JEWISH FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES
HOLOCAUST CENTER

Using Graphic Novels to Teach About the Holocaust: A Case Study of Nazi-Occupied France

Time: 2-3 Class Periods
Audience: 9-12th Grade. May be adapted for 8th Grade

Acknowledgment: *This curriculum is a project of the California Teachers Collaborative for Holocaust and Genocide Education, established by the JFCS Holocaust Center, with support from the California Department of Education, the Marin County Office of Education, and the State of California.*

Learning Objectives:
By the end of this lesson, students will be able to...

- Understand the complexities of wartime France and the threat to non-citizens
- Learn how and why children hid their identity
- Analyze the choices people made to survive and help others survive
- Use a graphic memoir to expand our understanding of how the larger history impacts an individual's life

Aligned Standards
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.9
Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9
Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9
Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Context
This lesson focuses on the Holocaust in occupied France through a child's perspective. A basic introduction to the Holocaust is helpful. For students with little background, this 38-minute video from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum will provide context. For middle school, please preview the video before showing. Additional resources are at the end of the lesson. For a list of common terms used within this lesson, refer to the glossary at the end of the lesson.

Materials Needed

- Google Slides
- Handout 1- The Journey Begins: A Question of Identity (*A Bag of Marbles*, Pages 23-27)

- Handout 2- Times of Crisis: Choosing to Act (*A Bag of Marbles*, Pages 31-35, 38-45, 116-120)
- Handout 3- Tightening Noose: Choiceless Choices (*A Bag of Marbles*, Pages 106-110)
- Handout 4- Timeline
- Handout 5- Map of Jo and Maurice's Journey (Supplemental, *A Bag of Marbles,* Page 127)
- KWL graphic chart

Lesson/Activities

Lesson Framing: Frame the lesson and go into the trigger warning. See example below. *Please note, due to the challenging themes of hatred and discrimination that this lesson focuses on, it is recommended that students receive a trigger warning about the challenging nature of the subject; frame the lesson as a continuing conversation, and remind students of their options if they feel they need to take a break.*

1. This lesson begins with direct instruction centered around google slides, and subsequently uses those slides to guide activities and assignments.

2. For students who do not have background in the Holocaust, this video provides context for the study of wartime France. Have students complete the first two steps of a KWL graphic chart.

   Debrief with a discussion of what they learned and whether they have any lingering questions. Please skip to the next step if not utilizing the video.

   Teaching Tip! Have students post questions to a "parking lot" to be discussed over the course of the lesson.

Jewish Life in France

3. **Transition to slide 1 in Google Slides.** After opening the slides, begin by telling students they will be learning about the Holocaust in France using excerpts from a graphic novel about a boy, Joseph (Jo) Joffo, and his brother's wartime experiences (1941-44) as a case study. The book is called *A Bag of Marbles*. Have students study the book's cover. Ask them to write down three things that they notice about the cover and two questions it raises. Share with a partner. Debrief as a class.

4. **Transition to Slide 2**. Explain that we are beginning with a look at Jewish life in France before the war. Before World War II, there was an influx of Jewish immigrants to France, including Jo's parents, who came from Russia and made their home in Paris. Like many Jews, they loved their new home and believed in the French Republic's ideals; Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.

5. **Transition to Slide 3.** Jewish artists, like Chagall and Lifshitz, immigrated to Paris and added to the rich culture of the city.

6. **Transition to Slide 4.** Some were small business people like Jo's father who opened a barbershop in a Jewish neighborhood, married and had four sons. Explain that in the 1930s, times changed and immigration was restricted.

   Slide 4. Continue to look at the Timeline. Ask what happens in 1939? (Hitler invades Poland and starts WWII).

7. **Transition to Slide 5.** Less than a year later, Germany invades France and surrounding countries.

8. **Transition to Slide 6.** France signs an armistice with Germany. The country is divided. Explain that the North is occupied by the Germans and the South called the "Free Zone," under French leaders with Vichy as the capital. Marshall Philippe Pétain and Pierre Laval are the leaders of the Unoccupied Zone.

   Did you know? Key players in Vichy, France: Phillipe Pétain and Pierre Laval.
   Although Petain and Laval were supposed to maintain neutrality, they collaborated with the Nazis. Without encouragement, the Vichy regime begins to pass anti-Jewish laws (Statut de Juif). It also establishes the Denaturalization Committee, to examine the status of immigrants, many of whom were Jews, who had become French citizens after 1927. It ultimately stripped 15,000 people of their citizenship. In July 1942, anxious that the Germans were threatening to reduce its autonomy and take direct control of policing, Vichy agreed that the French police would begin arresting and interning Jews, stipulating that it would only target foreign Jews, but volunteering to include the unoccupied zone in the round-ups. Foreign Jews, Laval told ministers discussing the deal, were simply "garbage waste sent by the Germans."

9. **Transition to Slide 7.** Look at the Statut de Juifs. Explain that these measures marginalized Jews, created "the Other." Ask students which option describes the picture to the right.
   Answer: D

10. **Transition to Slide 7-10.** Show the four examples of antisemitic signs/propaganda material in Paris.

    Teaching Tip! Teachers may want to make copies of these images so that students can look at them simultaneously and make notes on them.

    Activity: Think, pair, share. Whole group debrief. Prompt the students to look closely at these four examples. Note different venues. What does this say about the treatment of Jews in the public eye? What does this say about the non-Jewish observers?

Teaching Tip! Have students look at their timelines and discuss as a class- What is happening in the early 1930s in Germany? How might this affect the Jewish population in France? (German and Austrian Jews moving to France.)

- They drastically decrease Jewish involvement within French society.
- They segregate children from other children.
- They identify Jews as "the other."
- They highlight Jewish stereotypes.
- They invade public spaces.
- Other observations?

11. **Transition to Slide 11.** How quickly did anti-Jewish measures come into effect in Vichy? Are there differences between measures in two zones?

12. **Transition to Slide 12.** Point out the Transit Camps. Three arrest operations in the occupied zone throughout 1941 led to the detainment of close to 9000 Jews in camps of the occupied zone, most of foreign nationality. Over time, these camps would claim the lives of some 3,000 Jews, the first victims of the Holocaust in France. Almost all the foreign Jewish men in France, more than a third of the population of foreign Jews, were either conscripted into the Labor Corps (work camps) or incarcerated in concentration camps. In the south, Jews were rounded up by the *milice* (French term for military police).

13. **Transition to Slide 13.** Explain that this is a photo from one of the detention camps, Rivesaltes, in the Southern Zone. Have students do a silent free write in response to the photo.

14. Explain that the class now has the context in which the graphic novel took place and they will read excerpts from the book. Recap what they've learned. Revisit the book's cover. Do students have any additional reflections now that they have additional context? Share out.

15. **Transition to Slide 14.** Ask what the Yellow Star does (identifies, targets, humiliates, makes it easier to round up). Discuss as a class.

16. **Transition to Slide 15.** Describe what they see? Explain that this is in the center of Paris.

17. **Transition to Slide 16**. Why might the Nazis use buses to remove people from the city to camps?

Did you know? Nazis often hid what they were doing by using buses departing from the center of the city, which camouflage the true nature of their activities.

A Bag of Marbles

18. **Transition to Slide 17.** Introduce *A Bag of Marbles*. Now that students have context, do they have additional reflections on seeing the cover of the graphic memoir? Explain that they have now learned background to the excerpts of the graphic memoir based on the wartime (1941-1944) memoir of Joseph Joffo. Explain that Jo's father and mother immigrated to Paris in the 1920s where his father established a barber shop. After the order to wear a Yellow Star is enacted, the parents feel that it would be safer for the boys to go to live with their two older brothers in the Free Zone.

    Introduce Handout 1- The Journey Begins: A Question of Identity.

19. Explain that this sequence is the first of three they will read. Highlight the context; it begins the day Jo and Maurice come home after being bullied including physical violence by classmates for wearing the Yellow Star. Students should have the Timeline available for reference while reading the text. Before reading, note where the events fit in on the Timeline.

    Teaching Tip! The yellow star has been enacted.

    Activity: Four Close Reads.
    - Observe: First, do a quick read. What's the first thing they notice, shapes, colors, text to picture ratio? What is one question they have about what they observe?
    - Understand. In one sentence, describe the main idea of this excerpt. What evidence supports this?
    - Analyze: what do you learn?
    - Connect: What circumstances cause us to hide our identity both in times of crisis and in everyday life?

    Debrief activity.

    Introduce Handout 2- Times of Crisis: Choosing to Act (Pages 31-35, 38-45, 116-120)

20. This activity explores the question of moral choice in four scenarios in A Bag of Marbles. Continue to reference Timeline as needed. May also reference handout 5, map of the boys' journey.

    Activity: Journal- Have you (or someone you've seen) ever been faced with a difficult choice about helping another person? Share out (voluntary) as a class.

    Context to excerpt. The next four readings reflect choices made under difficult circumstances:

- The first incident occurs not long after the boys leave home. Note that Pétain enlisted the Church's support in backing his antisemitic policies. Clergy were against Nazi racial ideology but they held long-standing Christian anti-Jewish beliefs and did not protest the Statut de Juif. This changed after the Vel D'Hiv roundup in Paris and deportations in 1942. pp. 23-27.
- The second occurs when the boys are looking for a passeur (guide) in order to cross into the Free Zone. A "passeur" (French) was a paid person who transported people from the Occupied Zone to the Free Zone. pp. 38-45.
- Pro-Petain family. This man hid Jo in his home for several weeks. pp. 116-118.
- Jo is enlisted by the Resistance (anti-Vichy, anti-Nazi group) to act as a messenger. pp. 119-120.

Activity: Read, Think, Wonder in small groups:
- Read all excerpts silently. Discuss the main idea of each.
- Think: Who are the Upstanders in each scenario?
- Wonder: What prompted them to act ?
- In groups: Who is an Upstander activity? Scale of "Upstanding." On a scale of 1-10, where would they place the main character along the continuum?

Introduce Handout 3- Tightening Noose: Choiceless Choices (Pages 106-110)

21. Have students check their Timeline. Note overall radicalization of the deportations and murder of Jews and that the Nazis have now occupied the "Free Zone" in Southern France.
    Activity: Lawrence Langer, Holocaust scholar, coined the term "choiceless choices" to denote events in the Holocaust where people were faced with unprecedented challenges.

    Activity: Close Read.
    - How do you see evidence of the changing conditions? Give examples.
    - Identify several choices made in this excerpt by different people. Give evidence.
    - Are these choices resolved?
    - How do you imagine this excerpt ends? Why?

    Have students record their answers. First discuss in small groups. As a large group, focus on the last question (d). After they are finished, explain that Maurice returns with the necessary documents and the Nazis let them go. Reactions?

22. **Transition to Slide 18.** In 1944, the family returns to Paris without the boys' father who had been arrested, deported to Auschwitz and murdered. The four sons reopen the family barber shop. Debrief how *A Bag of Marbles* added to their understanding of the Holocaust in France.
    Discuss the notion of how countries face a difficult past.

Assessments
- Create a double timeline that compares what happened to Jo to the larger context in France during WWII. Additional lines could be added to other European countries.

- In a written reflection, analyze how reading a graphic novel has enriched your understanding of the Holocaust in France.

- Has reading about the moral complexities of being an upstander changed your thinking on what it means to be an upstander during times of crisis? Cite evidence from the text to support your argument.

Next Steps?

- *A Bag of Marbles* highlights how larger world events affect a personal story. Create a graphic auto-biography that explores events in your life within a broader world context. Think about how the author of *A Bag of Marbles* does this in his story when you create your own.
- Follow up with personal stories that make history come alive. The ushmm.org, the USC Shoah Foundation, yadvashem.org have testimonies of French Holocaust survivors that reinforce themes from this lesson.

- There are two feature films based on Joffo's memoir. Watch one of the films and compare it to the graphic work.

- Read Joffo's memoir and compare it to the film, and graphic work. What is included? Left out? How did reading the graphic memoir first shape your perception of the other works? Or not?

- Read another graphic novel, such as *White Bird*, which is also set in France, and compare the two works.

Supplemental Resources on Using Graphic Novels- just a few suggestions

- https://www.scholastic.com/content/dam/teachers/lesson-plans/18-19/Graphic-Novel-Discussion-Guide-2018.pdf
- https://cdn.ncte.org/nctefiles/resources/books/sample/03920chap01_x.pdf
- What is a Graphic Novel?
- How Comic Books Can Make Kids (and Adults) Smarter | Gene Luen Yang | Big Think

Glossary

- **Antisemitism:** Hatred or prejudice towards Jewish people.

- **Transit or Detention Camps:** Camps set up around France to detain and incarcerate people, mostly Jews, during the Holocaust. They were used as a collection point to deport people to death camps.

- **Passeur (French):** A person, usually paid, who helped people cross from the Occupied Zone in France to the Free Zone.

- **Juif:** French for “Jew”

- **Statut de Juif:** Anti-Jewish Laws passed by both the Nazis in the Northern occupied zone and the French Vichy government in the Southern “Free Zone” after the German invasion in 1940.

- **Deportation:** forcible removal of Jews to concentration and death camps.

- **Milice (French):** French police who collaborated in rounding up Jews and resistance fighters.

References

Bibliography

Bergen, D. (2009). *War and Genocide: A Concise History of theHolocaust*, New York: Rowan and Littlefield.

Dwork, D. (1991). *Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Hyman, P. (1998). *The Jews of Modern France*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Poznanski, R. (2001). *Jews in France during World War II,* Hanover: Brandeis University Press, the USHMM, and University Press of New England.

Marrus, M. and R. Paxton (1983) *Vichy France and the Jews.* New York: Basic Books.

Renée Poznanski, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, & Tauber Institute For The Study Of European Jewry. (2001). *Jews in France during World War II*. Brandeis University Press In Association With The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Selected Bibliography of Graphic Novels on the Holocaust and other Genocides (in progress) This list will grow as more books are published and vetted.

This is a recommended sample of books, as well as suggested ages for classroom use. As graphic novels can often be read on several different levels and for different purposes, the recommended age is somewhat fluid.

Krug, N. (2018). *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home.* New York: Scribner. This is a sophisticated combination of art, text, photography, collage that explores questions of the legacy of history, and memory,on the life of an American German woman wrestling with her family's complicated past. Recommended for upper high school grades.

Huevel, E. (2007). *A Family Secret* and *The Search.* New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux. These two linked books, published in cooperation with the Anne Frank House highlight both a Jewish girl's experiences in Holland during the Holocaust as well as her gentile friend, with whom she was close. In *A Family Secret* a boy discovers his grandmother Helena's, album that leads to her learning about what happened to her Jewish friend. *The Search* continues with Esther's grandson helping her find out what happened to her parents during the Holocaust. Middle school as well as younger high school students will enjoy the Tintin-esque illustrations. Both books also expand or enrich Anne Frank's diary but highlight a different experience in the Netherlands.

Joffo, J. (2013). *A Bag of Marbles.* Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group. See lesson *A Bag of Marbles: A Case Study of Nazi occupied France* on the JFCS Holocaust Center website.https://holocaustcenter.jfcs.org/

Nadel, E. (2024). *The Girl Who Sang: A Holocaust Memoir of Hope and Survival.* New York: Roaring Book Press. Enia Feld's idyllic prewar childhood opens this book about her wartime experiences in Poland that culminate with her immigration to the United States and becoming Estelle, an American teen. In between, readers learn about her dire years in hiding with her brothers, those who helped and others who betrayed them. While she survived, her wartime traumas shadow her postwar life.Throughout this true story, her love of music- even as the war suppressed her singing- remains with her. Suitable for middle school students and lower high school grades.

Palacio, R.J. (2019). White Bird. New York: Knopf. This book by the author of the best-selling novel *Wonder* tells the story of a girl who is hidden in a barn by a non-Jewish family during the Holocaust. The story is a fictionalized composite based on careful research, but the author does not avoid difficult aspects of the experience, including the deaths of several characters.Students will connect with the teenaged characters and the portrayal of their relationships. Recommended for middle and high school students. This might be used in conjunction with the lesson for *A Bag of Marbles,* which is also based in wartime France.
https://holocaustcenter.jfcs.org/

Robbins, T. (2011). *Lily Renee, Escape Artist*. Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group. Like *More than any Child Should Know*, this book is based on the true story of a Kindertransport survivor. Unlike Steve Adler, Lily is Austrian born and an older teenager when she arrives in England. Some historical context woven throughout, but additional details are included in "More about Lily's Story" at the conclusion of the book. Though the author does not shy away from difficult aspects of Lily's experience, the book is particularly suitable for middle school students. Photos from Lily's family album are included.

Robertson, D. A. (2012, 2021). *Sugar Falls: A Residential School Story.* Winnipeg: Highwater Press.This short graphic memoir is based on the true story of Betty Ross, Elder from Cross Lake First Nation. The book highlights the cruelty and abuse of First Nation children at the hands of Canadian authorities and the staff of residential schools through Ross's personal history. It shines a bright light on family connection and loss as well as raises questions about trauma and forgiveness. Recommended for high school students.

Rugelbrugge, P. (2021).*More than any Child Should Know: A Kindertransport Story of the Holocaust.* Seattle: Holocaust Center for Humanity. This slim book depicts the story of German-born survivor Steve Adler who was sent to England as part of the *Kindertransport* rescue program for Jewish children. It provides considerable historical context, also brings the protagonist into the present, and is accessible for middle school and high school. It is published by the Holocaust Center for Humanity, which has a teacher's guide on its website.
http://HolocaustCenterSeattle.org

Shayne, R. (2023). *Hour of Need: The Daring Escape of the Danish Jews during World War II.* New York: Yellow Jacket. *Hour of Need* details the often overlooked history of the rescue of Danish Jews during the Holocaust. Told from the perspective of Danish survivor Mette, who returns years later to Denmark with her grandchildren, the book highlights how ordinary citizens risked their lives to help the Jewish countrymen. Suitable for high school and middle school, a

Historical Note at the conclusion of the book provided by the Illinois Holocaust Museum offers additional context. The Illinois Holocaust Museum also has a teaching guide on its website. https://www.ilholocaustmuseum.org/students-educators/virtual-student-educator-resources/museum-teaching-guides/

Spiegelman, A. (1996). *The Complete Maus: A Survivor's Tale.* New York: Pantheon. This ground-breaking set of two graphic novels is based on taped interviews that Art Spiegelman conducted with his father Vladek, a Polish survivor of Auschwitz. In his black and white illustrations, which brings the story into stark relief, Spiegelman depicts Jews as mice and Nazis as cats. In addition to chronicling Vladek's prewar life, his marriage to Art's mother (who commits suicide), his experiences in a labor camp as well as Auschwitz, Spiegelman reveals a multi-layered, complicated postwar relationship with his father and his legacy. Recommended for high school students.

Veasna, T. (2019). *Year of the Rabbit,* Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly. Recommended for high school students, this book is based on the author's family's experiences during the Cambodian Genocide. Divided into twenty-one chapters, the memoir begins shortly after the Khmer Rouge takes over, three days before the author's birth. The deeply personal account details the family's flight from Phnom Penh through liberation, showcasing details of various relatives' lives. A family tree at the start and conclusion (showing those who were killed) gives human faces to the millions who were murdered.

Watch for:

Takavorian, N. *Armaveni. Armaveni* is a semi-autobiographical YA graphic novel that weaves two stories linked by the generational trauma of the Armenian genocide. Hoboken: Levine Querido. (forthcoming Spring 2025)

Avoid:

Boom, Corrie Ten, Sherril Johnl, Sherrill Elizabeth (2024). *The Hiding Place: A Graphic Novel.* Michigan: Chosen. Many teachers use Corrie Ten Boom's book *The Hiding Place* upon which this graphic novel is based, however, be aware that the graphic novel is published by an Evangelical publishing company and has a heavy-handed religious perspective.