

Reconstructing a Survivor's Life After Genocide

Concept(s) Primary Source Evidence

Prepared for Grade(s) 11, 12

Province NB

By Mark Perry

Time Period(s) 1900-present

Time allotment 3 periods X 60 minutes

Brief Description of the Task

Students will examine a series of traces and accounts exchanged by a Holocaust survivor located in Sweden and members of his extended family in Saint John, New Brunswick. The sources should offer clues regarding Michael Fried's activities, thoughts, and feelings as he attempts to regain his health and to right himself in a world drastically altered.

Objectives

Students will:

1. use several primary sources to reconstruct the life of Dr. Fried during a specific period of time.
2. analyze a primary source for the purposes, values and worldview of the author.
3. assess what can and cannot be answered by particular primary sources.

Required Knowledge & Skills

1. an understanding of the concept of 'evidence'
2. an understanding of the difference between primary and secondary sources
3. experience working with primary and secondary sources for the purposes of constructing an historical narrative
4. an understanding of the Nazi Blitzkrieg, invasion, and occupation is essential. The students must also understand the nature by which basic civil rights of Jews and others were eroded in Germany and the occupied lands: the Nuremberg Laws, Kristallnacht, Ghettoization, Einsatzgruppen, the Wansee Conference, and the Final Solution.
5. it is a good idea to have students read several accounts of life in Germany in 1935-36, in the Ghetto, in the labour camp, at Auschwitz, in hiding. (i.e. Elie Weisel's accounts are accessible and detailed in his book 'Night', Eta Burke of Fredericton wrote 'Chosen' which is quite helpful as well.

Detailed Instructions

1. The teacher introduces the task after students have had the opportunity to learn and discuss the key events of World War II and the Holocaust. A clear understanding

of the Nazi Blitzkrieg, invasion and occupation is essential. The students must also understand the nature by which basic civil rights for Jews and others were eroded in Germany and the occupied lands: the Nuremberg Laws, Kristallnacht, Ghettoization, Einsatzgruppen, the Wansee Conference, and the Final Solution.

2. The teacher should make the point that we should make an effort to concentrate on the accounts of individuals to discover more about this time. It is a good idea to have students read several accounts of life in Germany in 1933-39, in the Ghetto, in the labour camp, at Auschwitz, in hiding. (i.e. Elie Weisel's accounts are accessible and detailed in his book, 'Night.' Eta Burke of Fredericton wrote 'Chosen' which is quite helpful as well.

3. Eta Burke has claimed that it was with some reluctance on her part that she actually wrote Chosen. She was convinced by others, and by the statements of Holocaust deniers, that it was crucial that she recount her experiences. These authors intended to tell their stories to as large an audience as could be reached. In this task, students are introduced to primary sources that originated with the purpose of communication for survival. The sources take the reader directly to the moment where they may experience the urgency of the author, Dr. Michael Fried.

4. Introduction: In groups of three, students begin to read the documents and examine the accounts to ask questions that assist them in reconstructing the life of Fried:

- a) What is the date of this account?
- b) Who produced the account?
- b) Where was it written?
- c) Why was it written?
- d) What can we know about the author?
- e) What can we know about his physical and emotional state?

5. Using the graphic organizer 'evidence' to assist them to organize the information extracted from the sources. Then, using this information, students will do the following:

- a) Record in a timeline the activities of Dr. Michael Fried from September 1945 until May 1946. The students will also add the reasons for these actions
- c) Record the feelings and emotions that he and members of his family in Saint John experienced during this time
- d) Record any information provided regarding the European, Canadian, and /or American context (what can be inferred, if anything, about the state of Europe, Canada, or the US based on the accounts?)
- e) Justify all claims by referring to the specific evidence .

6. The students are then asked to imagine that they are cold case investigators and that a family in Saint John, New Brunswick has hired them to find out what

happened to a family member in the aftermath of World War II. The family has hired these investigators because they feel that their skills and their experience applied in cold case investigations permit them to delve into the past to reconstruct the lives of individuals with accuracy.

7. Referring to the completed graphic organizer, the students will write a report for the Weizel family that serves as their accounting of the life of Fried from September 1945 until March 1946. Be sure to remind students to justify, using the evidence, all claims.

Outcomes

Students will:

1. identify and use primary and secondary sources to evaluate questions
2. demonstrate an understanding that historians are selective in the questions they seek to answer and the evidence they use and that this influences their interpretation of history