

BEST HOLOCAUST VIDEOS FOR CHILDREN

Cheryl Banks

Description: This session will give an overview of Holocaust videos that are appropriate for children under the age of 13. The quality and age-appropriateness of these videos will be analyzed, and a bibliography will be provided.

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Although the program book lists the title of my presentation as “Holocaust Videos for Young Viewers,” in fact the subject of this workshop is the “Best Holocaust Videos for Children.” This distinction (i.e. eliminating the word “young”) must be made because the Holocaust is a very sophisticated and complicated subject and must be handled with particular care and sensitivity when taught to children.

In fact, the first question that has to be addressed by teachers, librarians, and most importantly, by parents, is the age and maturity level of the children to whom the Holocaust is going to be taught. There are many opinions and theories about this, and we, at AJL, have had vigorous discussions on HaSafran, and at conventions, about the age that children should begin to learn about the Holocaust, what details should be introduced when, etc. There are many pedagogical and psychological theories in existence about this question; it is important for all of us to explore this topic, and to become comfortable with where we, ourselves, stand on the issue.

I have done much research about Holocaust education, books, and videos, and have a particular (albeit conservative) view of this subject. So, I begin this lecture with the caveat that everyone here knows my educational bias:

I believe that it is my responsibility to respect the parents’ roles in knowing their children, and their child’s capability to deal with disturbing information. Therefore, if a parent comes in to check out books about the Holocaust for their child, I make sure to talk to that parent about the child’s emotional as well as intellectual development, and then recommend the appropriate books.

I do believe that it is necessary to introduce the subject of the Holocaust to children as part of their education about the history of the Jewish people, but it should be taught gradually, in an age-appropriate manner. Children today have plenty to deal with, and while they should be taught about the Holocaust, it should only be when they have the maturity to deal with it, so why rush it?

Therefore, I do not believe in reading books about the Holocaust for my library's story hours until the children are in late 4th grade (age 9 turning 10), and when I do so, we do not get into detail about killing machines, shootings, children separated from parents, etc. In the same way, I do not believe it is appropriate to show Holocaust videos to children under the age of 10.

So now, to the videos. There are more than you think that are acceptable for children ages ten and up. I want to reiterate that I don't think that these videos should be shown to anyone younger. The children just wouldn't understand, so there's no point and it would just scare them.

There are two main genres in children's films about the Holocaust -- fiction and non-fiction. Fiction is far better, because you can deal with the specific events on the screen and with the moral implications of the behaviors, and use them as triggers. There are several that I will recommend in that area.

The best Holocaust video for younger children is *Nightmare: The Immigration of Joachim (Yochim) and Rachel*. It was produced 20 years ago by the Films for the Humanities, and is still available, and excellent. It basically portrays the Holocaust through the eyes of two children who lose their parents (their parents hide them in their apartment when the "round-ups" begin) and have to struggle to survive. The film then becomes a microcosm of everything that occurred in the Holocaust, but without showing the gory details. The children have to run from the Nazis, they struggle to find food in the ghetto, they meet partisans, they are put on a train to a camp (only to escape), they live in the woods, and they end up, dazed and bewildered, in America where their uncle greets them. The film flashes back and forth, between their journey from hell (all shown in black and white) and their entry into America, which is in color. I highly recommend this film to be shown to anyone age 10 and up.

I have several favorite fictionalized films that are appropriate for ages 12 and up. My very favorite is *Miracle at Moreaux*, by Wonderworks. It takes place in France during the occupation, and the setting is a children's school run by a nun (Loretta Swit). Some Jewish children are running from the Nazis, and despite their discomfort, the Christian children in the school are forced to take them in. Some anti-Semitic views of the children are expressed, which are then forcefully eliminated. Ultimately, the Jewish children are cared for, and helped to escape. This film tackles the subjects of anti-Semitism, righteous gentiles, partisans, orphaned children, the harsh realities of war, and many other thought-provoking topics. Plus, it is a gripping story, one that the children watch intently.

In the *Island on Bird Street*, which I believe is only available at Blockbuster stores (but if anyone has any ideas, let us all know), a superb cast brings to life the wonderful novel of Uri Orlev. A boy is separated from his father and uncle during the liquidation of the ghetto, and the film demonstrates how he struggles to survive. Masterfully done, and very exciting, it really holds the children's attention.

I'm not sure that *Friendship in Vienna* is still in print, but it is an excellent movie. Based on the book, *The Devil in Vienna* by Doris Orgel, the movie is about a friendship between two girls, a

German gentile and a Jew. They are best friends, and the insanity of the coming Nazi destruction is shown through the effects that it has on the girls. The Jewish girl's family is struggling to come to a decision, to leave, not to leave, to bow their heads, to fight. The Christian girl's brother becomes a Nazi, and so more struggles ensue. Children who watch this movie are mesmerized by the drama.

Documentaries are less interesting to watch, as a rule, but a superb non-fiction depiction of the Holocaust is shown through *Dear Kitty* (which is also sold by the A & E Network as *Anne Frank: The Life of a Young Girl*.) It uses the story of Anne Frank to explain the rise of Nazism, and what happened to the Jews. While certainly Anne is the centerpiece, it is successfully and frankly, in pretty simple language, able to convey all of the events of the Holocaust to children age 10 and up.

Finally, I have included the classic ADL film "The Courage to Care," because I think that segments of it can be shown to middle grade children. It is a documentary about righteous gentiles, very moving and informational, and I think clips of the film can be used to promote discussion.

I have appended a hand-out which gives a basic annotated list of the videos that I recommend, their audience, length, and most importantly, their distributors. Only two videos seem to be unavailable at present: *Friendship in Vienna* and *Silence*.

RECOMMENDED LIST -- BEST HOLOCAUST VIDEOS FOR CHILDREN

Title: *Alan and Naomi* 95 min. Ages 12 - adult
Summary: This is the heartwarming story of an unlikely friendship between a Brooklyn boy and a young French Holocaust survivor. Lukas Haas stars as 14 year old Alan Silverman, a skinny rebellious kid who'd rather play stickball than help a young, disturbed girl. Alan has to confront his ambivalence, and a beautiful friendship results, Rated PG.
Available at <http://www.Amazon.com>

Title: *Anne Frank Remembered* 117 min. Ages 12 - adult
Summary: The winner of an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature, this extraordinary film features vintage newsreels, photographs, and even a rare home movie to look beyond the celebrated pages of Anne's diary. In surprising and emotional interviews with her family, friends, and her protector, Miep Gies, her life serves as a tribute and symbol of the many who died in the Holocaust. Narrated by Kenneth Branagh.
Available at <http://www.Amazon.com>

Title: *Anne Frank: The Life of a Young Girl* 50 min. Ages 12 - adult
Summary: This video describes the life of Anne Frank
Available at <http://www.historychannel.com>

Title: *Au Revoir, Les Enfants* 103 min. Ages 12 - adult
Summary: The Academy Award- winning story of two boys, one Jewish, one Gentile, who become friends while in a boarding school 'in France during World War II. The Jewish child is being "hidden" by the authorities of the boarding school. In French, with English subtitles. Rated PG. 1987.
Available at Facets Multimedia (<http://www.facets.org>)

Title: *Camera of My Family* 19 min. Ages 12 - adult
Summary: This is the story of a family who lived in Germany, and who were subject to the laws and humiliation of the Nazis. It traces what the family's background was, and then what happened to them throughout the war.
Available at the Anti-Defamation League (<http://www.adl.org>)

Title: *Children of the Holocaust* 51 min. Ages 12 - adult
Summary: About one-third of adult Jews survived the Holocaust but only 7 percent of the children. This video tells the story of four people who, as children, survived. Yehuda, a survivor of Theresienstadt; Sophie, who was hidden by a non-Jewish family; Janek, one of 200 Polish children who was smuggled out of Crakow in a suitcase; and Shmuel, whose mother bribed a peasant woman to save her son.
Available at Films for the Humanities (<http://www.films.com>)

Title: *Courage to Care* 28 min. Ages 12 - adult
Summary: Nominated in 1986 for an Academy Award for best short documentary film, this is an unforgettable encounter with ordinary people who refused to succumb to Nazi tyranny, and instead opened doors, fed strangers, kept secrets, and hid Jews, sometimes for years. Includes viewer's guide and historical notes.
Available at the Anti-Defamation League (<http://www.adl.org>)

Title: *Daniel's Story* 14 min. Ages 10 - adult
Summary: This is a video narrative of the Holocaust Museum's exhibit entitled "Daniel's Story" which shows a young boy from Germany and what happened to him during the Holocaust. Uses photos of the exhibit and a boy's narrative, rather than a "moving" video.
Available at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (<http://www.holocaustbooks.org>)

Title: *Dear Kitty* 25 min. Ages 10 - 14
Summary: The life of Anne Frank is told with quotations from her diary, scenes from her hiding place, and historical film footage. The film makes complex historical facts understandable, yet without shocking the young viewer. An excellent introduction to the Holocaust for all ages.
Available at the Anne Frank Center (<http://www.annefrank.com>)

Title: *Devil's Arithmetic* 97 min. Ages 10 - adult
Summary: Sixteen year old Hanna Stem is taken on a mystical journey to a concentration camp, in this made for television film adaptation of the book by Jane Yolen. While the events have a surreal, or science fiction feel, the movie is very watchable for young teens. Produced by Dustin Hoffman, in 1999.
Available at Facets Multimedia (<http://www.facets.org>)

Title: *Diary of Anne Frank* (1959 version) 170 min. Ages 12 - adult
Summary: The searing tale of eight brave people who live in a cramped attic for two years, in an effort to escape the Nazis. Based on the internationally acclaimed diary of a 13 year old girl, this is the original movie version. Stars Shelley Winters, Lou Jacobi, Ed Wynn and Joseph Schildkraut. 1959
Available a Facets Multimedia (<http://www.facets.org>)

Title: *Forget Me Not: The Anne Frank Story* 60 min. Ages 12 - adult
Summary: Mat Fritzlinger is a school boy enamored by the neo-Nazi movement. One day, while on a field trip to a Holocaust museum, Mat finds himself in a mysterious magical library. From there he is spun into the streets of Nazi occupied Amsterdam in the year 1944 -- as a Jew. There he meets Anne Frank. Excellent introduction to the Holocaust for teens.
Available at Social Studies School Service (<http://www.socialstudies.com>)

Title: *Friendship in Vienna* 94 min. Ages 10 - adult
Summary: An innocent friendship between very close friends becomes filled with tension, because one is a Jew, the other the daughter of a Nazi. As the persecution of the Nazis grows, the girls' friendship is tested, and ultimately preserved. We see the conflicting emotions of the times, portrayed brilliantly by the young actresses.
Currently out of print

Title: *Island on Bird Street* 104 min. Ages 12 - adult
Summary: Based on a true survivor's story, this is the story of Alex, an 11 year old Polish boy hiding from the Nazis with his father, his uncle, and his pet mouse. When the soldiers clear the ghetto, they are caught, but Alex and the pet mouse escape back into the abandoned city. Using lessons from his favorite book, Robinson Crusoe, he builds a hideout high above the rubble, and waits for his father's return.
Available at Blockbuster Video Stores

Title: *Just a Diary* 25 min. Ages 13 - adult
Summary: The life story of Anne Frank is told from the perspective of a 17 year old Dutch girl, who plays the part of Anne in a stage performance. She tells her feelings about Anne, and we see main scenes out of the play. In addition, historical film footage and photographs are shown about the rise of Hitler, and the Jews in Holland.
Available at the Anne Frank Center (<http://www.annefrank.com>)

Title: *Life of Anne Frank* 25 min. Ages 10 - adult
Summary: This is the story of the life of Anne Frank told through quotations from her diary, pictures of her hiding place, photos from the Frank family album, and historical documentary footage. This documentary also provides the historical background about the Nazis, anti-Semitism, the persecution of the Jews in Holland, and the ultimate capture of the Frank family by the Nazis.
Available at Films for the Humanities (<http://www.films.com>)

Title: *Miracle at Moreaux* 58 min. Ages 10 - adult
Summary: The moving story of a group of Jewish children escaping the Nazis who are hidden by a group of nuns in a convent. The other children in the convent are curious and a bit put off, but ultimately find that they are moved by the predicament of the Jewish children. Very well done.
Available at Social Studies School Service (<http://www.socialstudies.com>)

Title: *Nightmare: The Immigration of Joachim and Rachel* 24 min. Ages 10 - adult
Summary: A Films for the Humanities presentation, this is the story of two children in the Warsaw Ghetto who escape the Nazis (by hiding while their parents are captured), and who then make their way to their uncle in the United States by begging, stealing, and hiding in order to survive. Not gruesome or graphic, but contains disturbing themes.
Available at Films for the Humanities (<http://www.films.com>)

Title: *Prejudice: Answering Children's Questions* 75 Min. Ages 6 - adult
Summary: Peter Jennings hosts an audience of culturally diverse young children and leads an investigation of prejudice. Featuring a team of experts who conduct several enlightening experiments designed to help children better understand the roots of prejudice, this presentation analyzes what influence race, sex, religion, and disability have on children's views of the world.
Available at the Anti-Defamation League (<http://www.adl.org>)

Title: *Silence* 10 min. Ages 12 - adult
Summary: A little girl named Tana survived Theresienstadt concentration camp thanks to her resourceful grandmother. After liberation she lived a comfortable and cultured life with relatives in Sweden. No one spoke of her ordeal --"forget the past" she was told. A haunting animated film, capturing the surreal world of a child survivor whose pain has not been shared. Award-winning.
Currently unavailable.

Title: *Weapons of the Spirit* 90 min. Ages 12 - adult
Summary: In a fascinating study, this video tells the story of the village of Le Chambon, in France, whose residents gave refuge to 5000 Jews during the Holocaust. No one was turned away or betrayed, even when Nazi soldiers lived in the village. The filmmaker, Pierre Sauvage, was, himself, born and hidden in the village. His account is remarkable. Some English subtitles.
Available at Social Studies School Service (<http://www.socialstudies.com>)

Title: *World of Anne Frank*

28 min.

Ages 12 - adult

Summary: This docu-drama about Anne Frank and the Holocaust utilizes documentary information, rare film footage, photographs and interviews to portray the life and drama of Anne Frank, and those who hid the Frank family.

Available at Social Studies School Service (<http://www.socialstudies.com>)

Title: *Writing on the Wall*

45 min.

Ages 12 - adult

Summary: This excellent video was a CBS School Break Special, originally broadcast during the anniversary of Kristallnacht. Starring Hal Linden, the film is about three youths who vandalize the home of a rabbi and his neighbors, and their nearby synagogue. Rather than giving the vandals a prison sentence, the judge and rabbi determine to "punish" the boys by educating them about anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Based on a true story.

Available at Social Studies School Service (<http://www.socialstudies.com>)