

Teaching Artifacts: People, Not Numbers

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Subject: Social studies, history, Jewish history, language arts

Grade: 8th–9th

Time required: two class periods

Hook (5 minutes): Read aloud a passage from *The Diary of Anne Frank* (this plan assumes that the students have already read about Anne and her situation). Pose the following question: “Why do you think that the diary of Anne Frank has touched you and so many other people all over the world?” After students discuss in a think-pair-share, open the discussion by focusing on the importance of connecting to people in the Holocaust rather than the numbers, by recognizing that each person in the Holocaust has a story to tell, a life of her own, that we can learn, understand, remember, and share.

Introduction (5 minutes): Note that in Holocaust museums, there is a big emphasis on not only personal accounts but on artifacts as well. Discuss what an artifact is, what the point of it is in learning about the Holocaust, and what it represents or symbolizes. As the students engage, guide the responses in the direction of showing how artifacts represent someone’s life, and that the people who owned these artifacts were people just like us.

Activity (20 minutes): Place around the room on five stations a number (10–15) of different modern “artifacts” that you have selected and brought to school earlier. Such artifacts might include running sneakers, a bedazzled iPhone case, retro sunglasses, an engraved *tehilim* (small

book of psalms, often read by Jewish women when people are ill or otherwise in need of prayer), an autographed baseball, a thumb drive, wallet, wood carving, cufflinks, wristband, a stuffed animal, a graphic novel, etc. Divide the students into five groups and send them to different stations where each student should choose one artifact to examine (ideally, each would have his own, but two or three students can write, independently, about the same artifact). Explain that their task is to create a short biography of the person who owned that particular artifact. As per differentiated instruction, allow students to use different modalities to complete their task. They can write a newspaper account of the person's life; create a journal entry that the owner of the artifact might have written; or create visual art of a moment in the person's life.

Presentation and Discussion (5 minutes): After the students have completed this activity, encourage a volunteer to present her biography to the class, specifically noting how she thinks her artifact played a role in this person's life and explaining what about the artifact led to her conclusion. Reassure students that all will have a chance to share their biographies during tomorrow's class.

Formative Assessment/Homework (5 minutes): Give students these links
<http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/museum/artifacts/museum.asp>
http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_list.php?MediaType=af (this one must be pasted into your browser to open)

and/or the Spring 2014 issue of *PRISM: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Holocaust Educators*. Ask them to choose an artifact from the sites or the journal and write what they can learn about the person from examining the artifact and any accompanying text. What might he or she have been like? What clues help you to think this? Why might this artifact have been important in this

person's Holocaust journey? Students will share their feelings and writings with the class the next day and then submit their work to you.

Class 2: Summary Discussion--Content: Encourage all students to share their biographies from the previous class and to discuss the findings from their homework assignment. Then, elicit these big ideas:

- Artifacts give us a glimpse into people's lives.
- Artifacts are just "things" that people have; they can range from religious objects to the newest Kindle, but they each say something about you, your values, and your life.
- Therefore, when we see artifacts, we can see into other people's lives.
- We can look at artifacts from dozens to hundreds of years ago and connect these artifacts to the people who owned, used, and treasured them.
- We can understand that these people had lives just like ours, including fights with their siblings and favorite foods.
- Now, when we see artifacts from the Holocaust, we can appreciate their significance.
- Artifacts should be a part of every Holocaust unit of study because they help us to feel, to remember the people who suffered, not just the statistic of 6 million.
- Shoes, hairbrushes, eyeglasses, menorahs, and *siddurim* (Jewish prayer books) connect us to real people who owned them, just like we are real people who own our iPhone and Uggs.