

Hildegard Center for the Arts “Heroes Among Us”

Forging Freedom: A True Story of Heroism During the Holocaust

Adapted from Lesson Plans Developed by Chapman University
(www.chapman.edu/holocausteducation/forteachers/forgingfreedom.asp)

Suitable for Grades 5-8 (but may be adapted for other age groups) in the areas of Literature, Language Arts, History, Social Studies and Geography

Purpose: Through literature, research, and discussion, the students will learn about Heroism displayed during the Holocaust.

This lesson is based on the book *“Forging Freedom: A True Story of Heroism During the Holocaust”* by Hudson Talbott (available on Amazon for \$19.99 in hard cover and \$15.25 in paperback). Talbot tells the story of Jaap Penratt, a teenager in Amsterdam who could not sit by while the Germans were persecuting the Jewish people. He started by forging papers and later led groups of people to safety. His heroic efforts saved more than four hundred Jewish people while he put his own life in danger. Japp Penratt was recognized by Yad Vashem in Israel as one of the Righteous among the Nations.

Objectives:

- The students will read the story of a Japp Penratt (Teachers may also opt to read the story aloud to the class).
- The students will analyze the ethical dilemmas and complex choices Japp Penratt faced.
- The students will create a storyboard or outline of the hero’s choices and actions.
- The students will analyze the ethical dilemmas and complex choices the student faces in his/her own life.
- The students will write (using the story of Jaap Penratt as the individual who embodied heroism during the times of the Holocaust, projecting these actions onto the choices the student will face in his/her life) an essay, a poem or create a work of art in response to the topic.
- The students will share their work with their teacher, peers and/or parent/guardians.
- The students will revise and edit work before final submission.

National Standards that may be met:

- Students read to acquire new information, to respond to the needs of demands of society and for personal fulfillment.
- Students read to build an understanding of the many dimensions of human experience.
- Students adjust their use of spoken, written and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

- Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
- Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions, media techniques, figurative language and genre to create, critique and discuss print and non-print texts.
- Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
- Students use spoken, written and visual language to accomplish their own purposes.

Lesson Process:

- 1) After reading "*Forging Freedom: A True Story of Heroism During the Holocaust*" by Hudson Talbott, students will analyze the ethical dilemmas and complex choices the teen faced. Their goal is to become aware of the specific choices Penratt had to make.
- 2) Students will share the results of their analyses in small groups of three or four students. Together they will discuss the result of this teen's actions, thinking about the situation, the choices and the result. Discuss as a whole class.
- 3) As a class, brainstorm situations that the students face in contemporary terms-- situations that demand choices. Leave the record of this brainstorming session on a chalk or marker board while students consider individual choices.
- 4) Students will document the situations with which they are faced and the choices they make (or would like to make).
- 5) Students compose a draft of an essay or poem (or create a work of art) using the story of Jaap Penratt as the individual who embodied heroism during the times of the Holocaust, projecting these actions onto the choices the student will face in his/her life.
- 6) Students read their drafts to a partner, eliciting comments and suggestions for improvement.
- 7) Students work in small groups to revise and edit their drafts. Teacher may be involved at this stage.
- 8) Final work is submitted to the teacher for evaluation.

Other Applications:

Language Arts:

"*Forging Freedom: A True Story of Heroism During the Holocaust*" contains four classic archetypes of both literature and history: Hero, Bully, Victim and Bystander. By writing the four words on the blackboard, the teacher and students could talk about them and then list characteristics of each type underneath the appropriate word.

- 1) Students create a day in the life of each of the types, using at least three of the characteristics listed for that type.
- 2) Have students write about their own experiences (real or imagined) of being each of the archetypes. What caused them to be that type? How did it feel?
- 3) Going from “bystander” to “hero” –how? Why? Character development is essential in both fiction and non-fiction writing. In life, we may want to do the right thing but are afraid of being hurt ourselves. The urge to be true to one’s principles has to be weighed against the risks involved. Jaap Penraat was an ordinary man who did extraordinary things. Have students talk about what must have taken place in Jaap’s mind before he decided to take action.
- 4) Writing assignment: You are Jaap’s younger brother or sister. You are coming home from school when you see the Nazis taking away your neighbors, except for Solomon, the boy your age, who has run out the back door and is desperately trying to hide. Neither he nor the Nazis have seen you, so you are free to go into your house and pretend you’ve seen nothing. Describe what you do next, why and how you felt doing it.

Social Studies: History

How did Hitler come to power and why did he pick on the Jews? On page 6 “*Forging Freedom: A True Story of Heroism During the Holocaust*”, Jaap’s neighbor says the Germans are angry because they lost the big war and their money is worthless “and they need someone to blame” discussing the following points:

- 1) The German people were shocked to lose World War I. Their economy was ruined and their money lost its value. They wanted a strong leader. Hitler blamed the Jews because they were an easy target.
- 2) The world was a bystander. Other countries did nothing. Hitler became more powerful, seeing it as “someone else’s problem” until it was too late.

Social Studies: Geography

The map on pages 18-19 of “*Forging Freedom: A True Story of Heroism During the Holocaust*” shows Hitler as a barbed-wire octopus clutching Europe. Looking at this and other maps, discuss how geography played a major role in World War II using the following points:

- 1) Hitler spurred the Germans to invade their neighbors to the east, saying they needed and deserved “lebensraum”—more living space. They invaded their neighbors to the west because they needed an Atlantic seaport.
- 2) The English Channel and the North Sea formed a natural barrier, keeping the German forces contained on the continent, but it also kept the Allied forces (Britain and the U.S.) out. Discuss the D-day invasion--why it was so important but also so difficult. The maps

on page 34 show the route of the Jewish refugees Jaap rescued from the Nazis. Discuss the similarities with and differences from the Underground Railroad system that helped African-Americans escape slavery in the American South prior to the Civil War.

Suggested Field Trip:

The Nebraska Holocaust Memorial (located at Wyuka Cemetery in Lincoln) was funded by the citizens of the State of Nebraska and the Heartland Holocaust Educational Fund founded by Frances and Sam Fried. The Nebraska Holocaust Memorial is free and open to the public. Wyuka Cemetery is located at 3600 "O" Street in Lincoln, NE 68510. If you wish to arrange for a tour guide, contact the Memorial's Managing Director, Gary Hill at 402-420-0602 or Garyhill@cega.com. For teacher assistance, contact The Institute for Holocaust Education Director, Beth Dotan (402-334-6575) www.ihene.org, email info@ihene.org or call 402-334-6576.