admits that, to a certain extent, we have no control over our fate but she asserts that we do have control over "what we are going to do with the bad situations that fate put us into." What does she mean by this? How did Betty decide deal with her personal tragedy of losing her entire family in the War? What are some of the qualities that are necessary in overcoming that kind of adversity?
6. While Betty's family stayed behind, she crossed over into Soviet occupied Poland where she spent five years, fourteen months of which were in a labour camp. Who was sent to the labour camps during the War? What kind of work did they do and what were the conditions like?
7. When Betty returns to Poland after the war, she heads to the city of Lodz. Where is Lodz? Research the history of Jews in Lodz and the Lodz Ghetto.
8. Betty refers to the Central Committee of Polish Jews. What is this organisation? When and why was it created? What services did it offer?
9. Betty admits that she is angry that the Jews of Europe and the Diaspora "wasted time and paid the price for it." What does she mean by this? How did they waste time? How did the Jews of Canada and the United States respond to what was happening to the Jews in Europe during the War? Do you think that they could have done more to help them? Why? Why not? Provide evidence to support your opinion.
10. Betty ends by saying that "all we can do is touch humanity and each other and fight for a better world." What does she mean by this? What steps can we take to do so?

### Related Resources:

The Yivo Encyclopaedia of Jews in Eastern Europe

[http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Central\\_Committee\\_of\\_Jews\\_in\\_Poland](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Central_Committee_of_Jews_in_Poland)

The Jewish Virtual Library

[http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Central Committee of Jews in Poland](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Central_Committee_of_Jews_in_Poland)

### **Max Bornstein: If Home is Not Here**

1. Why do you think that Max's memoir is entitled *If Home Is Not Here*? What is he referring to?
2. Max's journey takes him from France to Argentina through the Pyrenees and Portugal. Trace that route along a map. How long is it? What kind of terrain would he have encountered?
3. Despite the fact that Max had lived in Canada for ten years and had a younger sister that was born in Canada, his family was denied a visa to return to Canada when his family tried to flee Europe. Research Canada's immigration record before and after the War. What was the country's policy on refugees?
4. Max was arrested by the Spanish police and imprisoned in Miranda de Ebro concentration camp. Research Spain's role in the War. Who was imprisoned in Miranda de Ebro?
5. After his release from Prison and arrival in England, Max felt "normal" at first. What eventually caused his nervous breakdown? Why did the trauma he suffered not overwhelm him as soon as he became free?
6. Max admits that he has never "fully recovered" and that his wife and children have suffered because of experiences. Research the effect of the Holocaust on the children and grandchildren of survivors.
7. Why is it so important for Max to tell his story?

#### **Related Resources**

The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs

<http://www.cija.ca/issues/a-brief-history-of-the-canadian-jewish-community/>

Citizenship and Immigration Canada

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/legacy/chap-4a.asp>

Jewish Virtual Library

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/canada.html>

Fight Hatred

<http://www.fighthatred.com/historical-events/country-guides/411-a-look-back-at-canadas-anti-semitic-history-frederick-charles-blair>

Ariege Pyrenees

<http://www.ariege.com/histoire/chemin.html>

WWII Database

<http://ww2db.com/country/spain>

Second Generation

<http://www.2ndgeneration.org.uk/>

Georgetown University

<http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/bassr/218/projects/hamner/children.htm>

## **Felix Opatowski: Gatehouse to Hell**

1. Felix was sent to Auschwitz, one of the largest concentration camps where over a million Jews were killed. Research the history of the camp and the role it played in the Final Solution.
2. How does the animation in the film create a sense of panic and fear?
3. What were some of the factors that contributed to Felix being able to survive against the odds?
4. Despite the trauma he endured in both a labour camp and at Auschwitz, Felix believes that he is "the luckiest man alive." Why?
5. Felix discusses the transports that he witnessed arriving at Auschwitz, but he only loses his composure when he speaks about the one from Drancy. What is he referring to? Research what happened at Drancy.
6. Why is it so important for Felix to tell his story?

### **Related Resources:**

Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum

<http://en.auschwitz.org/m/>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005189>

BBC

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2004/12\\_december/03/auschwitz\\_facts.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2004/12_december/03/auschwitz_facts.shtml)

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005215>

JewishGen

<http://www.jewishgen.org/forgottenCamps/Camps/DranEngl.html>



## **Judy Abrams: *Tenuous Threads***

1. While the other films in the series employ mostly black and white animation, Judy's story is told mostly in vivid colour. Why?
2. As a child, Judy went from being proud of being Jewish to being ashamed of her background. How and why did this transformation take place?
3. Judy is taken by her mother to the Ursuline Motherhouse. Who were the Ursuline nuns? Research the role that the Catholic Church played in saving Jews during the War.
4. Judy's relationship with her parents underwent many changes over the years. Describe the different stages that she describes and discuss the reasons for Judy's attitude towards her parents at different points in her life. How did she feel when she was first reunited with them after the War? Why did she feel that she had to separate herself from them when they first moved to Canada? Why was Judy angry when her mother pointed to her photo and claimed that Judy was the reason that she survived the War? How does Judy feel about her parents in hindsight?
5. Judy and her family arrived in Halifax in April. What was her reaction to her new country? Research the history of Pier 21, Canada's principal immigration reception and processing facility during and immediately after the War.
6. How did the Jewish community of Montreal regard the influx of survivors who came after the War?
7. Although Judy always drew on her childhood experiences as a writer, she never thought of her stories as being important as witness stories. What made her change her mind?
8. Why it is so important for Judy to tell her story? How does her story relate to children in any war situation, not just the Holocaust?

### **Related Resources**

Catholic Encyclopaedia

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15228b.htm>

The Ursuline Sisters

<http://www.theursulines.org/saint-angela-merici/>

Catholic Education Resource Centre

<http://catholiceducation.org/articles/facts/fm0020.html>

Yad Vashem Museum

[http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/search\\_results.asp?cx=005038866121755566658%3Auch7z5rmfsg&cof=FORID%3A10&ie=UTF-8&q=catholic+church&find=&siteurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.yadvashem.org%2F](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/search_results.asp?cx=005038866121755566658%3Auch7z5rmfsg&cof=FORID%3A10&ie=UTF-8&q=catholic+church&find=&siteurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.yadvashem.org%2F)

Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 1

<http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Pier21/eng/lhistoire-history-pier-21-eng.html>

Canada's Historic Places

[http://www.historicplaces.ca/en/pages/36\\_pier\\_21.aspx](http://www.historicplaces.ca/en/pages/36_pier_21.aspx)

## **Eva Felsenberg Marx: One of the Lucky Ones**

1. Eva was born in Brno, Czechoslovakia. Find out more about the Jewish community of Czechoslovakia before and after the War.
2. Eva was initially hidden by a Christian woman who risked her life, although Eva points out that "she did it for money." Do you think that that detracts from the heroism of the act? Why/why not?
3. Many Christians risked their lives during more to save the lives of their Jewish friends and neighbours. Research the topic of Righteous Among the Nations, providing specific names and stories. What were some of the motivating factors that allowed these people to jeopardise their own lives to save the lives of others?
4. Eva attributes her survival to "pure luck". Do you agree? What other factors might have played a role in her survival?
5. The reality of life in North America did not match the Hollywood image that Eva knew from the films that she had seen in Europe. What was Jewish life in Montreal like in the 1940s and 1950s?
6. Although life in Montreal was difficult for her parents, Eva insists that they loved Canada. Why? What were the most important aspects of Canadian life to them?
7. Why did Eva allow herself to be convinced to write her memoir?

### **Related Resources**

Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic

<http://www.fzo.cz/en/about-us/history/>

Jewish Virtual Library

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/Czech.html>

The Righteous Among the Nations

<http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/about.asp>

The Yivo Encyclopaedia of Jews in Eastern Europe

[http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Righteous\\_Gentiles](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Righteous_Gentiles)

Interactive Museum of Jewish Montreal

<http://imjm.ca/index.php>

Jewish Montreal of Yesterday

<http://www.jewishpubliclibrary.org/blog/>

Federation Canada

[http://www.federationcja.org/en/jewish\\_montreal/history/](http://www.federationcja.org/en/jewish_montreal/history/)

## References

All Websites cited are from March, 2013)

Yad Vashem

[http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/index.asp?WT.mc\\_id=ggcamp&WT.src\\_h=1](http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/index.asp?WT.mc_id=ggcamp&WT.src_h=1)

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<http://www.ushmm.org/education/>

Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Centre

<http://www.wsherc.org/>

USC Shoah Foundation Institute

<http://college.usc.edu/vhi/about/segmentsfortheclassroom/index.php?gclid=CiiCttuyzqcCFcW8KgodfBMmFA>

The Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme

<http://www.un.org/en/holocaustremembrance/emainpage.shtml>

Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behaviour

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Citizenship and Immigration Canada

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/legacy/chap-4a.asp>

Jewish Virtual Library

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/canada.html>

Fight Hatred

<http://www.fighthatred.com/historical-events/country-guides/411-a-look-back-at-canadas-anti-semitic-history-frederick-charles-blair>

Ariege Pyrenees

<http://www.ariege.com/histoire/chemin.html>

WWII Database

<http://ww2db.com/country/spain>

Second Generation

<http://www.2ndgeneration.org.uk/>

Georgetown University

<http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/bassr/218/projects/hamner/children.htm>

Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum

<http://en.auschwitz.org/m/>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005189>

BBC

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2004/12\\_december/03/auschwitz\\_facts.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2004/12_december/03/auschwitz_facts.shtml)

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<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15228b.htm>

The Ursuline Sisters

<http://www.theursulines.org/saint-angela-merici/>

Catholic Education Resource Centre

<http://catholiceducation.org/articles/facts/fm0020.html>

Yad Vashem Museum

[http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/search\\_results.asp?cx=005038866121755566658%3Auch7z5rmfsgs&cof=FORID%3A10&ie=UTF-8&q=catholic+church&find=&siteurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.yadvashem.org%2F](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/search_results.asp?cx=005038866121755566658%3Auch7z5rmfsgs&cof=FORID%3A10&ie=UTF-8&q=catholic+church&find=&siteurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.yadvashem.org%2F)

Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 1

<http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Pier21/eng/lhistoire-history-pier-21-eng.html>

Canada's Historic Places

[http://www.historicplaces.ca/en/pages/36\\_pier\\_21.aspx](http://www.historicplaces.ca/en/pages/36_pier_21.aspx)

Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic

<http://www.fzo.cz/en/about-us/history/>

Jewish Virtual Library

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/Czech.html>

The Righteous Among the Nations

<http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/about.asp>

The Yivo Encyclopaedia of Jews in Eastern Europe

[http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Righteous\\_Gentiles](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Righteous_Gentiles)

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[http://www.federationcja.org/en/jewish\\_montreal/history/](http://www.federationcja.org/en/jewish_montreal/history/)

