# *From the Heart*: Client Connected Project for The Midwest Center for Holocaust Education

**Background:** The **Midwest Center for Holocaust Education (MCHE)** is a nonprofit founded in 1993 by Holocaust survivors Isak Federman and Jack Mandelbaum. Their vision was to create an outreach center that focused all of its resources on education. Therefore, MCHE is not a museum. **Its mission is “to teach the history of the Holocaust, applying its lessons to counter indifference, intolerance, and genocide.”** MCHE provides educational programs and resources for general audiences, school groups, educators, corporate groups, law enforcement, non-profit partners, the families of survivors, and others.

Some of the first projects MCHE tackled were videotaping and audiotaping the testimonies of Holocaust survivors who rebuilt their lives in the Kansas City area. Professional photographs of these individuals were collected in 2000. These recordings, their transcripts, the portraits, and supporting documents are available for students and researchers on the MCHE website at <https://mchekc.org/survivors/>. In addition, each survivor’s portrait along with excerpts of their testimony, were published as a book called *From the Heart: Life Before and After the Holocaust—A Mosaic of Memories*.

MCHE believes that stories are powerful points of human connection. They have the power to spark conversation and compassion. They foster connection between people who perceive themselves to be different from each other. The survivors’ eyewitness testimonies are essential for putting the story into the history of the Holocaust. If—as a world community—we hope to end genocide, we must trade empathy for indifference. Stories are a start.

Note: MCHE will provide copies of *From the Heart* to teams who undertake our project. Teams have permission to use the book as they desire, including cutting the book apart for use in artwork or educational manipulatives.

**Currently:** In 2023, MCHE marked its 30th anniversary. Although we have accomplished many great things, there are sobering statistics that indicate we have much to do:

* Of the 51 survivors featured in *From the Heart*, only 7 are still living. Most survivors were motivated to tell their stories by a desire that no one else would suffer as they did. However, since 1945 genocides have happened in Cambodia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda, Darfur, and elsewhere. GenocideWatch, has issued current watches, warnings, and emergencies for many sites around the world. <https://www.genocidewatch.com/>
* According to a report from The Brookings Institution, American democracy is under assault. One reason is that “the very existence of a sizeable number of citizens who cannot agree on facts is an enormous threat to democracy.” The authors also write that “about 1 in 5 Americans have views that make them open to, if not outright supportive of, authoritarianism…. [I]f democracy fails in America, it will not be because a majority of Americans is demanding a non-democratic form of government. It will be because an organized, purposeful minority seizes strategic positions within the system and subverts the substance of democracy while retaining the shell—while the majority isn’t organized, or doesn’t care enough, to resist.” <https://www.brookings.edu/research/is-democracy-failing-and-putting-our-economic-system-at-risk/>
* “In 2022, ADL tabulated 3,697 antisemitic incidents throughout the United States. This is a 36% increase from the 2,717 incidents tabulated in 2021 and the highest number on record since ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1971.” <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/audit-antisemitic-incidents-2022>
* Jews are not the only group experiencing an increase of hate-filled activity. The 2022 edition of *The Year in Hate and Extremism* from the Southern Poverty Law Center tracked an upward trend in many types of exclusionary and violent behavior. <https://www.splcenter.org/year-hate-extremism-2022/introduction>

**The Good News:** In 2020, Echoes and Reflections—a cooperative venture of ADL, USC Shoah Foundation, and Yad Vashem—completed a college survey that shows many benefits of Holocaust education. Specifically, the study found that students who interacted with survivor testimonies (stories) demonstrated significant positive differences in characteristics such as critical thinking, openness to the viewpoints of others, challenging injustices in society, and engaging in upstander behavior.
<https://echoesandreflections.org/wp-content/themes/twentysixteenechoes/fileview.php?source=1&file_nm=2023/06/Updated-6.14.2023-College-Survey-Summary-Article-September-2020.pdf>

Project: How can the stories of Kansas City’s Holocaust survivors be shared—in age appropriate ways—with students in schools or community members in public places for the purpose of countering indifference, intolerance, and the divisions in our world community that can lead to genocide?

The final product delivered to the client must:
The student team members must be able to (Market Value Asset):

* Incorporate a QR code or codes into the final product that directs traffic to the survivors’ page(s) on the MCHE website. <https://mchekc.org/survivors/>
* Educate the target audience about the lives of Kansas City’s Holocaust survivors before, during, and/or after the Holocaust.
* Give a truthful representation of survivors’ stories. Don’t embellish. Graphic details of survivors’ experiences may need to be left out, depending on the age of the target audience.
* Convey accurate Holocaust and historical information. Research! Ask MCHE for help with access to reliable and age-appropriate sources of information as well as answers to questions when stymied.
* Be creative. Design a product that is attractive and will capture the attention/interest of the chosen audience.
* For bonus points—it would be lovely if the audience could interact with the final product in some way.

Examples of Final Products (ideas only; not an exclusive list):

* Art installation. Consider free-standing, temporary, moveable, art for public areas such as school and public libraries, city and county government buildings, churches, recreation centers—any places people pass through or gather. Note: MCHE needs art for the display windows in its office.
* Short documentary film
* Planned series of social media posts
* Picture book for 4th through 6th graders
Suggested topic: Jewish life and culture in Europe pre-WWII. How were these children similar to you?
* Non-fiction poetry
* Educational game/ manipulative/ app—physical or virtual
* Geography (map-making) focused project. Where did survivors’ live in 1933? In 1939? Where do Jews live now—in Europe? Around the world? Do you notice any patterns?
* Historical timeline project. What was happening during WWII and the Holocaust-at-large in comparison to the events of a single survivor’s life 1933-1945? How did events interplay and affect each other?
* Plan an observance for your school or community for The November Pogrom (i.e. Kristallnacht) or Yom HaShoah—Holocaust Remembrance Day.