Issues of Responsibility

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Issues of Responsibility:
Suggestions for the Educator

One of the most common questions when studying the Holocaust is, “Why couldn’t anyone stop the Nazis?” There are no easy answers to this dilemma, but several ways to approach it.

1) Look at the ways that victims did resist.
2) Study the actions of rescuers, their motivations, and the risks they faced.
3) Learn how Nazis justified their actions.
4) Look at world responses to the plight of refugees.

The following lessons are linked to a variety of skills, ranging from math skills to sequencing, but all address the actions of different groups of people during the Holocaust. The first reading captures several subtle ways that victims did resist: by hiding, by organizing warning systems, and by passing as someone else. The second series of lessons are based on rescuers’ efforts. The third section focuses on the Nuremberg Trials, when the highest ranking Nazis were tried for some of the crimes committed during this period. Finally, you will find lessons on the voyage of the S.S. St. Louis—a ship of Jewish refugees who were trying to flee to safety in the United States.

Each of the lessons in this section has an underlying theme: “What did various people do—or not do—during this period? And what were the results of their actions?” The issue of responsibility is difficult to address. Expect that close inspection will yield more questions than answers.
Odette Meyers

Many of the people hunted by Nazis were children at the time. Odette Meyers, a small French Jewish girl, spent much of her young life resisting the Nazi efforts to make Europe “free of Jews.” The following excerpt tells how she and her mother were hidden by a kind neighbor when two soldiers came to arrest them.

Later, Odette pretended to be Catholic and attended a convent school in a small French village. She spent the war years going to mass and learning just like any other “Catholic child.” Many Jewish children were saved in this manner.

Both Odette and her mother survived the Nazi efforts and were reunited after the war. To learn more about Odette Meyers’ experiences, watch the video “Courage to Care.” This video includes an interview with her as an adult.

Madame Marie, excerpt from A Place to Hide: True Stories of Holocaust Rescues by Jayne Pettit (Scholastic, Inc.; New York, 1993)

Early on the morning of the raid, Madame Marie heard the rumbling of German trucks and the screams of Jewish neighbors being taken from their homes. Running upstairs to warn Odette and her mother about what was happening, she ordered the two to follow her into her own apartment, and hurriedly shoved them into a broom closet seconds before the Germans appeared at her door.

With no time to lose, Marie greeted the soldiers with a flourish of hospitality, uncorking a bottle of wine and showing them to her kitchen table. As the search team emptied their glasses, the Frenchwoman thanked them repeatedly for what they were doing.
While Odette and her mother huddled in the tiny closet, Marie poured a second glass of wine for the Germans who, by now, had started asking questions about the two Jews they had come to arrest. Marie responded with a stream of anti-Semitic insults about Odette and her mother. And all the while, she continued to pour the wine.

Then, one of the Germans began threatening Madame Marie and demanded to see the Meyers apartment. Flying into a tirade, Marie insisted that they would not want to step into such a filthy place. And besides, she grumbled, the Meyers had left for a vacation in the country, something she herself couldn't possibly afford.

As the last of the wine was emptied, the Germans staggered to the door and left. Marie listened as the soldiers moved on down the hallway and then ran to the phone to call her husband, Henri. Like Odette's mother and many others, Henri was active in the French Resistance and had helped many Jews find safety in the countryside. Hurrying home from his job, Henri told Odette to follow him immediately.
Sequence Exercise
For Odette Meyers

In both written and spoken language, we use certain words or phrases to explain a sequence of events. Sequence is another word for the order or arrangement of objects or actions. Sometimes, to clarify or explain a situation, you need to tell about something that happened earlier in time. Understanding sequence words and learning how to use them effectively helps you communicate clearly with other people.

PART I
Many sequence words are used in English. Here are a few sequence words:

first  next  before  until  when  finally

Write a list of at least 6 more sequence words. If you have a hard time thinking of six, look at the Madame Marie reading, other readings, or even at a cookbook! We use sequence words so often that we forget their purpose!

1. _____________________________  4. _____________________________
2. _____________________________  5. _____________________________
3. _____________________________  6. _____________________________
PART II
After reading Odette Meyers, read each of the following sentences. In the spaces at the left, number the sentences in the order that they happened from 1 to 7.

_____ German soldiers came to arrest Odette and her mother.
_____ Marie entertained the German soldiers.
_____ Henri told Odette to follow him.
_____ Madame Marie heard the rumbling of trucks.
_____ Marie telephoned her husband.
_____ Madame Marie shoved Odette and her mother in a broom closet.

PART III
Think of a simple set of actions that you do each day that have a specific sequence. In other words, if you do the steps out of order, you will not succeed. Write at least 3 sentences describing your sequence. Remember to use sequence words to help the reader understand!

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The Work of Rescuers

Many Holocaust survivors were saved from death by heroic acts of friends, neighbors, and complete strangers. Some of these acts seem minor, like sharing food or passing a message, but helping any “enemy of the state” was punishable by imprisonment. Other acts by rescuers were truly heroic, like the Danish Resistance’s efforts to transport people by boat to Sweden, a much safer country. As you can see on the map, both Sweden and Denmark are close to Germany by water, so much of their work took place at night.

The number of rescuers in Nazi-occupied Europe during the Holocaust was extremely small. Some people estimate that $\frac{1}{2}$ of 1% (or .5%) of the non-Jewish population helped rescue people who were at risk. This percentage means that out of 100 people, only about $\frac{1}{2}$ of a person would have helped. Since you can not split a person in half, another way to think of this percentage is that only one person out of each 200 helped as a rescuer!

The next three lessons refer to an excerpt from *Number the Stars* by Jewish refugees are ferried out of Denmark aboard Danish fishing boats bound for Sweden (1943).
Lois Lowry (Yearling Books, 1990). Chapter 12 is a “cliff-hanger” reading about a young girl who is waiting for her mother to return from a risky rescue effort. After you read this chapter, you will probably want to read the entire book—few people are able to stop here!

Although *Number the Stars* is fiction, the circumstances are similar to those that occurred in Denmark in 1943. To learn more about the actual circumstances, read “Rescue” in *Tell Them We Remember*, or watch the video, “Courage to Care.”
Vocabulary Words

for Number the Stars (Chapter 12)

Use the context of each word below to infer its meaning. Write the meaning of each word, then write a sentence using the word.

1. crumpled______________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. gnarled ________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. heap __________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. peered ________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________

5. pried __________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________

6. scampering ____________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________

7. squinted ______________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________

8. unnecessarily __________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________
Context and Situation Inference Questions

for *Number the Stars* (Chapter 12)

The chapter you have read is from the middle of *Number the Stars*. If you read carefully, you will be able to uncover a lot of information about the story’s characters and context. You will “infer” details like a detective: you collect the details, then predict how they fit together. You use these skills everyday to understand the world around you.

1. Who are the characters in this chapter? What do you know about each character?

__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. What is the central theme of the chapter? What is the overall mood?

__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. In what country does this chapter take place? What other places are mentioned?

__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. Think about the setting for the chapter. Sketch the setting as you imagine it in your mind. Compare your sketch with other students to find similarities and differences. Read over the chapter to check or compare details about the setting.

__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________

5. What do you think happened to Annemarie’s mother? Imagine and describe what might happen next as if you were the author of the book.

__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
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Essay Writing Skills

for *Number the Stars* (Chapter 12)

**Steps to Writing an Essay:**

1. After reading Chapter 12 of *Number the Stars*, select one of the following questions for your 200 word essay. The underlined part of the question is the main idea for your essay.

2. Before you begin writing your essay, follow these steps:
   a. “Brainstorm” by writing a list of your thoughts and ideas about the topic.
   b. Organize your list. Group together things that are similar. Think about the best order for your categories or groups.
   c. Plan your essay. Be sure to include an introduction and an ending that link your ideas to the main idea.

3. Write your essay. Be sure to write complete sentences, follow your plan, and support the main idea.

4. When you are finished, read your essay to yourself (silently or aloud). Answer the following questions.
   a. Does your essay make sense?
   b. Have you used complete sentences?
   c. Does your essay support the main idea?

5. Revise your essay if any answers are “no.” Repeat step 4 until you can answer “yes” to all 3 questions.

**Essay Questions (select one)**

1. **Can children be as brave as adults?** State your opinion and give reasons for your answer. You may want to support your reasons with examples.

2. Reflect on your own childhood. **Can you remember an experience that was especially exciting or important to you as a child?** Describe the experience and discuss why it is memorable to you.

3. **Do you think childhood experiences affect a person’s life after they become an adult?** State your opinion and give reasons for your answer. Support your reasons with examples.
The Nuremberg Trials

After the war, some of those responsible for the crimes of the Holocaust were brought to trial. The trials were held in Nuremberg, Germany. Nuremberg was known as the “mystic homeplace of Nazism” hosting annual Nazi party pageants. Judges from the allied powers—Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union and the United States—presided over the hearings. The U.S. President Harry Truman appointed Justice Robert Jackson to head the prosecution team for the U.S.

Who Was Charged?

Twenty-two Nazi criminals were indicted at Nuremberg, although an estimated 4 1/2 million people belonged to the “brown shirts” or Nazi storm troopers. Twenty-one of the indicted actually went to trial because one person committed suicide. Adolf Hitler, the Nazi leader and person most often blamed for the Holocaust, was missing at the trials. He committed suicide in the final days of the war, as did several of his closest aids.

Overcoming Language Barriers

Most of the people who were charged spoke German, but the prosecutors spoke other languages including English, French and Russian. New technology from IBM provided a solution. Each person in the courtroom wore headphones for instant translation to their native language.

The Charges

The crimes of the Nazi government were unique, so no one knew exactly how to proceed with an international trial. Agreements were reached on how to try the Nazis. Justice Jackson from the United States came up with an idea to try the Nazis with a conspiracy. The conspiracy consisted of three crimes: waging an aggressive war, crimes against humanity (murder, enslavement, and other acts), and other war crimes.

Adult Learners Speak Out

“I would like to understand how all of the Nazis got away with all of those murders after it was all over with. Why wasn’t anything done to the soldiers?”
Finding Proof

The next step for the four prosecution teams was deciding how to present evidence. Originally, the prosecutors thought that eyewitness testimony was their best option. Then they realized that the Nazis documented and organized a lot of information about every prisoner, camp, and action. Justice Jackson wanted to use documentation rather than eyewitnesses to be sure of a guilty verdict and provide a clear record of the Nazi crimes. Other justices wanted to rely on eyewitness testimony. They thought it would capture more of the world’s attention. Jackson’s idea prevailed, and documentation was used to prove the case.

Their Plea

All accused Nazis pleaded “not guilty.” Many of them claimed they did not know what was happening. Some complained that they were being singled out for actions of an entire nation. The most common defense, though, was a denial of personal responsibility. The Nazis claimed they were “simply following orders.”
The Outcome

Of the twenty-one men who stood trial, fourteen were sentenced to death by hanging. The remaining seven received prison sentences. Before one of the men could be hanged, he committed suicide with poison smuggled into his cell.

Later, a second set of trials took place in Germany. It included 185 defendants, including doctors, military officers, concentration camp directors, judges, and business executives. Again, all pleaded “not guilty.” Some defended themselves with the same “simply following orders” excuse.

Those who were directly involved in the killing—doctors and concentration camp heads—received the most severe sentences. Some were sentenced to death by hanging. Business executives who used slave labor received short prison sentences. Thirty-five defendants were not proven guilty.

Reactions to the Trials

Many people were frustrated that so few people were punished for the crimes of the Holocaust. In later years, other trials took place to charge the worst Nazi offenders. Often their punishment did not fit their crimes. For example, Kurt Möbius, who ordered at least 100,000 people killed, was sentenced to eight years in prison as an accessory to murder.

Many top Nazis escaped to other countries (including the United States) and took on new identities. Ever since the end of World War II, “Nazi hunters” have searched the world for these criminals. For the victims of the Holocaust, justice is an impossible goal, but survival and success are their greatest revenge.
Vocabulary List For the “The Nuremberg Trials”

Define each word. Write a sentence using the word correctly.

Accessory _____________________________________________

Barriers ______________________________________________

Conspiracy ____________________________________________

Defendants _____________________________________________

Documentation __________________________________________

Evidence ______________________________________________

Indicted ________________________________________________

International ___________________________________________

Mystic __________________________________________________

Prosecution _____________________________________________

Suicide _________________________________________________
Learning About
the Nazi Criminals

For the “The Nuremberg Trials”

To learn more about the fate of some Nazi criminals, watch “Nuremberg: Tyranny on Trial,” an A&E Home Video. This video lasts approximately 50 minutes, providing historical context with original film clips. Beware of some graphic archival footage!

Developing Critical Thinking Skills

The following questions can be used either for class discussion or for essays.

Revenge vs. Justice
1. Many people expressed a feeling that all Nazi criminals should be put up against a wall and shot. Instead, an international trial was held. If the Nazi criminals had been lined up and killed, would we know much about the Holocaust today?

Who Was Charged vs. Who Should Have Been Charged
2. Many Nazis charged with crimes against humanity claimed that their “hands were clean.” Although some never physically killed anyone, they ordered the deaths of millions of people. Who is guilty: the person who gave the orders or the one who pulled the trigger? Explain your answer.

3. “I was simply following orders” was the defense given by most all Nazi criminals. In Nazi-occupied Europe, the government and its agents committed mass murder. How are these killings different from today’s crimes like drive-by shootings or the Oklahoma City bombing?

Language Barriers vs. a Fair Trial
4. The Nazi criminals on trial spoke German while the prosecutors spoke other languages including English, French, and Russian. Headphones were worn by all so instant translation could occur during the trials. Many words have different meanings when translated to another language. How can language barriers pose a problem for clear communication?
Critical Thinking: Analyzing Quotations
For the “The Nuremberg Trials”

Read the following quotes. Select one and write a paragraph about its meaning.

1. “Those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it.” —George Santayana

2. “In this hour, I can only express the hope that the victors will treat them [the Nazi criminals] with generosity.” —Alfred Jodl, a Nazi General who was later hanged for his crimes

3. “I followed these orders because they came from the highest leaders of the state and not because I was in any way afraid.” —Kurt Möbius, Nazi criminal charged as an accessory to the murder of 100,000 people.

4. “To punish these men after a trial will stand better in history. Moreover, this process will develop a record of Nazi criminality which will stand in history.” —Henry L. Stimson, United States Secretary of War
Who Knew the Murderers?

A poem by Ursula Duba

Ursula Duba's poem, "Who Knew the Murderers," is excellent for addressing questions of responsibility. Ms. Duba is a German gentile who recalls her childhood in her book, Tales from a Child of the Enemy (Penguin Books, 1995). She was born in Germany during World War II. She learned of the Holocaust as a young adult and felt betrayed by her country for its silence.

"Who Knew the Murderers" is a thought-provoking poem for readers of all academic abilities. Although the vocabulary is relatively easy, readers need a basic grasp of the Holocaust's historical context to understand the ideas presented. Due to its lack of punctuation, this poem works best if read aloud to low-level readers.

Discussion Questions

1. What images in the poem are most vivid for you? Why? Look at photographic images from the Holocaust years and consider what jobs were necessary to create each situation or event.

2. Read the 10-line passage starting with "forbidding Jews." Discuss ways the discrimination in this poem is similar to that in other times and places (for example, during segregation in the United States in the 1950s).

3. Are there events of your childhood that took years to understand? Compare your newfound awareness to the author's. How did her conversation with the survivor (as told in "Who Knew the Murderers") change her perspective?

4. After reading and discussing the context of the poem, discuss its style and form. If it had punctuation, would it be as effective?
The Voyage of the St. Louis

Why didn't more people leave Germany and Europe when conditions began to get hostile? This question can be answered a lot of different ways. Each family had different reasons and faced different problems with leaving. Learn more about the conditions people faced by studying the voyage of the S.S. St. Louis.

Many Jewish families were desperate to leave Germany after Kristallnacht, “The Night of Broken Glass.” The S.S. St. Louis, a German ocean ship, was scheduled to leave Hamburg, Germany to go to Havana, Cuba. When the ship left on May 13, 1939, there were 936 passengers on board.

All but 6 of those passengers were Jewish.

Most of the Jews on the ship to Cuba planned to move to the United States as soon as possible, but they were on a waiting list. Many of the families thought it would be safer and closer to wait in Cuba than in Germany—where conditions became worse each day. The people on the ship were forced to leave all of their money and possessions behind. The Nazis did not let valuables leave the country. The people who boarded the ship were happy to be able to leave a country so full of hate, but sad to leave their friends, their homes, and often, other family members.

As the St. Louis arrived in the harbor of Havana, the captain was told that the people on board were not welcome in Cuba. Obviously, the passengers were fearful. They gave up everything to get away from the Nazis, but now they had nowhere to land.

In 1939 when the captain of the S.S. St. Louis asked the United States for permission to dock in Miami, Florida, the U.S. had a immigration “quota system” in effect. Although the Nazis' abusive treatment of the Jews was well known, the captain’s request was turned down. The

Vocabulary to Know

- **quota system**: a set of laws that limited the number of people who could come into the country each year.
- **refugees**: people who leave their countries because of a threat to their safety.
- **immigrants**: people who choose to leave their homeland to live in another country.
- **prejudice**: a negative attitude or opinion about a group of people without regard to individual differences within the group.
Jewish men, women, and children were not welcome here either.

With nowhere left to turn, the S.S. St. Louis headed back to Europe. Four countries opened their doors to passengers: Belgium, Holland, England, and France. The people who stayed in England were relatively safe, but the Nazis soon invaded the other three countries. Many of the people who tried to flee for safety in Cuba but were forced to returned to Europe later and died during the Holocaust.

To learn more about what happened on this voyage, watch the video, “Sea Tales: The Doomed Voyage of the St. Louis” (A&E Home Video) or read the chapter about this voyage in *Tell Them We Remember*.

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**About Immigration, Refugees, and Quotas**

Even though the United States is called the “land of immigrants,” people from other countries are not always welcomed into the country. Laws governing immigration change from time to time. Sometimes laws change because of economic conditions. During hard times, people do not want immigrants taking scarce jobs. Sometimes the laws reflect common attitudes—including prejudice against specific groups of people.

**Examples U.S. immigration laws:**

- **1882** Chinese immigrants could not enter the U.S.
- **1907** Japanese immigrants could not enter the U.S.
- **1917** Immigrants over 16 had to pass test to prove they could read and write at least one language.
- **1921** The Quota Act limited immigration based on the number of people who had already immigrated from a particular country.
- **1929** The National Origins Act revised details of the Quota Act and set a maximum of 150,000 immigrants per year.
- **1965** The National Origin System was stopped, but preference was given to people with special skills and those with family members already in the U.S.
- **1978** Congress set the total number of immigrants allowed at 290,000 per year.
Questions on Immigration, Quotas, and Refugees
For the Voyage of the St. Louis

1. Based on the immigration laws shown and the *Voyage of the St. Louis* reading, why do you think the U.S. refused to allow the passengers of the S.S. St. Louis to land in 1939?

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2. Do you see any examples of prejudice in the immigration laws on the list? If so, describe how one law seems to be prejudiced.

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3. Do you think there are still prejudiced attitudes about immigrants coming to the U.S. today? Explain your answer.

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Reviewing Math Skills
For the Voyage of the St. Louis

Use *Tell Them We Remember* (pg. 28-29) for this exercise.

1. Use the map on page 29 of *Tell Them We Remember*.
   A. Estimate how many miles the passengers of the S.S. St. Louis traveled to get to Cuba. _____________
   
   B. About how many miles did the passengers travel altogether? ______________

2. Using the information shown on the map, how many days did the passengers travel? ______________
   (The month of May has 31 days).

3. There were 936 passengers total. All but 6 passengers were Jewish.
   Rounding to the nearest whole number, what percentage of the passengers were Jewish? ______________

4. Of the 936 passengers, 288 got off in England where they were relatively safe.
   Rounding to the nearest whole number, what percentage of the passengers stayed in England? ____________