TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST THROUGH THE ART OF MIRIAM BRYSK

ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH LIBRARIES
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INTRODUCTION

For educators faced with the challenge of teaching today's learners about the Holocaust, the inclusion of artwork offers a powerful means to enhance literary and historical study. Holocaust instruction can further benefit from effective integration of 21st century technology.

A group of classroom teachers and a school librarian have collaborated with a Holocaust survivor and artist to develop some meaningful lessons.

This session is designed to help you enrich existing curriculum by sharing with you instructional resources that are aligned to standards and that can be replicated!
SESSION OVERVIEW

I. The Survivor: Her Life and Her Art (Miriam Brysk)

II. Using Holocaust Art to Transcend the Limitations of Language (Cynthia Schofield)

III. Art as an Introduction to the Holocaust for ELL Students (Tosha Tillotson)

IV. Holocaust Instruction Meets 21st Century Technology (Scott Durham)

V. Scroll of Remembrance exhibit (Art Center of Battle Creek, Michigan)
THE SURVIVOR: HER LIFE AND HER ART
MIRIAM BRYSK (resume)

I was born in Warsaw in 1935. After the German occupation in 1939, my family escaped to Lida, Belarus. We were spared in the May 1942 Lida ghetto massacre as the Germans needed my father's surgical skills. In November 1942, Russian partisans brought us to the Lipiczany forest where a hospital was set up with my father as chief of staff. My hair was shaved. I wore boy's clothing to protect me from rape. On my eighth birthday I was given a pistol. We were liberated in the summer of 1944. My father was awarded the Order of Lenin for his medical contributions. We escaped to central Poland, brought to Italy by soldiers in the Jewish Brigade and immigrated to America in February 1947. I was 12 and had no previous formal education. Nevertheless, I finished high school at 17 and college at NYU at 20. I married Henry Brysk, a physicist and Holocaust survivor from France; we have two daughters and 5 grandchildren. After obtaining my Ph.D. in biological sciences from Columbia University, I become a scientist and professor of dermatology, biochemistry and microbiology at the University of Texas Medical Branch (publishing some 85 scientific research manuscripts).
PREWAR FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS - WARSAW, POLAND UNTIL SEPTEMBER 1939
GROUP OF JEWISH PARTISANS IN LIPICZANY FOREST
MAMA AND I AFTER LIBERATION, SZCZUCZYN, 1944
America, 1947

Marrying survivor Henry Brysk, 1955

And lives and dreams to be lived ----
Ph.D. Columbia University

Scientist / Professor University of Texas

Artist / Writer Ann Arbor, Michigan
In 2000, I retired to Ann Arbor, Michigan to pursue my dream of becoming an artist and writer. I returned for the first time to Eastern Europe to view remnants of ghettos and camps of the Holocaust. I cried my way through the trip, remembering those in my family who perished. I felt a deep need to portray their suffering and return to them their dignity as Jews, denied to them by the Nazis. Two bodies of artwork followed: “In a Confined Silence” and “Children of the Holocaust.” To recreate memory through art, I used photographs of Jews who perished. My art combines the starkness of photography with the graphic power of the computer. Each work is accompanied by an historical perspective explanation. Students seem moved by emotions contained in the imagery and intrigued by the digital tools.
Awaiting Her Turn
This girl and other Jews from the Vilna ghetto in Lithuania were rounded up and taken to the nearby pits at Ponar. Some sixty thousand Vilna Jews were shot by Einsatzgruppe A (a mobile killing squad) in 1941-44.
II. CYNTHIA SCHOFIELD

USING HOLOCAUST ART TO TRANSCEND THE LIMITATIONS OF LANGUAGE
MEETING THE COMMON CORE

Close and Critical Reading Questions

1. What does the text say? Briefly summarize the art product at a literal level. \textit{CCR 1 & 2}

2. How does it say it? In other words, how does the artist develop the text to convey his/her purpose? What are the genre, format, features, organization, etc.? \textit{CCR 3, 4, & 5}

3. What does the text mean? What message/theme/concept is the artist trying to get across? \textit{CCR 2, 6, 7, & 8}

4. So What? What does the message/theme/concept mean in your life and/or in the lives of others? Why is it worth sharing/telling? What significance does it have to your life and/or to the lives of others? \textit{CCR 7 & 9}
Miriam’s art piece reminds me of the bond between a mother and a child. The bond extends beyond time and space. One expects his/her parents to die first. However, it is not natural to lose a child. Yet, this is still happening around the world. The genocide in Darfur has claimed 400,000 lives and displaced over 2,500,000 people. I wonder how many mothers and children have perished in Darfur? Who weeps for them?
III. TOSHA TILLOTSON

ART AS AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HOLOCAUST FOR ELL STUDENTS
STUDENT WRITING 9

OH, THE ISOLATION
THE HORRIFYING THOUGHTS
THE FINAL ENDING
THAT WHICH IS UNWANTED
THE FUTURE SCREAMS
BURNING IN HER THROAT
THE THOUSANDS DYING
JUST BY BREATHING

Fear
Lodz - Chelmno (Poland)

The Nazis ordered the head of the Judenrat to surrender all Jewish children under age ten, as they did not contribute to the war effort. On September 4, 1942, thousands of ghetto children were torn from arms of desperate parents and deported to their death in gassing vans of the Chelmno extermination camp.

Reading: “Diary of an Anonymous Girl”

Salvaged Pages by Alexandra Zapruder (p. 256)
IV. SCOTT DURHAM

HOLOCAUST INSTRUCTION MEETS 21ST CENTURY TECHNOLOGY
This series of three lessons is part of a World War II unit in World At War, an elective class taught at Lakeview High School in Battle Creek, Michigan.

The lessons use the work of Holocaust survivor and artist Miriam Brysk to consider the theme of Bystanders, Resistance and Perpetrators. As a student, you will come to grips with the big ideas or over-arching concepts of how individuals treat one another through a study of war in the 20th century.

We will consider how actions in our own lives yield both good and bad results. In the context of war and genocide, however, action (or inaction) can have decidedly evil or virtuous outcomes. You will be able to apply this learning on a personal level, making connections to your present day life and community. This lesson will utilize mobile devices and we hope to create an online ebook documenting our learning.

The sad, forlorn little girl in Vilna-Ponar appears to be bundled up in her clothes. To her left, there seems to be a street map of the ghetto. In the bottom portion of the artwork is an inscription on a tombstone or memorial. A disturbing grey pile of bodies is seen in the lower right section.
FINAL PROJECT

Students contribute their own “chapter” to an eBook, linking photographs and images from their own lives to the art of Miriam Brysk, connecting the lessons of the Holocaust to the world today.

- Why is it important to remember victims of the Holocaust?
- Are there some things that no evil can destroy or take away? What are they?
- How can you ensure that your memories are kept alive?
- How can we ensure that memories of Holocaust victims are kept alive?
This photograph was taken when our three children (Geoffrey, Benjamin and Ruth) were 13, 11 and 2 years old. The occasion was Geoffrey’s Bar Mitzvah. This life cycle event at age thirteen in the Jewish religion marks a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. Children traditionally receive a tallis (prayer shawl) from their parents.
Warschau 724-30 34

UNION OF MYANMAR

CERTIFICATE OF IDENTITY
V. BATTLE CREEK ART CENTER

SCROLL OF REMEMBRANCE EXHIBIT
In Scroll of Remembrance, my focus has shifted from the plights of individual Jews to the deaths of entire Jewish communities. The creation of this exhibit has been more labor-intensive than any of my previous ones. The hundreds of Holocaust photographs that I have accumulated were all too small, of very poor resolution, and often damaged from wear. After many attempts, I figured out how to transform the images into a higher resolution that I could work with. My goal was to create a way to use many images in each work, obliterating the demarcations between them, and allowing one image to flow into another. I sought to have each of the resulting works represent a cross-section of an entire Jewish community and its fate during the Holocaust. My art combines photography with the graphic power of the computer to create an art form that combines narrative realism and expressionism.
Paris - Auschwitz I (France - Poland)

LODZ GHETTO
SCROLL OF REMEMBRANCE

AN EXHIBIT BY
HOLOCAUST ARTIST AND SURVIVOR
MIRIAM M. BRYSK

A powerful visual narrative depicting Jewish communities destroyed in the Holocaust and imparting faces to the events of history.

ART CENTER OF BATTLE CREEK
MAY 4 - 25, 2014

IDENTITY

Name ________________________________
School ______________________________

Photo courtesy of Battle Creek Enquirer.
Auschwitz - They Lived

In this last artwork “Auschwitz - They Lived,” find an image which suggests that even during the most difficult of circumstances, the Jews of Auschwitz maintained their spirit and desire to live. Identify the image and explain why you are left with a positive feeling or sense of hope.

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

We look forward to hearing about your efforts to integrate art into Holocaust instruction.

Together, may we be inspired to make a positive difference in the lives of our students!

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