

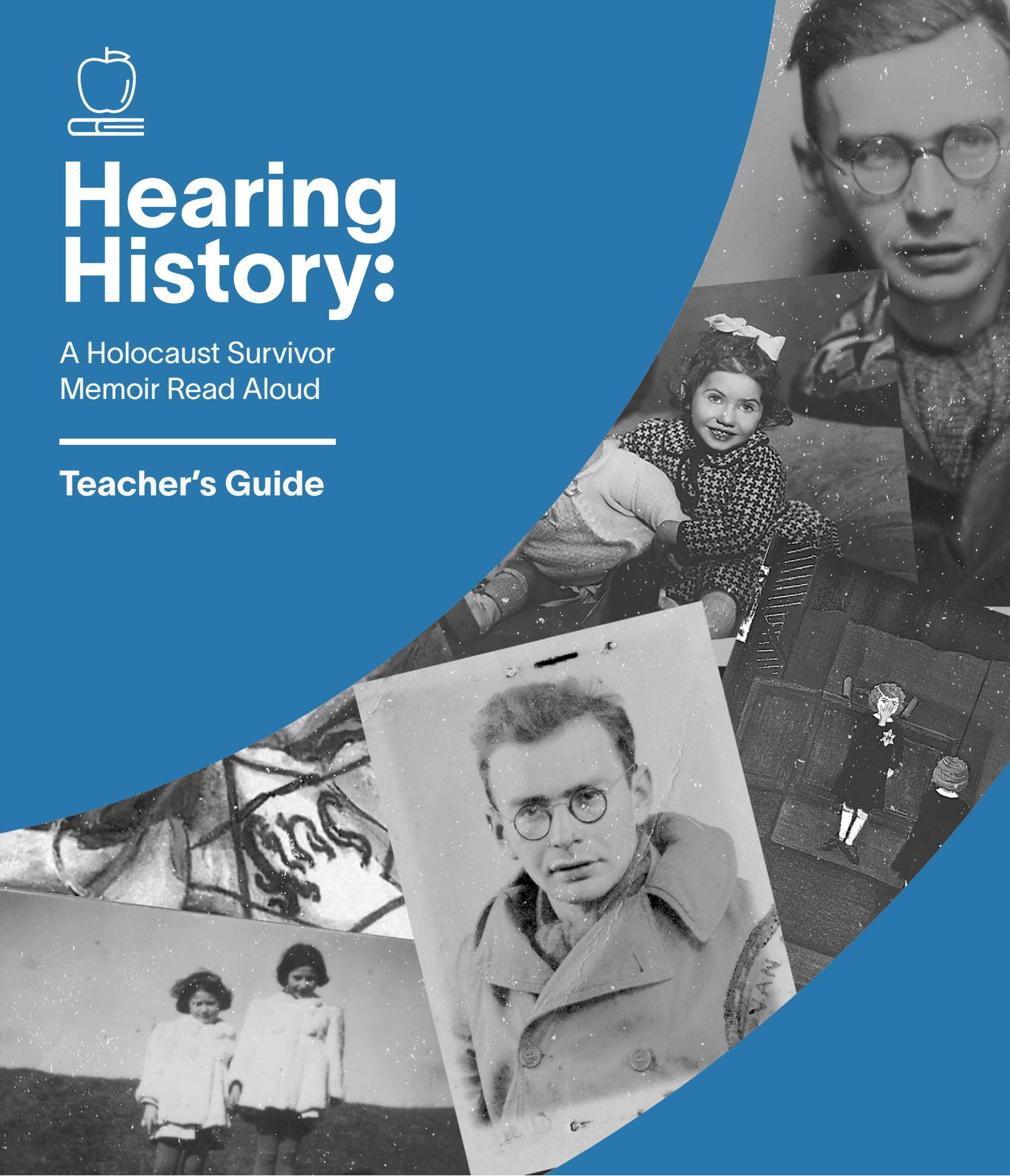


# Hearing History:

A Holocaust Survivor  
Memoir Read Aloud

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Teacher's Guide



# Hearing History

## A Holocaust Survivor Memoir Read Aloud

This program was developed by the Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Program, a non-profit program established by the Azrieli Foundation in 2005 to collect, preserve and share the memoirs and diaries written by survivors of the Holocaust who came to Canada. These memoirs — published in both English and French — are distributed free of charge to educational institutions across Canada.

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# INTRODUCTION

The following ready-to-use program was created to help educators bring the difficult topic of the Holocaust into their classrooms by deeply engaging with survivor testimony through an educator-guided read aloud of a memoir.

Before you begin teaching about the Holocaust, it is important to reflect on your knowledge, goals and methods. To prepare educators and build their confidence in teaching this topic, we have created a guide titled *The First Step: A Guide for Educators Preparing to Teach about the Holocaust*. As you move through the material and short activities in *The First Step*, you will gain familiarity with the *core content* of the Holocaust, reflect on your teaching rationales and consider best practices in how to bring this topic into your classroom. We encourage you to explore this guide *before* beginning any Holocaust education activity with your students.

## OVERVIEW

This program is designed to help students learn about the Holocaust by deeply engaging with a survivor memoir and exploring its historical context. Students will gain an understanding of the Holocaust through the lens of survivor testimony, in the format of a written memoir. As the memoir will be read aloud to students, this program better engages a younger audience (ages 11 and up) and those in English or French as a Second Language programs. Students will learn about the value of memoirs as both a literary form and a tool for studying history.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Learn about the Holocaust through the lens of survivor testimony.
- Develop a general understanding of the historical context of the Holocaust.
- Explore memoir as a literary form.
- Build comprehension skills through an educator-guided read aloud of the text.
- Practise and develop historical thinking concepts (see *Appendix 1*).

The reading of a memoir and the study of related historical events are easily tied into the provincial curricula. See *Appendix 2* for some examples of direct links to your provincial curricula.

## THE BENEFITS OF A READ ALOUD

- Effectively brings a survivor story into the classroom in a way that is educator-guided and supported.
- Students hear and learn new vocabulary in context, with immediate explanations.
- Memoir can be delivered in smaller sections.
- Requires little to no materials or technology and minimal prep work.
- Encourages comprehension skills.
- Builds oral language skills (fluency, inflection, pacing, pronunciation, etc.).
- Students who struggle with decoding skills can participate in the reading of a text above their individual reading level.
- Students discover literature about a topic (the Holocaust) and in a genre (memoir) they may not choose on their own.
- Reading as a whole group creates a feeling of community.
- Promotes meaningful discussion and reflection.

## LENGTH AND IMPLEMENTATION

This program is flexible and can be adapted to meet the needs of your classroom. Depending on how frequently you schedule time to read, how long you read for and how often you pause for discussions, a read aloud can span anywhere from a couple of weeks to a couple of months. You can choose to implement this program as a stand-alone text reading, or it can be an accompanying piece to an existing, relevant unit of study. This program can be effective in a variety of subjects and courses.

## AGE APPROPRIATENESS

This program has been designed for use in Grade 5 and 6 classrooms but can easily be adapted for older age groups. We recommend that you pause frequently to further discuss key story developments, debrief mature content, define unique or relevant vocabulary and ensure understanding by facilitating discussions with and between students.

## A NOTE ON THE CONTENT

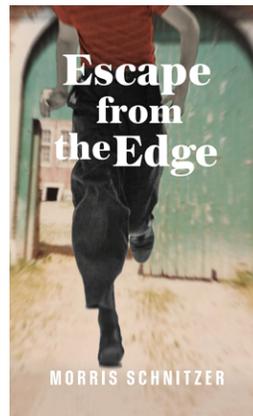
The Holocaust is a sensitive subject to learn about, and some of your students may struggle with the content. Although the selected texts have minimal explicit content, the topic of the Holocaust itself can be heavy and unsettling for students. Study of the Holocaust will include references to the persecution of Jews and other groups targeted by the Nazis, which may include discrimination, depictions of violence and mentions or descriptions of death and mass murder. We always recommend you read the text before reading to your students. Choose materials with the age and sensitivity of your students in mind and build in opportunities for them to process the material and share their reflections with you and with peers.

## THE MEMOIRS

This program is designed to be taught using one of the following memoirs:

### ESCAPE FROM THE EDGE by Morris Schnitzer

Narrow escapes and bold decisions define the life of teenager Morris Schnitzer. Fleeing from Nazi Germany before the onset of World War II, Morris ends up in the Netherlands only to watch the country be invaded by the Nazis. With his father's warning to never set foot in a concentration camp echoing in his mind, Morris resolves to fight — and survive. As he assumes false identities and crosses endless borders in search of safety, Morris never acquiesces to the Nazi occupiers in Western Europe. In his epic journey to *Escape from the Edge*, Morris endures imprisonment and gruelling work as a farmhand, joins the resistance in Belgium and ultimately enlists in the American army, vowing to take revenge for all that he has lost.



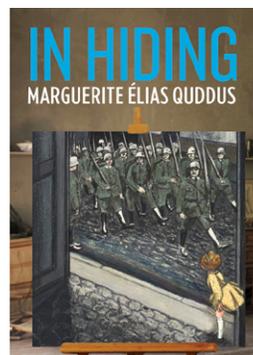
#### At a Glance:

- 144 pages (not including front matter and back matter)
- Germany; the Netherlands; France; Belgium
- Kristallnacht
- Kindertransport
- Escape
- Passing/ false identity
- Resistance
- Postwar Netherlands
- Arrived in Canada in 1947

### IN HIDING by Marguerite Élias Quddus

*"Goodbye children! Go, and don't look back..."*

Two little girls, Marguerite and her older sister, Henriette, hear these last words from their mother and know that they must forget everything that is familiar about their former lives in Paris. With new Catholic identities, the sisters are taken from farm to farm and convent to convent where they learn how to remain silent, how to pretend, how to lie in order to survive.



#### At a Glance:

- 194 pages (not including front matter and back matter)
- France
- Vichy France
- Roundups
- Hidden child
- Wartime documents
- Arrived in Canada in 1967

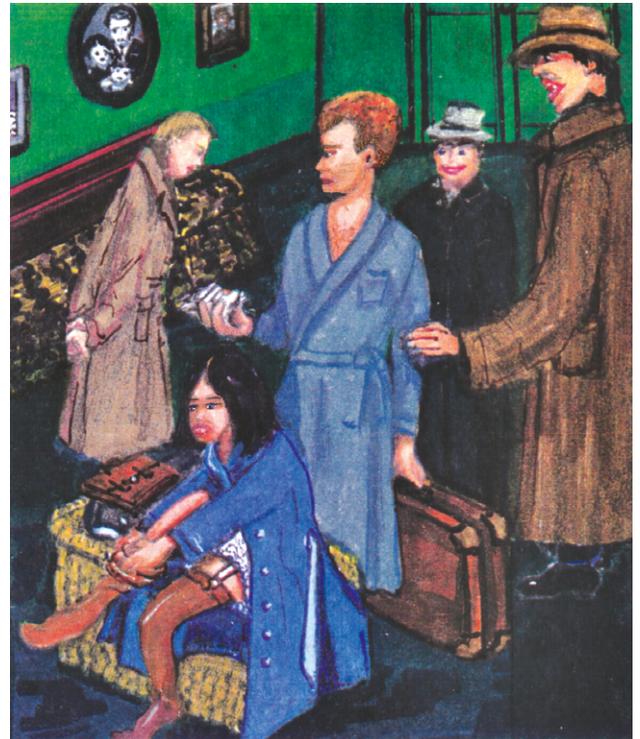
The program only requires that you [order one copy](#) per classroom. However, you are welcome to order additional copies for any students who would benefit from having a personal copy of the text. Memoirs are free of charge for students and educators.

## LANGUAGE AND VOCABULARY

As the educator, you will facilitate student discussions and help develop understanding of the memoir. In the document titled *Language Notes and Content Warnings*, we have noted phrases, excerpts or sections that you may choose to define, simplify or skip during your read aloud. You may also refer to the glossary at the end of the book.

## SUPPLEMENTARY VISUALS

Each memoir is accompanied by maps, photographs and other visuals. You will find a downloadable package with all relevant visuals to be displayed in your classroom as you read.



Illustrations by Marguerite Élias Quddus

# THE PROGRAM | Before Reading the Memoir



## LENGTH

1-2 class periods (90-120 minutes)



## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Develop a general understanding of the ideas and developments that led to the Holocaust, key events during the Holocaust and the impact and aftermath of the Holocaust.
- Identify the features of a memoir as a literary genre.
- Practise historical thinking concepts, such as establishing [historical significance](#) and taking [historical perspectives](#).



## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Background Reading pages
- A copy of the memoir

## THE LESSON

In this lesson you will help your students learn about the Holocaust and consider the genre of memoir.

### 1. WHAT WAS THE HOLOCAUST? 60–75 minutes

#### a. Definition

To begin, walk your students through a definition of the Holocaust. If you completed [The First Step: A Guide for Educators Preparing to Teach about the Holocaust](#), you can use your definition here. Otherwise, here is a sample definition you can use in your classroom:

*The Holocaust refers to Nazi Germany's attempt to annihilate the Jewish population of Europe. Adolf Hitler, leader of the Nazi Party, saw Jews as the primary enemy of the "Aryan" race and believed that Germany would become powerful only by ridding itself of Jews. Starting in 1933, Nazi Germany took measures to humiliate, isolate and persecute Jews.*

*The Nazis also targeted other groups in Germany, including Roma and Sinti, people with disabilities, Jehovah's Witnesses, Afro-Germans, homosexuals and political opponents. With the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, Nazi policies and violence extended to each country occupied by Germany.*

*During the war, the Nazis and their collaborators began systematically killing Jews and other target groups. By the time World War II ended in 1945, six million Jews had been murdered in the Holocaust.*

#### b. Brief Overview

After sharing a definition, we recommend providing a brief overview of the Holocaust to properly ground the study of a survivor memoir in its broader context (the Holocaust and World War II). It is impossible to teach the entirety of the Holocaust to your students in an in-depth manner. This overview is an opportunity for you as the educator to provide accurate historical information and set the appropriate tone.

When planning and teaching this overview, take care to cover the elements of the [core content](#). You can do this using a combination of available strategies (slide decks, presentations, videos, educator-guided

exploration tasks). You may choose to spend less time on certain elements of the core content, depending on the age of students or specific topics/themes that you will explore in depth.

Ensure that you use resources from recognized institutions when creating your teaching materials, such as:

- [The Montreal Holocaust Museum's](#) interactive online [History of the Holocaust](#)
- [The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's](#) [Introduction to the Holocaust](#) text and searchable [Holocaust Encyclopedia](#)
- [Yad Vashem's](#) multi-part video [What is the Holocaust?](#) (Parts 1-5 and 7 from 1:49 onwards are appropriate to show to students)

## 2. WHAT IS A MEMOIR? 15–20 minutes

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In our resources, we often talk about memoirs, but what exactly is a memoir?

Memoirs are non-fiction, first-person accounts of events and of an author's life. Memoirs focus on experience, feelings and emotional truth. The term memoir overlaps with autobiography but is often distinguished through its focus on world events, such as wars.

Take an opportunity to define *memoir* as a literary genre. Make sure to include the relevant features of a memoir such as point of view, scope, writing style. It is important to note how memoirs compare to other narrative genres, specifically biographies, autobiographies and historical fiction. However, as useful as these categories are for understanding different types of reading material, it is also important to note that these terms describe tendencies, not firm divisions; *memoir* and *autobiography*, for example, are sometimes used interchangeably, and novels might describe real people and events.

Although all of our memoirs have been thoroughly fact-checked, it is important to discuss the challenges and considerations that come with using survivor testimonies as historical sources. For example, students might recognize that since a memoir is usually written from one person's perspective, other voices and viewpoints are not present. Other possible considerations might be the age and memory of the survivor, the language of the memoir differing from their native language, and the impact of the traumatic experience on their recollection.

However, there is tremendous value in using survivor testimony when learning about the Holocaust. Explain to students the benefits of using survivor testimony as a tool for learning about historically significant events. Survivor testimony can:

- Allow students to hear first-hand accounts of historical events.
- Connect students to a story that may seem distant, disconnected or far in the past.
- Individualize facts and statistics.
- Provide an emotional connection to complement the learned history and information.
- Show students that prior to the war, the victims and survivors were ordinary people living regular lives.

## 3. WHAT IS THE SPECIFIC HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THIS MEMOIR? 15–25 minutes

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- a. Distribute the survivor author's *Background Reading* page and have students read it in partners or small groups.
- b. Explore any additional historical context about locations, events and key historical figures in the story by exploring the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's searchable [Holocaust Encyclopedia](#).

# THE PROGRAM | Reading the Memoir



1. Set a regular time to read in your class, based on a schedule that works for you (e.g., every Monday, Wednesday and Friday for the last 20 minutes before lunch; every morning for the first 15 minutes after the morning announcements).
2. Pause as needed to answer questions or take comments.
3. Pause intentionally throughout the memoir to discuss significant events, moments or vocabulary.
4. Continue until the reading of the memoir is complete.



## TEACHING TIP

After each reading session, co-create a class summary of the key events from the memoir. Before each reading session, review the summary from the previous reading.



## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Build comprehension skills through an educator-guided read aloud of the text.



## MATERIALS NEEDED

- A copy of the memoir
- Supplementary visuals
- *Language Notes and Content warnings*

## ACCOMMODATIONS



For students requiring additional support, consider the following strategies:

- Provide student(s) with a personal copy of the text to follow along.
- Provide a summary or chapter/section notes.
- Record your reading for students who were absent or who want to listen again and at their own pace.

## EXTENSIONS



Students looking to extend their study of the Holocaust or memoir/testimony can engage in the following activities:

- Read additional [survivor memoirs](#) from the [Azrieli Foundation's Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Program](#) and complete [other memoir-focused activities and programs](#).
- Explore [Re:Collection](#), an innovative digital resource that combines video interviews with memoir excerpts, photos and artifacts, and features interactive timelines and maps to place survivors' stories in historical and geographic context.
- Visit local Holocaust museums ([Toronto Holocaust Museum](#), [Montreal Holocaust Museum](#), [Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre](#)).
- View the websites of international Holocaust museums ([United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#), [Yad Vashem](#)).



## BEST PRACTICES FOR READING ALOUD WITH STUDENTS

- Be flexible with student seating or your positioning for the read aloud. Students should be comfortable and have equal opportunity to hear and see you. Consider a different classroom arrangement for read aloud time (e.g., form a circle with chairs).
- Have students clear desks entirely to reduce distractions while listening.
- Consider having students participate in the read aloud (student copies can be ordered [here](#), free of charge).

# THE PROGRAM | Upon Completing the Memoir

Regardless of how you have used the memoir in your classroom, you should always provide opportunities for students to debrief and reflect on the content of the story and the topic of the Holocaust. Here are some ways you can wrap up the reading of the memoir in your classroom.

If you read the memoir **as an independent text**, debrief with an in-depth class discussion that includes context and higher-order thinking questions (see *Sample Discussion Questions*).

If you read the memoir **as part of a larger unit of study**,

- incorporate the memoir into your summative task as an additional source for information;
- reflect upon the use of a memoir as a genre of literature/tool for studying history;
- have students complete a reflection about their experience listening to a Holocaust survivor memoir;
- use the memoir, *Background Reading* pages and additional contextual information gathered from the *Before the Reading* lesson to have students create a timeline that connects significant moments from the survivor's story to significant events of the Holocaust. For an additional source of information, see the Historical Timeline on Re:Collection [here](#).

If you aren't sure what type of culminating or summative task to use upon completing the memoir, [connect](#) with a member of the Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Program's education team.

# APPENDIX 1

## Historical Thinking Concepts

Historical thinking concepts help students answer key questions linked to studying the Holocaust:

### **How do we decide what is important to learn about the past?**

The concept of **historical significance** helps students think critically about what is important to know by providing criteria to consider. An event, person or development is significant if it resulted in change, meaning that it “had deep consequences, for many people, over a long period of time.” Or, it is significant if it reveals something important to us about “enduring or emerging issues in history or contemporary life.” Beyond these criteria, establishing historical significance means recognizing the way that historical narratives are *constructed* by people (such as the author of a textbook), who use these pieces of the past to build their story. What people consider to be significant varies over time.

See [here](#) for more on historical significance.

### **How can we better understand the people of the past?**

Students can start to answer this key question by applying the concept of historical perspectives. For historians, “taking historical perspectives means understanding the social, cultural, intellectual, and emotional settings that shaped people’s lives and actions in the past.” The goal is not for students to consider what they would have done and felt in the past, but to understand what someone in the past did and felt in relation to their own circumstances. By exploring a variety of experiences and perspectives, students can understand individual decisions, beliefs, values and motivations within a specific context.

See [here](#) for more information on historical perspectives.

The content above has been adapted from Peter Seixas and Tom Morton’s book *The Big Six: Historical Thinking Concepts* (2013) and [www.historicalthinking.ca](http://www.historicalthinking.ca).

# APPENDIX 2

## Curricular Connections

Below are some sample curricular connections that directly tie this educational program to the provincial curricula. The content is adapted from provincial curricula documents.

Province	Subject/Grade/ Course	Unit/Big Idea	Competencies/Expectations	Concepts, Content, Strategies and Other Notes
AB	English Language Arts and Literature Grade 6	Text Forms and Structure: Identifying and applying text forms and structures improves understanding of content, literary style, and our rich language traditions.	Students analyze how the organization of a variety of texts can influence understandings of ourselves, each other, and the world.  Knowledge: Literary texts can be cate- gorized by genre, including fiction and non-fiction.	<p>Text features can be digital or nondigital and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• images and graphics</li> <li>• titles and headings</li> <li>• sidebars</li> <li>• tables of contents and indexes</li> <li>• fonts</li> <li>• captions</li> <li>• maps</li> <li>• charts and graphs</li> <li>• glossaries</li> </ul> <p><b>Non-fiction texts can include</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• biographies</li> <li>• autobiographies</li> <li>• memoirs</li> <li>• [...]</li> </ul> <p><b>Understanding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-fiction texts have structures that support factual information that can be evaluated for accuracy and authenticity.</li> </ul> <p><b>Skills and Procedures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine the genre of a variety of literary texts.</li> <li>• Determine the form of a variety of literary texts.</li> <li>• Describe a variety of literary forms and structures.</li> <li>• Identify if narratives are expressed in the first, second, or third person.</li> <li>• Provide personal opinions regarding the structure, content, or source of information expressed in informational texts.</li> </ul>
BC	English Language Arts Grade 5	Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connec- tions to others and to the world.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a variety of comprehension strate- gies before, during, and after reading, listening or viewing to guide inquiry and deepen understanding of text</li> <li>• Apply a variety of thinking skills to gain meaning from texts</li> <li>• Identify how differences in context, perspectives and voice influence mea- ning in texts</li> <li>• Recognize how literary elements, tech- niques and devices enhance meaning in texts</li> </ul>	<p>Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Story/text</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ forms, function and genres of text</li> <li>▪ text features</li> <li>▪ literary elements</li> <li>▪ literary devices</li> <li>▪ perspective/point of view</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Strategies and processes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ oral language strategies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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Province	Subject/Grade/Course	Unit/Big Idea	Competencies/Expectations	Concepts, Content, Strategies and Other Notes
MB	Social Studies 6 "Canada: A Country of Change (1867 to Present)"	Unit: An Emerging Nation (1914 to 1945) Learning Experience: World War II	<p>KG-042 Describe Canada's involvement in the Second World War and identify its impact on Canadian individuals and communities.</p> <p>Include: internment of ethnocultural groups; the Holocaust.</p> <p>Vocabulary: dictatorship, antisemitism, Holocaust, propaganda [...]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students read and discuss poems or other writings created by survivors or victims of the Holocaust. In a guided discussion, students share what they may have heard about the Holocaust and pose questions to research on the subject.</li> <li>• Students engage in a Literature Circle using books about the Holocaust.</li> <li>• Students use primary and secondary sources to research the Holocaust and engage in a "brain-writing" activity.</li> </ul>
ON	Language Arts, Grade 5	Oral Communication	<p><b>Comprehension Strategies</b></p> <p>1.3 identify a variety of listening comprehension strategies and use them appropriately before, during, and after listening in order to understand and clarify the meaning of oral texts</p> <p><b>Demonstrating Understanding</b></p> <p>1.4 demonstrate an understanding of the information and ideas in oral texts by summarizing important ideas and citing a variety of supporting details</p> <p><b>Extending Understanding</b></p> <p>1.6 extend understanding of oral texts by connecting the ideas in them to their own knowledge, experience, and insights; to other texts, including print and visual texts; and to the world around them</p> <p><b>Analysing Texts</b></p> <p>1.7 analyze oral texts and explain how specific elements in them contribute to meaning</p> <p><b>Point of View</b></p> <p>1.8 identify the point of view presented in oral texts and ask questions to identify missing or possible alternative points of view</p>	

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Province	Subject/Grade/ Course	Unit/Big Idea	Competencies/Expectations	Concepts, Content, Strategies and Other Notes
ON	Language Arts, Grade 6	Reading	<p><b>Variety of Texts</b> 1.1 read a wide variety of texts from diverse cultures, including literary texts, graphic texts and informational texts</p> <p><b>Purpose</b> 1.2 identify a variety of purposes for reading and choose reading materials appropriate for those purposes</p> <p><b>Text Features</b> 2.3 identify a variety of text features and explain how they help readers understand texts</p> <p><b>Elements of Style</b> 2.4 identify various elements of style – including voice, word choice, and the use of hyperbole, strong verbs, dialogue, and complex sentences – and explain how they help communicate meaning</p>	
QC	Grade 6: English Language Arts		<p>Competency #1 To read and listen to literary, popular and information-based texts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Key Features of the Competency</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To use a response process when reading and listening to literary, popular and information-based texts</li> <li>▪ To construct her/his own view of the world through reading and listening to literary, popular and information-based texts</li> <li>▪ To construct a profile of self as reader</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Evaluation Criteria (Cycle three)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Begins to broaden repertoire of familiar literary, popular and information-based texts beyond favourites</li> <li>▪ Begins to respond to the interpretative processes of her/his peers</li> <li>▪ Reflects on reading progress by explaining reading preferences and use of strategies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	