

Auschwitz

Not long ago. Not far away.

MCHE Teacher Recommended List of Recommended (and a Few Not Recommended) Holocaust Books and Films

Key to Codes:

F = Fiction
NF = Non-Fiction
JCL = Available at the Johnson County (KS) Library
KCPL = Available at the Kansas City (MO) Public Library
MCPL = Available at the Mid-Continent (MO) Public Library
MCHE = Available at the Midwest Center for Holocaust Education

L (Ex. **760L**) = Lexile Score. Briefly, books with higher Lexile scores require greater reading skill to achieve comprehension. Please note that Lexile does not measure a reader's social-emotional readiness to manage the content of a text. (See www.lexile.com for more information.)

Introduction: While I was teaching the Holocaust in my middle school English language arts course, my students created a good problem. They were eager to learn about the Holocaust and sought books and films on their own initiative. The problem was that some of their choices were not built on a strong historical foundation. I realized that I needed to give their curiosity some direction; therefore, I began cultivating a list of recommended reading and viewing.

Let me clearly state my bias that the Holocaust should not be taught to students younger than 7th grade; I believe 8th grade is a more appropriate age to begin. I think that children ought to achieve some maturity before they are confronted with the truth than humans can behave in evil ways toward each other. I also have a bias that non-fiction, memoirs, biographies, and diaries about Holocaust topics are generally preferable to fiction. I have not included any title on this list that I have not personally read or viewed. As an English teacher, I care about the quality of literature and have not included titles that did not pass muster. I have included books that students would enjoy for personal reading and have generally excluded books that serve better as instructional texts.

In preparation for the exhibition *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.*, which will be coming to Union Station in Kansas City, MO in 2021, I have added titles to this list that will help parents and teachers prepare young people to see the exhibit or follow-up after. The exhibit is not recommended for elementary school children. However, understanding that some families may have children of various ages traveling to see the exhibit together, I have included picture books that may be useful for upper-elementary age children. There are many books on this list that adults would enjoy.

I hope this list of recommended reading and viewing is useful to you and your family as you learn about Auschwitz and the Holocaust more generally.

- Laura Patton, Isak Federman Teaching Cadre, Midwest Center for Holocaust Education

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RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Bartoletti, Susan Campbell	<i>The Boy Who Dared: A Novel Based on the True Story of a Hitler Youth</i>	F	760L	JCL KCPL
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When Bartoletti was doing research for her award-winning non-fiction book, *Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow*, she came across Helmuth Hübener's amazing story. Hübener, a Hitler Youth, was convicted of treason against the Nazi government and executed at age 17. This novel is meticulously-researched historical fiction supported with photographs. Gripping; I couldn't put it down. Recommended for 8th grade and older.

Bascomb, Neal	<i>The Nazi Hunters: How a Team of Spies and Survivors Captures the World's Most Notorious Nazi</i>	NF	1000L	JCL KCPL
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This book tells the true story of how a team of Israeli spies, aided by Holocaust survivors in Argentina, located and captured Adolf Eichmann then smuggled him to Israel to stand trial for his crimes against humanity. The story is as suspenseful as any spy novel you could read and is filled with photographs, documents, and maps. Recommended for 8th grade and above. Background knowledge about the Holocaust advised.

Bretholz, Leo with Michael Olesker	<i>Leap Into Darkness: Seven Years On the Run in Wartime Europe</i>	NF	---	MCHE
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Leo Bretholz was a Jewish teenager living in Vienna when the Nazis annexed Austria in 1938. Not long afterward, his mother insisted that he leave home because she feared for his fate under Hitler's rule. Little did she know that most of Europe who soon become a death trap for Jews. Leo spent the years of the WW II living in Jewish transit camps, hiding in attics, and literally running for his life. This memoir is as action-packed as a suspense novel. Leo Bretholz visited Kansas City in 2000. One of my students and I attended Leo's presentation at the Johnson County Public Library; we both read Leo's book afterward and loved it. Recommended for 8th grade and older.

Dobbs, Michael	<i>The Unwanted: America, Auschwitz, and a Village Caught in Between</i>	NF	---	JCL KCPL
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One of the most difficult things about teaching the Holocaust is personalizing the facts – helping students to see how the policies of governments, events and statistics of history, and decisions of leaders affected individuals. Dobbs' book, published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, tells the story of the 144 Jews who lived in Kippenheim, Germany in 1933.

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Kippenheim, in the Baden region of southwest Germany, is close to the Rhine River and not far from Switzerland; Jews had lived in the area since the seventeenth century. Beginning with Kristallnacht in November 1938, Dobbs skillfully reveals, with extensive documentation, how the policies of the Nazi, Vichy, and American governments affected the fates of the Kippenheim Jews. Students often ask, “Why didn’t the Jews leave?” This book gives the complicated answer to that question in a way that is engaging and supplemented with numerous maps and photographs. Recommended for 10th grade and older.

Freedman, Russell	<i>We Will Not Be Silent: The White Rose Student Resistance Movement That Defied Adolf Hitler</i>	NF	640L	JCL KCPL
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My recommendation for middle school readers is that if the book is written by Russell Freedman, read it. Freedman’s books are always non-fiction, often award-winners, and usually biographies or studies of groups of people who were influential during or impacted by a specific period of history. Freedman’s books are meticulously researched and liberally illustrated with photographs or artwork. Lastly, they are good reads; they tell compelling stories. This comprehensive book shares, in about 100 pages, the story of Hans and Sophie Scholl – siblings instrumental to the White Rose Movement, which protested the Nazi dictatorship in Germany. Recommended for 7th grade and older.

Giblin, James Cross	<i>The Life and Death of Adolf Hitler</i>	NF	1100L	JCL KCPL
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This is a complete and balanced biography of Adolf Hitler – from his childhood to his suicide. The final chapter deals with the Nuremberg trials and the rise of neo-Nazi groups in modern times. The book answers the questions that students always ask about Hitler but does not glamorize him in any way. Winner of the Robert F. Sibert Medal. Recommended for 8th grade and older.

Hillman, Laura	<i>I Will Plant You A Lilac Tree: A Memoir of a Schindler’s List Survivor</i>	NF	740L	JCL KCPL
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Laura Hillman was known as Hannelore Wolff when she was growing up in Germany. In 1942 she was deported to Poland along with her mother and two brothers. This memoir tells Hannelore’s journey through eight camps, including Auschwitz-Birkenau, and eventual liberation from Brännlitz, a work camp run by Oskar Schindler. This story has several interesting elements. 1) Hannelore is able to maintain some contact with one brother. 2) Although she does not go into depth, Hannelore relates some of the unique experiences of being a female prisoner of the Nazis.

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3) Hannelore meets and grows to love a Polish POW named Hillman in one of the camps. 4) There are strong themes of friendship and spiritual resistance in this story. The writing in this memoir is not as lyrical as Klein's *All But My Life*, but it is shorter and an easier read while sharing many of the same themes. Recommended for 8th grade and older.

Klein, Gerda Weissmann	<i>All But My Life: A Memoir</i>	NF	780L	JCL MCPL
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Gerda Weissman Klein's memoir of her Holocaust experience is remarkable because of the eloquence of her language. This book is a beautiful piece of writing in addition to being a powerful story of friendship and resilience. Recommended for 8th grade and older.

In my work for the Midwest Center for Holocaust Education, I have helped develop book club materials for *All But My Life*. If you would like to check out a book club bag for your group to use, please contact MCHE (www.mchekc.org). Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, has wonderful instructional materials for the Academy Award-winning film *One Survivor Remembers* based on *All But My Life*. See <https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/film-kits/one-survivor-remembers>

Klein, Gerda Weissmann and Kurt Klein	<i>The Hours After: Letters of Love and Longing in War's Aftermath</i>	NF	---	KCPL
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This book continues the story of Gerda Weissman and Kurt Klein where *All But My Life* ends. Kurt and Gerda decided that he should return to the United States with his military unit and then send for Gerda as soon as possible so that they can be married. *The Hours After* is a collection of Kurt and Gerda's love letters exchanged during the year they spent apart from each other. The book tells many of the details of their romance that are left out of *All But My Life*. Getting Gerda to the United States was no easy feat. As a Holocaust survivor, she was a stateless person with no documents to prove her identity. The book provides a fascinating look into the lives of survivors immediately following the war. *The Hours After* has romance, heartache, angst, a daring escape, and a happy ending. What more could a reader want? Recommended for 8th grade and older.

Levine, Karen	<i>Hana's Suitcase: A True Story</i>	NF	730L	JCL MCPL
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In March 2000, a suitcase from Auschwitz arrived at the Tokyo Holocaust Education Center. Working with only the few clues painted on the outside of the suitcase and a long list of questions from the children who visit the center, Fumiko Ishioka set out to discover as much as she could about Hanna Brady. This book tells the story of her research, how it brings together people from

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three continents, and honors the memory of a young girl who perished in the Holocaust. Recommended for 7th grade and older. A wonderful book for introducing the Holocaust to young middle school students.

Opdyke, Irene Gut	<i>In My Hands: Memoires of a Holocaust Rescuer</i>	NF	890L	JCL MCHE
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This is the true story of a Polish Christian woman who was only seventeen-years-old when WWII began. She was forced to work for the German army, but because she was attractive she secured a relatively safe job as a waitress in an officer's dining room. As she worked, she overheard bits of useful information that she passed on to the Jews in the ghetto. She raided a warehouse for food and blankets. She smuggled people out of the work camp into the forests. Later, Irene was asked to work as a housekeeper for a Nazi major; she hid twelve Jews in the basement of his home until the end of the war. This is the story of how Irene Gut Opdyke did what she did. Recommended for 9th grade and older.

Perl, Lila & Marion Blumenthal Lazan	<i>Four Perfect Pebbles: A Holocaust Story</i>	NF	1080L	JCL KCPL
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Four Perfect Pebbles is an excellent book for introducing the Holocaust to middle school students. The Blumenthal family's story is very unusual because all the family members are able to stay together throughout their imprisonment by the Nazis. As Holocaust stories go, it has a relatively "happy" ending. Because of the family's unusual circumstances, they were able to keep many documents and photographs; these are used liberally to illustrate the book. There are great links to sources of additional information on the Midwest Center for Holocaust Education website (www.mcchekc.org). The Lazans also maintain a website with information about Marion (www.fourperfectpebbles.com). Recommended for 7th grade and older.

Rosen, Michael	<i>The Missing: The True Story of My Family in World War II</i>	NF	---	JCL
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Michael Rosen grew up in London following WWII. Michael's father, Harold, was sent to Britain to serve with the U.S. Army. Harold's father, Morris, and one of his brothers emigrated to the U.S. from Poland. Two of Morris' other siblings went to France. Four of the siblings stayed in Poland. In this book Rosen solves the mystery of what happened to the French and Polish branches of the Rosen family tree during WWII. This volume is about 100 pages; contains photos, maps, and a family tree; is interlaced with poems by the author; is written in a friendly, conversational tone; lacks graphic details; and is briskly paced. In addition to telling the story, Rosen reveals the process of his

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research and gives an indication of the time it took for him to find the answers to his questions. This is a perspective that is often hidden from readers. Seeing the work underneath a book intended for middle school students is a bonus. Recommended for 6th grade and older.

Settingington, Ken	<i>Branded by the Pink Triangle</i>	NF	1110L	JCL KCPL
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Settingington’s book focuses on a specific group that was persecuted by the Nazis – homosexual men. It describes the relative freedom that gay men and women enjoyed in Germany before the Nazis came to power and explains why that shifted so radically starting in 1933. He also explains why gay men were targeted more than gay women. The author shares stories, and often photos, of real people throughout the text; one of the last chapters shares the resolutions of these stories. Although homosexual men were not targeted for murder, many died because of torture, starvation, exposure, disease, overwork, and dangerous working conditions. Settingington gives examples of these conditions in the book that are not easy to read; therefore, I recommend this book for mature 9th graders and older.

Sutin, Jack and Rochelle	<i>Jack and Rochelle: A Holocaust Story of Love and Resistance</i>	NF	N/A	JCL KCPL
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Jack and Rochelle fell in love while they were hiding from the Nazis in the woods of Poland. This story is a fascinating look into the lives of the partisans and their acts of resistance. Recommended for 8th grade and older. I highly recommend reading this book before watching the film *Defiance*.

Tec, Nechama	<i>Dry Tears: The Story of a Lost Childhood</i>	NF	960L	KCPL MCHE
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Nechama Tec and her family were Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust by hiding with Polish Christians. Nechama’s story is remarkable because, as the person in her family most able to “pass” as Christian, she had the responsibility to sell the bread that the family baked to support itself – even though she was only eleven years old. This autobiography is a good choice if you want to learn about how a family lived in hiding during the Holocaust and if you want to understand what life in occupied Poland might have been like during WWII. Recommended for 8th grade and older.

Tito, E. Tina	<i>Liberation: Teens in the Concentration Camps and the Teen Soldiers Who Liberated Them</i>	NF	870L	JCL MCPL
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This 53-page volume conveys the stories, in their own words, of two teenage survivors of the Nazi camps and two teenage soldiers who helped liberate those camps. The stories are liberally illustrated with historical photos. The book includes a Timeline and Glossary. Although the Lexile level of this book would suggest that an elementary school student could read it, I caution against this. Like most Holocaust books, the text and photos require maturity and emotional resilience to navigate. Recommended for 8th grade and older.

Toll, Nelly S.	<i>Behind the Secret Window: A Memoir of a Hidden Childhood</i>	NF	910L	MCHE
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When she was only eight years old, Nelly Toll and her mother were hidden in the bedroom of an apartment in Lwów, Poland. During especially dangerous moments, Nelly hid in a space within a wall – behind a secret window. To keep her young charge occupied and quiet, the woman who owned the apartment gave Nelly a journal to write in and art materials with which to paint. The text of this book is based upon Nelly’s journal and it is illustrated with the paintings that she created during her time in hiding. Recommended for 8th grade and older.

Vinke, Hermann	<i>Defying the Nazis: The Life of German Officer Wilm Hosenfeld</i>	NF	1010L	JCL
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In 2008 Yad Vashem posthumously declared Wilm Hosenfeld Righteous Among the Nations.* This is the highest honor awarded to people who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. There were very few people who helped Jews in Nazi-controlled Europe. Antisemitism was rampant. In addition, the Nazis imposed severe punishments on those who helped and offered rewards to those who either turned over Jews or denounced their helpers. There are other stories of rescuers on this list. This biography is unique because it tells the story of a German army officer who followed his conscience and exercised compassion. This book is filled with photographs, maps, excerpts from Hosenfeld’s journals, and letters shared between family members. Highly recommended for 8th grade and older
*See <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/faq.html> for the requirements of this designation.

Read about Hosenfeld on Yad Vashem’s Righteous Among the Nations Database:

https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=hosenfeld,%20wilm&searchType=righteous_only&language=en&itemId=4015318&ind=0

Volavková, Hana, Editor	<i>...I never saw another butterfly...: Children’s Drawing and Poems from the Terezin Concentration Camp 1942-1944</i>	NF	---	JCL KCPL
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The Terezin concentration camp in Czechoslovakia was remarkable among the Nazi camps. One of the reasons for this is that many artists, musicians, writers, and teachers, were imprisoned there. Some of these people took it upon themselves to defy the Nazis and create cultural activities such as concerts and plays and to teach classes for children. This book is a collection of artwork and poetry created by children at Terezin during these clandestine classes. Most of the children did not survive, but their creative work stands as a testament to their spirits. Recommended for 8th grade and older.

Warren, Andrea	<i>Surviving Hitler: A Boy in the Nazi Death Camps</i>	NF	820L	JCL KCPL
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Surviving Hitler is the true story of Jack Mandelbaum, who started his life over again in the Kansas City area after surviving the Holocaust. It is written by Johnson County author, Andrea Warren. Jack's story is compelling and supported by Warren's meticulous research. The text is filled with historical photographs. This is an excellent book for middle school students to begin learning about the Holocaust. A Robert F. Sibert Honor Book. Those who wish to learn more about Jack after reading the book should contact the Midwest Center for Holocaust Education (www.mchekc.org), which Jack co-founded with fellow survivor Isak Federman. Recommended for 8th grade and older.

PICTURE BOOKS

Abells, Chana Byers Photographs from the Archives of Yad Vashem	<i>The Children We Remember</i>	NF	460L	JCL
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The text in this book is simple, spare, and hauntingly beautiful. The text supports and is supported by historical photographs from Yad Vashem, The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem, Israel. Although the Lexile level on this book is low, I would advise adult support when using this book with elementary students because it includes several disturbing images. Recommended for 7th grade and older.

Adler, David A.	<i>A Hero and the Holocaust: The Story of Janusz Korczak and His Children</i>	NF	---	JCL KCPL
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I completed a research project about Janusz Korczak for a graduate course many years ago. Of course, Adler's book caught my eye. I love this illustrated book because it makes Korczak's story accessible for younger kids. Korczak was a Polish Jew. He was a doctor famous throughout Poland because he had a radio program which gave child-care and medical advice to parents. He wrote books for children. He also directed an orphanage for Jewish children in Warsaw. When the Nazis invaded Poland, forced the Jews into ghettos, and ultimately deported them to death camps,

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Korczak had offers of rescue from his Christian friends. He refused them. Today there are stones on the site of the Treblinka death camp that represent entire villages of people who were murdered there. Only one stone bears the name of a single person; it is a stone that memorializes Korczak. Recommended for 6th through 8th grades.

Bat Zvi, Pnina and Margie Wolfe Isabelle Cardianl illustrator	<i>The Promise</i>	NF	520L	JCL KCPL
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The true story related in this picture book focuses on a specific incident in the lives of two sisters, Rachel and Toby, while they are imprisoned as slave laborers at Auschwitz. The authors are Rachel and Toby's daughters. The illustrations are subdued, sepia-toned, collages that convey the mood of the story beautifully. I recommend this book for 6th through 8th grades. Parents and teachers will need to be ready to answer the questions it will likely provoke. This would be an interesting book for teachers to use to introduce a Holocaust unit.

Borden, Louise Allan Drummond illustrator	<i>The Journey That Saved Curious George: The True Wartime Escape of Margret and H.A. Rey</i>	NF	950L	JCL KCPL
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Most people know and love the mischievous monkey Curious George created by Margret and H.A. Rey. What many people don't know is that Hans Augusto Reyersbach and Margarete Waldstein were both born in Hamburg, Germany to Jewish families. They escaped from Paris on bicycles, carrying an early manuscript of their first Curious George book, as the Nazis invaded France. Borden tells the Rey's story in this lushly illustrated book. Recommended for 4th grade and older.

Bunting, Eve K. Wendy Popp illustrator	<i>One Candle</i>	F	600L	KCPL
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This story of a family Hanukkah celebration includes a special ritual performed by the grandmother and great-aunt that memorializes a Hanukkah spent in a Nazi camp and remembers the friends who did not survive. This story provides a way to discuss resistance in the camps. Recommended for 4th grade and older.

Hesse, Karen Wendy Watson illustrator	<i>The Cats in Krasinski Square</i>	F	990L	JCL KCPL
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The story in this picture book is told from the point-of-view of a young Jewish girl who has escaped

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from the Warsaw Ghetto and is working with the Resistance to help smuggle food into the Ghetto. (Children really did act as smugglers because they could get into small spaces and were less likely to attract attention.) When the Resistance learns that a smuggling plot may be foiled by the Gestapo, the cats are employed to help. Lovely illustrations. Historical notes at the end. A useful book to teach the concept of resistance. Recommended for 3rd grade and older.

Klein, Gerda Weissmann Vincent Tarto illustrator	<i>Promise of a New Spring: The Holocaust and Renewal</i>	NF	---L	
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Unlike Klein's other books, this one is written for young children. She uses the renewal of winter after spring and the regrowth of a forest after a fire to explain the sharing of memories and recreation of families by the survivors of the Holocaust. Recommended for 3rd grade and older. This book is out-of-print; there are some new and used copies for sale online.

Kushner, Tony Maurice Sendak illustrator	<i>Brundibar</i>	NF	AD570L	JCL MCPL
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Kushner and Sendak have created a picture book version of a children's opera that was completed in 1938 by Adolf Hoffmeister and Hans Krása. The opera was performed fifty-five times by children imprisoned in the Nazi concentration camp Terezin. Krása, who was also imprisoned at Terezin, died at Auschwitz in 1944. Understanding the origins of this story makes it far more than a simple tale of children defeating the town bully. This book could be read to young elementary school students; students 7th grade and older could be taught the history behind the story. This book would pair well with *The Cat with the Yellow Star* for 7th grade and older.

Patz, Nancy	<i>Who Was the Woman Who Wore the Hat?</i>	NF	580L	MCPL
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This text is a reflective poem inspired by a hat that Patz saw in the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam. She wonders about the life of the woman who wore the hat and who lost her life in the Holocaust. The poem and artwork stand on their own. However, Patz's poem would also serve as a mentor text for a student writing assignment – using a different historical artifact. Recommended for 7th grade and older.

Roy, Jennifer Meg Owenson illustrator	<i>Jars of Hope: How One Woman Helped Save 2,500 Children During the Holocaust</i>	NF	630L	JCL
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Irena Sendler was a social worker in Warsaw, Poland when WWII began. She worked with a

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network of helpers to smuggle Jewish children out of the Warsaw Ghetto. In addition, she kept careful records with the intention that the children would be reunited with their parents after the war. Sadly, many parents did not survive, but many of the children learned the stories of their brave parents who gave them a chance to live. This picture book relates Irena's story for children. Recommended for 6th grade and older.

Rubin, Susan Goldman with Ela Weissberger	<i>The Cat with the Yellow Star: Coming of Age in Terezin</i>	NF	800L	JCL MCPL
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This book tells the true story of Ela Weissburger. She and her family lived in an area of Czechoslovakia known as the Sudetenland which the Nazis re-occupied in violation of the Versailles Treaty. Ela's father was arrested on Kristallnacht; the family never saw him again. Ela, her sister, and her mother were deported to Terezin, a Nazi camp in Czechoslovakia. Terezin had a large population of professors, artists, musicians, and other well-educated Jewish inmates from nearby Prague. Some of these adults made clandestine but dedicated efforts to educate and care for the mental health of the children who were imprisoned at Terezin. Many pieces of artwork and poetry that the children created were hidden in the buildings and survived the Holocaust. A couple of chapters of this book relate Ela's experiences playing the cat in performances of a children's opera called *Brundibar*. The book also tells what happened to Ela and her family after they were liberated. The book is lavishly illustrated with photos, artwork, and reproductions of documents. This book would work well to provide context for the Kushner and Sendak book *Brundibar*, which tells the story of the opera. Recommended for grades 7 and older.

Rubin, Susan Goldman	<i>Fireflies in the Dark: The Story of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and the Children of Terezin</i>	NF	890L	JCL
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Friedl Dicker-Brandeis was an artist and teacher who was imprisoned by the Nazis at Terezin. She was instrumental in developing art classes for the children who were also captives at Terezin and preserved the work they created. This book is a biography, but it also gives an excellent description of Terezin and the unique conditions there. The text is liberally illustrated with photographs and artwork created at Terezin. Recommended for 7th grade and older.

Rubin, Susan Goldman Bill Farnsworth illustrator	<i>The Flag with Fifty-Six Stars: A Gift from the Survivors of Mauthausen</i>	NF	940L	JCL MCPL
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This story of Mauthausen gives general information about the camp – where it was located, the type of slave labor done there, who was imprisoned there – but it focuses mostly on the liberation of the prisoners. The inmates secretly made an American flag as a symbol of freedom and as an act of

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resistance during the final weeks of the war. They gave this flag as a gift to their liberators; it is now on display in the Simon Wiesenthal Center. Wiesenthal was a Holocaust survivor liberated at Mauthausen. The paintings used to illustrate this book are lovely. Neither the text nor illustrations are overly graphic. Recommended for 7th grade and older.

Russo, Marisabina	<i>Always Remember Me: How One Family Survived World War II</i>	NF	720L	JCL MCPL
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In this picture book, the author tells the true story of how her grandmother, mother, and two aunts survived the Holocaust. Oma shows her granddaughter Rachel a photo album of her “first life before [she] came to America.” In this way we learn about the family’s life in Germany and how things changed when the Nazis came to power. Oma has never shown Rachel that last pages in this album but says that she is now old enough to hear the rest of the story about what happened to the family during WWII. The story concludes with Oma’s second photo album. Although many family members did not survive, all three of her beautiful daughters did. The second album tells about the women of the family rebuilding their lives and continuing into another generation. Recommended for 6th through 8th grades.

Sís, Peter	<i>Nicky & Vera: A Quiet Hero of the Holocaust and the Children He Rescued</i>	NF	---L	JCL KCPL
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Nicholas Winton was only 29 years old in late 1938 when he traveled from London to Prague to meet a friend. Germany had recently reoccupied a region of Czechoslovakia called the Sudetenland in violation of the Versailles Treaty. Once he arrived in Prague, Winton’s friend asked him to assist with efforts to evacuate children from Czechoslovakia. Starting March 1939, Winton organized nine trainloads of children; eight of them successfully departed for Britain before WWII began on September 1, 1939. Vera Diamantova was one of the children Winton rescued. This is their story. Recommended for children in 6th through 8th grades. (The publisher recommends for children age 6-8. I strongly disagree. Just because a book is a picture book does not make it a book appropriate for young children.) This book does not have a Lexile score as of 3-2021, but it was just published. Sís is a previous Caldecott medal winner; therefore, I suspect a Lexile score will come soon.

Vander Zee, Ruth Roberto Innocenti illustrator	<i>Erika’s Story</i>	NF	---L	JCL
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This is a true story of a child who survived the Holocaust because her parents made a choiceless choice and righteous strangers intervened. The story is told with exquisite, spare prose. The

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illustrations are hauntingly beautiful. I recommend this book for children in 6th through 8th grades with adult guidance.

RECOMMENDED FILMS

<i>Defiance</i> (Film)	2008	Rated R	JCL KCPL
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This film is based on the book "Defiance: the Bielski Partisans" by Nechama Tec. It tells the true story of the Bielski brothers who led a Jewish partisan group in the forests of Poland and Belorussia. The unique characteristic of the Bielki partisans is that the group included women, children, and the elderly. This film is rated R for violence and language, but I recommend it because it realistically depicts a historically violent period of time. I do not feel that the use of violence or offensive language in the film is egregious or inappropriate considering the story the film is telling. I recommend that students age 14 to 18 watch this film along with their parents.

<i>Escape From Sobibor</i> (Film)	1987	Not Rated	MCHE
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This film was made for TV and won Primetime Emmy Awards in 1987 and Golden Globes in 1988. It is "Hollywoodized;" what I mean is that the people in the film look much healthier and cleaner than prisoners in a death camp would really have looked. There is also an improbable scene where a dance happens in the camp. Nonetheless, this film tells the true story of a prisoner uprising and escape at the death camp Sobibor. I use clips from this film in my classroom, but the whole film is worth watching.

<i>No Place On Earth</i> (Film)	2012	PG-13	JCL
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This film reveals the mystery of a cave "discovered" in Ukraine in 1993. The cavers found evidence that humans had inhabited it in the not-ancient past. But who? And why? This 1-hour, 24-minute film tells an unusual and interesting survival story that is not overly violent or graphic. I would recommend it for 7th grade and older.

<i>One Survivor Remembers</i> (Film)	1994	Not Rated	MCHE
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This short documentary film is based on Gerda Weissmann Klein's autobiography, *All But My Life*. The film and book tell of Gerda's gradual separation from the members of her loving family, her years spent working in slave labor camps, the death march she endured, the tight-knit group of

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friends who helped her survive, and the American soldier who rescued her. The film won an Academy Award in 1995. Recommended for 8th grade and older.

<i>Schindler's List</i> (Film)	1993	Rated R	JCL
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Schindler's List, directed by Stephen Spielberg, is a classic among Holocaust films. The film tells the story of Oskar Schindler, an industrialist who swindles the Nazis and saves the lives of more than 1,000 Jews. The film contrasts Schindler with Amon Goeth, the Nazi officer who has control of the Krakow ghetto and later the Plaszow concentration camp. It is rated R because of violence and nudity; however, it is difficult to tell a true story of the Holocaust without these things. Students under age 18 should watch the film with their parents or educators.

BOOKS AND FILMS TO AVOID

Boyne, John	<i>The Boy in the Striped Pajamas</i>	F	1080L	JCL
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The subtitle of this novel states that it is a fable. If readers read it as a fable, I wouldn't have such a strong objection to this book or the film based on the book. However, I have middle school students who arrive to class and tell me with great enthusiasm that they "read the best book/saw the best movie." This has happened so many times that I am now willing to take bets with them before they spill the beans that they are going to tell me they read/saw *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. My concern is that my 8th graders do not have the background knowledge and critical thinking skills to discern the historical inaccuracies of this film. They don't read or see it as a fable; they generally tend to accept what they read in the book or see in the film as the truth. This is problematic for several reasons. For starters, most children did not survive the initial selection to become inmates in a concentration or death camp. Therefore, no character like Shmuel would have existed. Secondly, Shmuel has time to sit at the fence and talk with Bruno; no camp inmate would have been so poorly supervised. The only reason inmates were kept alive was for work. Thirdly, if Bruno can sneak into the camp underneath the fence, then the inmates would have been able to escape out of the camp. My largest objection to *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* is that it is purposefully manipulative. The audience is in tears as both Shmuel (the Jewish boy) and Bruno (the Commandant's son) are herded into a gas chamber. Who exactly is the audience crying for? Learning about the Holocaust often produces strong feelings for students; I don't know that this can or should be avoided. However, falsely representing history just to manipulate the reader's or viewer's emotions is self-serving and even unethical. Better to shed tears over the true stories.

Yolen, Jane	<i>The Devil's Arithmetic</i>	F	730L	JCL
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This is the summary for *The Devil's Arithmetic* you will find on the Johnson County Library website: "Hannah resents the traditions of her Jewish heritage until time travel places her in the middle of a

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small Jewish village in Nazi-occupied Poland.” Here is my spin on the book: “Spoiled Jewish teenager experiences an attitude readjustment when she steps through a doorway and suddenly finds herself in Nazi-occupied Poland. When she returns home, she is magically appreciative of her Jewish ancestors and religious traditions.” Don’t all parents wish we could time-travel our self-absorbed teenagers back to the good-old-days when we had to walk to school five miles through the snow uphill both ways? Yolen is generally a talented writer; her research in this novel is solid. My objection is the time travel premise; it is ridiculous. There are so many excellent non-fiction Holocaust books. Why waste time with this nonsense?

Life is Beautiful	1998	PG-13	JCL
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This film is about an Italian Jewish family who is deported to a Nazi camp late in the war. To protect his young son, the father makes the entire experience a game. These are some of Roger Ebert’s comments on the film:

“And Benigni [director and lead actor] isn't really making comedy out of the Holocaust, anyway. He is showing how Guido [main character] uses the only gift at his command to protect his son. If he had a gun, he would shoot at the Fascists. If he had an army, he would destroy them. He is a clown, and comedy is his weapon.

The movie actually softens the Holocaust slightly, to make the humor possible at all. In the real death camps there would be no role for Guido. But "Life Is Beautiful" is not about Nazis and Fascists, but about the human spirit. It is about rescuing whatever is good and hopeful from the wreckage of dreams. About hope for the future.”

My objections to *Life is Beautiful* are much the same as my objections to *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. If you want to view it as a piece of art, fine. However, the film lacks historical accuracy, and I fear that students who watch it will not have the background knowledge or critical thinking skills to understand that. A teaching colleague of mine showed the film to her middle school American history classes. I don’t think she understood that this film is not an accurate depiction of the Holocaust. If an adult can’t figure this out, how could a teenager be expected to do so? I don’t recommend this film, even if Roger Ebert does.

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