

Personal Experiences

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Linking to Personal Experiences: Suggestions for the Educator

The events of the Holocaust happened to ordinary people. Perhaps the hardest part of teaching about historical events is convincing learners that the information is relevant to their lives. Effective lessons reinforce that each person who was affected by a historical event had similar feelings, thoughts, hopes, and dreams as each of us. Understanding personal experiences helps learners relate history—and the importance of its lessons—to their own lives. A clearer understanding of history helps us avoid the mistakes of the past.

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

The Holocaust is recent enough in the past that many people who were affected by it are still alive. Eyewitnesses to this event—including survivors, liberators, people who escaped, or others—can teach effective lessons by telling their own experiences. Whenever possible, ask an eyewitness to speak to your class. Remember, many Holocaust survivors experienced an interruption in their education like adult learners! Do not assume that there are no eyewitnesses in your area—they look just like the man next door or the woman in front of you in the grocery line.

To find a local survivor who is willing to speak to classes, contact your local Jewish Federation or a rabbi. Remember that not all survivors are Jewish! It is more difficult—but not impossible—to find “other victims.”

To find a concentration camp liberator, contact your local Veterans Administration office or Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post.

If eyewitnesses to the Holocaust are not available to speak to your students, many excellent videos are available. “One Survivor Remembers” is a compelling HBO documentary in which Gerda Weismann Klein describes her own experiences. The video is a manageable 30 minutes long and provides some historical context. For those who want to know more about her experiences, her memoir is entitled, *All But My Life*.

Linking Holocaust experiences to the personal histories of your students also reinforces the humanness of history. In this section, you will find several lessons in

Each survivor of the Holocaust has a unique personal history. When you invite someone to speak to your class, briefly interview the person so you can appropriately prepare your students.

Consider these variations between survivors:

- some fled Europe early, leaving behind their family and friends
- some hid during the worst of the period
- some adopted false identities
- some children were given to other families for safety
- some went to labor camps, concentration camps, or death camps
- and many experienced several of these conditions

Adult Learners Speak Out

Mr. Reiss touched me deeply, for some reason, the reason—his loss. I related to that. The mourning over his father, reminded me of the loss of my father 2 years ago. I know what it is like to mourn a father and what might have been.

Adult Learners Speak Out

“They were both interesting. the things they talked about were sad because it happen to them and their family. After they finished everybody sit around, Began to talk about the things they’ve seen and how would it feel if something like that would happen to you or your family. Then, it got real sad. Everybody was getting emostional. You could feel the things everybody was relating to.”

“[I liked] how she told everything that happened to her not leaving out the bad things. Leting people now know how they were treated.”

“I felt a small part of the pain that a person felt during the Holocaust. I learned how bad the Holocaust really was.”

“It was very sad that the lady in this movie did not get to have a normal childhood. I am glad she now gets to live the rest of her years in peace.”

which adult learners are encouraged to record their own life experiences. These lessons reinforce writing and critical thinking skills as they draw on the subject they know best—their own lives. For some learners, these lessons are difficult reminders of a painful past, but many of the teachers find that commonalities between students—both positive and negative—help unite members of a class.

Other ideas to focus on personal experiences during the Holocaust include:

- **Using diaries**

- *The Diary of Anne Frank* is widely available.
- *Children in the Holocaust and World War II: Their Secret Diaries* has excerpts from 22 diaries that can be read separately.
- Have students read all or parts of memoirs, like *All But My Life*.
- *The Big Lie* is a beginning reading level memoir.

- **Reading poetry**

- *Tales from a Child of the Enemy*, by Ursula Duba, is a volume of poems describing her introduction to the Holocaust as a young German gentile.
- *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* is a volume of poems and drawings by children who were prisoners in the Terezin Concentration Camp.

- **Viewing videotapes**

- “Heil Hitler: Confession of a Nazi Youth” tells of a German youth’s experiences.
- “Courage to Care” includes interviews with rescuers from different parts of Europe.
- “Camera of My Family” tells of the plight of one Jewish family.

The Identification Card Project

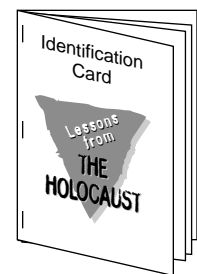
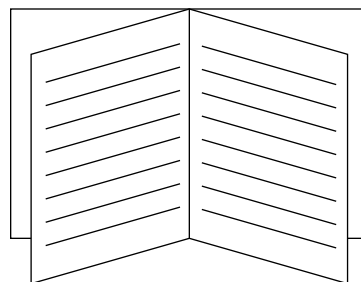
History is most often learned as a set of facts about big events, but each person who “was there” had a unique experience. Each person’s perspective (or view) is different. To understand perspectives better, think about what happens during a car wreck. All witnesses see different details, depending on where they are and what they are doing at the instant the wreck occurs.

Often when we study history, the stories of past events seem distant and lifeless. Remember that ordinary people experienced “history” as their daily lives, just like the today’s events are a part of our lives. Our experiences will be part of “history” in the future.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum created Identification (ID) Cards for museum visitors to “meet” individuals whose lives were affected by the Holocaust. Each ID card tells about the experiences of a real person during the Holocaust.

In this project, you will first study the ID card for a person who experienced the Holocaust. As you read their card, think about the person’s life. How are they similar to you? How are they different? Next, you will be creating an ID card for yourself. What people and events have shaped your life?

On your ID card, you will be asked to think about your goals and what you would like to do in the future. Finally, you will be asked to compare your life to the life of the person on the Holocaust ID card.



To assemble: copy ID Card pages front to back, fold in half and staple at the crease.

Learning about the Personal Histories of Holocaust Victims

1. **Select an Identification Card.** You may want to choose a “partner” who is the same sex as you.

2. **Read the top of the first page of the card.**

a. Whose ID card do you have? _____

b. Can you say your new partner's name? yes no

(Note: If the name on your ID card is difficult, you may want to use a similar name that is easier for you to remember. Many names and places are difficult to pronounce for people from other parts of the world.)

c. When was your partner born? _____

d. In what country was your partner born? _____

Find that country on your *1933 Map of Europe*.

3. **In your own words, describe an interesting detail from your partner’s personal history before 1933.**

4. **In your own words, describe a detail from 1933 to 1939.** *(These were the years after Hitler came to power but before World War II)*

5. **In your own words, describe a detail from 1940 to 1945.** *(During World War II)*

6. **After 1945.** *(After World War II)*

Your Personal History: An ID Card Project

Each person has a unique personal history. Just like the people who are on the ID cards in the first part of this lesson, your history is unique—it is yours alone. Other people (your family, friends, and community) share parts of your history, but their story is not identical to yours. Writing your personal history helps you understand your unique place in the world.

1. Complete this questionnaire to begin gathering and organizing information about your personal history. Include the names of places you have lived.
2. Collect a few photographs or other important mementos of your life (you may want to photocopy these rather than turning in your originals).
3. On a map, find and mark the places you have lived.
4. Finally, create your own ID card on the form provided OR create a new format for your ID card.

Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Place of Birth: _____

Parents' Names: _____

Brothers and Sisters: _____

Family Background: _____

Important events as baby or a young child: _____

Important events as a youth: _____

Important events as an adult: _____

Your current situation or future goals: _____

Other information you would like to include: _____

Identification Card

*This Project was adapted from
The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Identification Card Project.*

*It was designed to help adult learners
document their life experiences and future goals
as they learn more about the Holocaust.*

*Like every victim of the Holocaust,
we each have our own personal history
of good times and bad.*

Adult Education Program

NAME OF PROGRAM:

ADDRESS:

TELEPHONE NUMBER:

()



Influences on an Individual's Life

A personal history—for you and every other person—is shaped by a variety of factors. These factors include:

- your family's background (*like wealth, race, and religion*)
- personal decisions you make (*like a decision to get married, have a child, or finish school*)
- other people's actions (*like a parent's decision to move*)
- unavoidable natural events (*like a family death, a flood, or a house fire*)
- and political or community conditions (*like a depression or war*).

Study the Holocaust ID Card that you read in the first part of this lesson and the personal ID Card you made in the second part of the lesson. Fill in the chart on the next page to discover how personal histories are shaped. In some categories, you may have to infer (to figure out by reasoning) an answer. For example, the Holocaust ID Cards do not say that the war started in 1939, but we know it did from reading *The Holocaust: Over Twelve Years of Fear*. We can infer how the war changed the person's life.

INFLUENCES ON AN INDIVIDUAL'S LIFE

FACTORS	PERSONAL HISTORY FROM A HOLOCAUST ID CARD	YOUR PERSONAL HISTORY
Family Background		
Personal Decisions		
Other People's Actions		
Unavoidable Natural Events		
Political/ Community Conditions		

Note: Some sections may not have examples and others may have several.

Masking Our Identities

Most people choose to hide parts of their identity or their feelings from public view. Some people rarely discuss a painful experience of their past. Others create a false “history” rather than telling the truth. The focus of this lesson is “masking”—or hiding—either true feelings or part of a person’s identity.

The first reading is a poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar called “We Wear the Mask.” This poem describes how African-Americans in the late 1800’s hid their true feelings about their treatment in America. Their pain was hidden, “With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,” but certainly present.

During the Holocaust, many people who were normally honest found themselves having to lie in order to fight the Nazi government. Some people managed to survive the Holocaust because they hid their true identity. Others protected victims through lies and deception. In *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* (Pantheon Books, 1991), Art Spiegelman draws his father’s experiences during the Holocaust. The short excerpt included provides one example of masking from *Maus*.

The purpose of this lesson is to think critically about how and why people mask information about themselves. To think more about how people masked information during the Holocaust, read individual chapters from *A Place to Hide: True Stories of Holocaust Rescues* by Jayne Pettit. You will find many examples of masked identities, feelings, and actions. By thinking about masked identities, we can learn more about both ourselves and other people.

Examples of Masking from *A Place to Hide*

—**Oskar Schindler** pretended to be a “good Nazi” as he and his wife, **Emilie**, saved over a thousand Jews from certain death.

—**Odette Meyers**, a young Jewish child, was put in a convent as if she was Catholic.

—**André Trocmé** and the townspeople of a small French village, Le Chambon, created an elaborate system to protect people who fled from the Nazis.

Masking Our Identities

We Wear the Mask

—a poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
A mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
 We wear the mask.

We smile, but, oh great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured soul arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
 We wear the mask!

About the Poet

Paul Laurence Dunbar was an African-American poet who lived from 1872 to 1906. In his poem, “We Wear the Mask,” he shares the experience of hiding true feelings and pains from the rest of the world. He uses the pronoun “we” to indicate that the experience of “masking” feelings was a common coping mechanism for African-Americans during his lifetime. Sometimes groups of people cover their feelings by smiling or pretending they are unaffected by conditions or events in their lives.

Maus: A Survivor's Tale

—by Art Spiegelman
(Pantheon Books, 1991)

About the Cartoon Format Biography

In *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, Art Spiegelman describes his father's experiences. Although his drawings are symbolic, the biography of his father's life is factual. Spiegelman uses masks to describe times when his father and mother chose to hide their Jewishness as a survival mechanism in Nazi-controlled Europe.

Pay attention to how each character is drawn. Jewish people are drawn as mice, Poles as pigs, and Nazis as cats. When a Jew is passing as a non-Jewish Pole, he or she is drawn wearing a pig mask.

Excerpt from *MAUS: A Survivor's Tale* by Art Spiegelman. Reprinted with permission from Pantheon Books.



The Masks We Wear

Writing Assignment

After reading both the poem “We Wear the Mask” and the excerpt from *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* (by Art Spiegelman, pages 136-137), consider other times when people choose to hide information about themselves from other people. You are welcome to use your own experiences.

A. Pre-Writing Exercise

1) Briefly describe a situation where you, another person, or a group of people tries to hide information about themselves from other people. For example: you may want to describe a situation where you choose to “mask” that you participate in adult education classes.

2) Which is being hidden: true feelings or an aspect of personal identity? Why?

3) From whom are you/they hiding information?

4) What would most likely happen if the hidden information were revealed? Would the situation be life-threatening? Job-threatening? Or is information hidden to protect a person's pride?

5) Briefly describe a "safe" person or place where you, the person or group could reveal this information about themselves.

B. Essay Writing Assignment

Use your answers to the Pre-Writing Exercise to plan, organize, and develop a 200-word essay on either masked identities or masked feelings.

Teaching with Videos

Excellent video resources are available to teach adult learners about the Holocaust and related issues. Often they include personal testimonies, reminding classes that these were real people's experiences not long ago. In multi-level classrooms, the videos serve to unify otherwise academically diverse groups of students, and allow classroom discussions between students of varying abilities. Finally, videos are a relatively fast, interesting way to convey detailed information and to encourage students to want to know more about a subject.

“

This has been a life-encompassing project. Everywhere I looked, something seemed to relate to the Holocaust. It was almost as if I had grown a set of antenna that picked up signals about relevant topics and interpreted seemingly unrelated materials in a relevant way.

”

Adult Learners Speak Out

“[The video] has made me aware of the conditions and the emotions that they must have felt. The people were a little hard to understand, due to there accents.”

(On Courage to Care): “It has told me that no matter what kind of situation they were in and that they could be killed they still tried to help the others.”

(On One Survivor Remembers): “It was one of those films that was so great, but then again, so awful.”

(On One Survivor Remembers): “My reaction to the film. My heart was touch. About the things that those women and their parent had to go through. I know that you have to have very strong will power. Some survive, some didn't. It was very sad.”

Suggested Video and Reading Pairs

The following list is a starting point for selecting videos for your classes—many others are available. Videos often bridge directly to specific readings and lessons, which are noted in the chart in descending order of difficulty (full bibliographical information is available in the appendix).

VIDEO	RELATED BOOKS, CHAPTERS, AND READINGS
Camera of My Family	Tell Them We Remember (Parts One and Two) The Big Lie Promise of a New Spring
One Survivor Remembers	Promise of a New Spring Tell Them We Remember (Selected Chapters in Part Two) All But My Life
Courage to Care	The Lily Cupboard A Place to Hide Twenty and Ten Number the Stars USHMM Pamphlet, “Resistance during the Holocaust”
Schindler’s List	A Place to Hide (Chapter 2) Schindler’s List
Confessions of a Hitler Youth	Behind the Bedroom Wall Tales of a Child of the Enemy
Anne Frank Remembered	Anne Frank: Beyond the Diary The Diary of Anne Frank A Place to Hide (Chapter 1) Tell Them We Remember (“Afterword: Remembering the Children”)
The Purple Triangles	USHMM, “The Other Victims, Jehovah’s Witnesses” pamphlet Tell Them We Remember (“Enemies of the State”) The Other Victims
Voyage of the Damned	Tell Them We Remember (“Rescue”)
Nuremberg: Tyranny on Trial	Tell Them We Remember (“The Nuremberg Trials”) Tales from a Child of the Enemy (“Who Knew the Murderers”)



Videotape Review Form

Name of the videotape _____

Please rate this videotape: Excellent Good Poor

What did you learn from this videotape that you did not know before?

Did this videotape help you understand some part(s) of the Holocaust better? If so, what?

What did you like most about this videotape?

What did you dislike about this videotape?

Would you suggest showing this videotape to other adult learners? Why?

Nutrition: Food as a Weapon

When the United States stock market crashed in 1929, the economic effects were felt worldwide. Germany, like the U.S., was pushed into a severe depression during the 1930's. Food became scarce and extremely expensive. Some people describe the hard times by saying that it took a wheelbarrow full of money to buy a loaf of bread.

During World War II (1939-1945), the Nazis used food—ordinary food—as a weapon in their efforts to punish or kill their enemies. To understand how food was used as a weapon, consider the following information.

- The food allotment for Jewish ghetto residents was only enough to feed about 20% of the population. People starved to death daily in the ghettos. For example, in the Warsaw ghetto, food rations (or allowances) were as low as 300 calories for each person per day. Some people were able to smuggle or buy food from outside the ghetto. They ate as many as 1,100 calories on a “good” day.
- In concentration camps, most prisoners were allowed about 500 calories per day. Many of these people were forced to do slave labor. The Nazis planned to feed prisoners so little that they would die “naturally” from starvation in about 3 months. This method of killing people was “more efficient” than using bullets or poisonous gas. Efficiency was a big concern to the Nazis.

Holocaust survivor Noemi:

“The only food they gave us was so-called black coffee, what most of us used for washing our face. Water was not available. Later on, we got a little bread. We had to stand in line, 5 of us in one row and they put in the hand of the first one a big pail. Some vegetables, some dried vegetable, and something was swimming in that water. And without any cup or utensil, some of them had to drink it, give it to the next one, and give it to the next one. Most of the time, I didn’t even taste them.”

Holocaust survivor Livia:

“Lunch was a soup that had all kinds of vegetables in it, including grass, pebbles—the meat must have been horse meat if any...if we were lucky, we had potatoes. One of the vegetables...turnips. I can’t stand them. They were cut up in whatever was in it. You see, in Hungary, as I knew it, turnips were eaten by animals.... Supper time, I remember having a black piece of bread with a little square of margarine. Uh...but it got very bad later on.”

One Day Calorie Tally

Keep track of everything you eat for one day. Add all of your calories together for one day in order to understand better how the Nazis used food as a weapon.

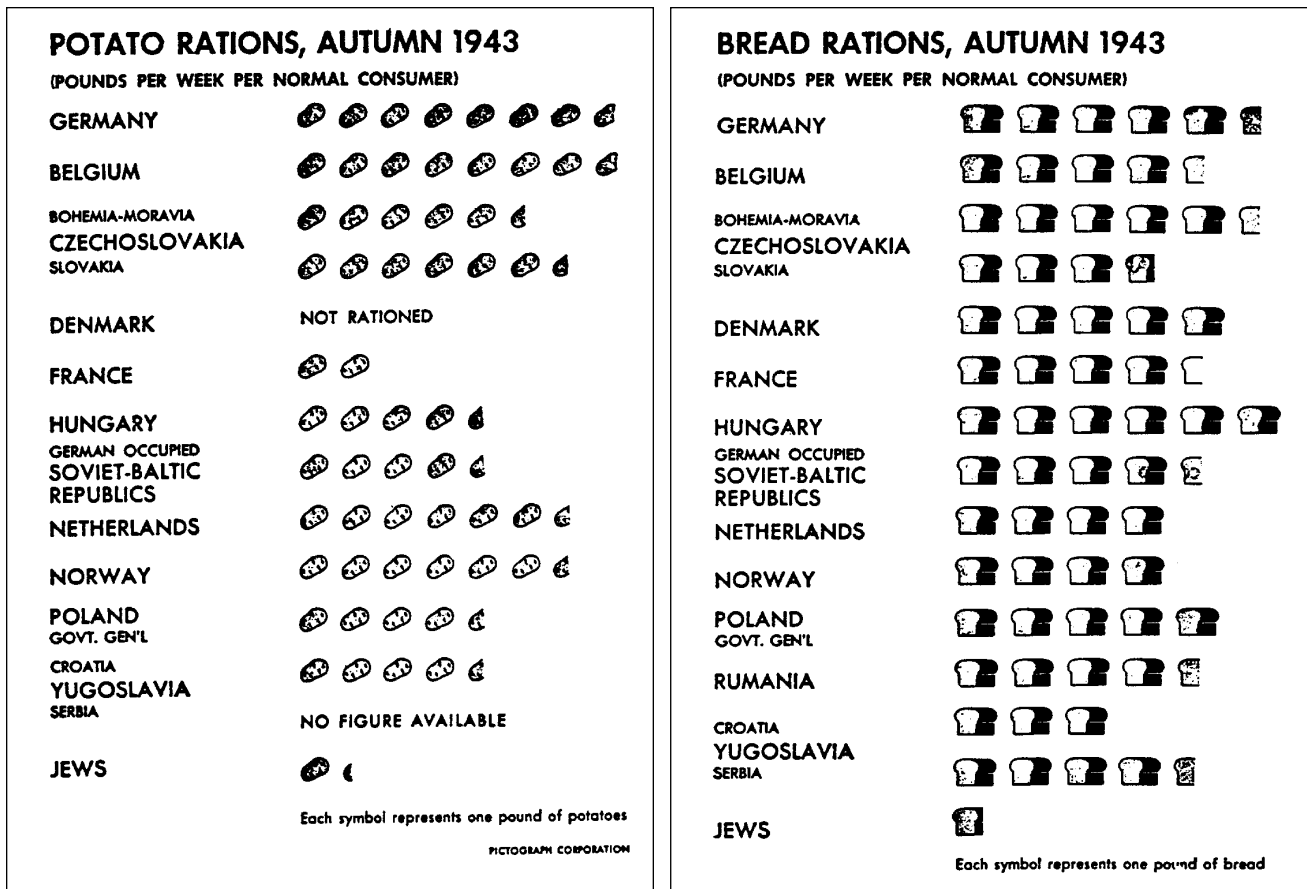
To track your calories, read the “Nutrition Facts” on the labels of the foods you eat or consult a “calorie counter” book. For example, if you eat cereal for breakfast, find the “serving size” at the top of the “Nutrition Facts” panel and measure out your cereal. Then read the number of calories per serving. Record that number of calories on your chart. You will have to estimate the calories for some foods. At the end of the day, add all of the calories together to find out how many calories of food you ate that day.

	FOOD	CALORIES
Breakfast	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
Lunch	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
Dinner	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
Snacks	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	TOTAL CALORIES FOR ONE DAY	_____

Typical Nutrition Facts Label

Nutrition Facts		
Serving Size 1 cup (30g)		
Servings Per Package about 13		
Amount Per Serving	1 Cup Cereal	1/2 Cup Cereal With Skim Milk
Calories	110	150
Calories from Fat	10	15
% Daily Value**		
Total Fat 1g*	2%	2%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%	1%
Sodium 270mg	11%	14%
Potassium 100mg	3%	9%
Total Carbohydrate 24g	8%	10%
Dietary Fiber 2g	7%	7%
Sugars 11g		
Other Carbohydrate 11g		
Protein 3g		
Vitamin A	25%	30%
Vitamin C	25%	
Calcium		

Nutrition Math and Analysis



Answer the following questions by reading the two ration charts about Nazi Europe.

- Which group(s) had the highest ration of potatoes?
Of bread?
- Which group had the smallest ration of potatoes?
Of bread?
- Which group had the second smallest ration of potatoes?
Of bread?
- How many total pounds of potatoes were rationed each week?
Of bread?
- What percentage of the total potato ration was for Jews?
What percentage of the total bread ration was for Jews?

Recommended Daily Allowance Chart

The Recommended Daily Allowances shown below are the average daily intakes needed by a healthy person in the United States. This chart shows only a few of the nutrients people need each day. More information on nutritional needs is available through the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

AGE (YR)	WEIGHT (LB)	HEIGHT (IN)	CALORIES (KCAL)	PROTEIN (G)	CALCIUM (MG)
Infants					
0.0-0.5	13	24	650	13	400
0.5-1.0	20	28	850	14	600
Children					
1-3	29	35	1300	16	800
4-6	44	44	1800	24	800
7-10	62	52	2000	28	800
Males					
11-14	99	62	2500	45	1200
15-18	145	69	3000	59	1200
19-24	160	70	2900	58	1200
25-50	174	70	2900	63	800
51+	170	68	2300	63	800
Females					
11-14	101	62	2200	46	1200
15-18	120	64	2200	44	1200
19-24	128	65	2200	46	1200
25-50	138	64	2200	50	800
51+	143	63	1900	50	800
Pregnant			+300	60	1200
Lactating					
1st 6 mo.			+500	65	1200
2nd 6 mo.			+500	62	1200

Questions for Recommended Daily Allowances

Answer the following questions using the Recommended Daily Allowances Chart and information in the Nutrition: Food as a Weapon reading.

1. What is the total daily calories recommended for you based on your age and sex?
2. What is the difference between your actual one day calorie intake (on the chart you completed) and the total recommended for you?
3. Suppose you are pregnant. How many calories should be added to your diet?
4. If you are lactating (breast-feeding), how many calories should be added to your diet?
5. What is the recommended amount of calcium for a female in the 11-14 age group?
For your age group?
6. How much protein does a child in the 1-3 age group need? How much calcium?
7. What is the difference between your recommended calorie intake and that allowed for a Jewish prisoner in a concentration camp?
8. Compare recommended daily allowances for men and women your age.
 - A. Which group requires more calories per day?
 - B. Based only on nutritional needs, which group (men or women) do you think would have a greater chance of surviving a concentration camp?
9. Think about things you know about the Holocaust. Name two other factors that you think might have affected a person's chance at survival in a Nazi concentration camp. Briefly explain why you think these might have helped a person to survive.