

Post-Virtual Experience Activity

“The Past is Present”

Teacher’s Guide

Time Needed: 1-3 hours

Teacher Note:

Many of the resources for this activity are located on the IWitness website. Please register at <http://iwitness.usc.edu> and create your free account in order to access the resources.

Introduction:

In this Post-Virtual Experience activity, students will discuss themes and lessons of the Virtual Experience and the learning activities in which they have participated. Throughout the Post-Virtual Experience activity, discussion questions are provided as a helpful guide to initiate and focus discussions. However, teachers should use their own discretion and knowledge of their students when posing questions and facilitating discussion. Additionally, students should be encouraged to ask their own questions and connect what they viewed to build understanding. Finally, it is important to explain to students that there are no simple answers to these questions, which are *extremely* complex in nature.

To encourage thoughtful engagement from each student, consider structuring the discussions using strategies such as Think-Pair-Share, Four Corners, Affinity Protocol, Hand Votes, and/or Fishbowl. Additional examples and descriptions can be found [here](#) or by conducting an Internet search. **Please note that Role Playing is not a suitable discussion structure for any of these activities.**

By participating in this activity, it is hoped that students will understand that prejudice, stereotypes, exclusion, dehumanization, and hatred played a central role in the events of the Holocaust and that it was neither inevitable nor a case of people acting without choice. Students will also begin to examine their role as future – and current – leaders in their schools, communities, and towns or cities.

PART I: Debrief

Approximate Time Needed: 20 minutes

In Part I of this Post-Virtual Experience activity, students will debrief the Virtual Experience and share their thoughts and feelings with each other. As students weave together the lessons of this Virtual Experience, they will understand that the past is indeed present and that they have the power – and responsibility – to be a force for positive change.

Procedure:

1. After the Virtual Experience, ask students to discuss their initial thoughts about what they saw and heard. Use this opportunity to reinforce the topics that were discussed throughout the Virtual Experience. Use questions, such as the following, to guide the discussion and promote dialogue:
 - *What were some aspects of the Virtual Experience that stood out for you, were memorable, were most meaningful?*

- *What roles do you think prejudices, stereotypes, exclusion, dehumanization, and hatred played in the Holocaust?*
- *How did people survive the Holocaust? What roles do you think tolerance, love, and unity played?*
- *The events of the Holocaust were perpetrated 70+ years ago. Why is it important that we continue to remember those events?*
- *What are the lessons you take with you today as a result of participating in this Virtual Experience?*

PART II: Lessons from a Survivor

Approximate Time Needed: 60 minutes

Roman Kent, a survivor of the Holocaust, delivered a powerful, moving speech at the ceremony commemorating the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. Although he was speaking directly to the audience present at the event, Mr. Kent's words were also intended for young people – the future leaders of the world.

In Part II of this Post-Virtual Experience activity, students will read excerpts from Roman Kent's speech and identify the themes and/or messages of the excerpt. As they discuss each excerpt, they will also reflect on what they viewed and heard in the Virtual Experience and connect the message of the excerpt to something they saw and heard in the Virtual Experience. The teacher will facilitate students' conversations and offer support and guidance as students bring personal interpretations to the words of a Holocaust survivor and build meaning with their classmates.

Resources:

- **Excerpts from Roman Kent's Speech** (see Appendix D)
- **Teacher Guide for Excerpts from Roman Kent's Speech** (see Appendix E)
- **Optional Video: Roman Kent's speech on YouTube**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_fk0xQ-u4

Procedure:

1. Divide students into six small groups. Assign each group one excerpt to read and consider. If possible, allow each group to view their assigned video excerpts.
2. As students read/view the speech, have them identify the main themes and messages of their excerpt.
3. After all groups have identified and recorded the themes and/or messages from their excerpts, have each group share their excerpt and interpretations with the whole group.
4. After all groups have presented, engage students in a whole group discussion about the overall message of Roman Kent's speech. Consider asking guiding questions to help prepare students for the Part III activity, such as the following:
 - Who was Mr. Kent speaking to through much of his speech? What messages was he trying to convey?
 - What connections did you make between Mr. Kent's speech and what you saw and heard in the Virtual Experience?

- Why is it important that we continue to hear from Holocaust survivors like Mr. Kent?

Options for Instruction:

- Work through the activity and discussion with the whole group of students. Ask volunteers to record their classmates' thoughts on chart papers so everyone can see.
- If students are going to view their video excerpt, ask them to discuss their interpretations prior to viewing the clip. Once students have viewed their video excerpt, ask them to revisit their interpretations to determine if they want to adjust their thinking based on what they viewed and heard.

PART III: The Past is Present

Approximate Time Needed: 60 minutes

In Part II of this Post-Virtual Experience activity, students identified themes and messages that were repeated throughout Roman Kent's speech, primarily the following:

- We must all remember the Holocaust and share survivors' memories to honor those who died and ensure that this part in history is not forgotten.
- It is our responsibility to prevent future human atrocities like the Holocaust from occurring.
- We must not stand by and watch as crimes are committed against humanity.

In Part III of this Post-Virtual Experience activity, students will dig deeper into those themes by engaging in a discussion around the questions below. It is important to explain to students that there are no simple answers to these questions, which are *extremely* complex in nature. The experiences of Jewish people throughout Europe were varied, so there can be neither single, definitive lessons nor any satisfying resolutions. However, as Roman Kent reminds us, we must remember history and learn from it. The purpose of this activity is two-fold. The first goal is to ask students to think about the experiences of survivors and the lasting impact of those experiences on subsequent generations. The second goal is to get students to begin to think about how they can be agents of positive change in their own schools, neighborhoods, or communities, bringing their own light to a world of darkness.

Resources:

- **Web Activity: Pyramid of Hate Exercise**
<http://sfi.usc.edu/education/pyramid/exercise.php>
- **Website: iWitness USC Shoah Foundation**
<http://iWitness.usc.edu/SFI/>
- **Website: Carr Center for Human Rights Policy**
<http://carrcenter.hks.harvard.edu>
- **Website: International Criminal Court**
http://www.icc-cpi.int/en_menus/icc/about%20the%20court/frequently%20asked%20questions/Pages/12.aspx
- **Website: Human Rights Watch**
<http://www.hrw.org/topic/international-justice/war-crimescrimes-against-humanity>
- **Video: Bystanders Video Clips on iWitness**
<http://iWitness.usc.edu/SFI/BrowseTopics.aspx>. Select "Bystanders."

- **Activity: Pyramid of Hate on USC Shoah Foundation website**
https://sfi.usc.edu/teach_and_learn/for_educators/resources/lessons/pyramid-hate

Procedure:

1. Engage students in a discussion around the questions below.

Teacher Note:

Explain to students that there are no simple answers to any of the questions in this activity. However, it is important for them to engage in a discussion around these topics so they can begin to make connections between the past and the present and understand how individual acts of prejudice can become greater acts of hate.

- The title of today's Virtual Experience is "The Past is Present." What do you think the title means? How is the past present?
 - What examples of acts or attitudes of prejudice did you see or hear about in the Virtual experience?
 - Does antisemitism still exist? Do antisemitic attacks still occur? (If students are unable to identify any, discuss the recent antisemitic attacks in Paris and London.)
2. Explain that attitudes of prejudice are individual perspectives. Ask the following questions to continue the discussion:
 - Why are attitudes of prejudice a problem?
 - What might happen when groups of people share and act upon their individual attitudes of prejudice?
 3. Invite students to work in small groups to complete the Pyramid of Hate Exercise from the USC Shoah Foundation (<http://sfi.usc.edu/education/pyramid/exercise.php>). In addition to the information and graphic organizer in the exercise, students are encouraged to use information from the in-class activities and from the Virtual Experience.
 4. After completing the exercise, ask students the following questions:
 - What does the Pyramid of Hate Exercise teach us about the dangers of acts and attitudes of prejudice?
 - What can occur if acts and attitudes of prejudice are allowed to flourish unchecked?
 - Is it possible to combat acts of prejudice, discrimination, or violence? How? What examples have you seen in the news? In your community? In this school?
 5. Continue the discussion with the following questions:
 - Since the end of the Second World War, there have been many other incidents of genocide, persecution, and mass atrocity around the globe. Although the numbers who have died these events may not equal those who perished in the Holocaust, the suffering has been immense. Do human atrocities still occur in which people stereotype, isolate, intimidate, persecute, or murder groups of people because they are different?

- What examples of human atrocity did Roman Kent mention in his speech?
 - Consider the Pyramid of Hate activity. What acts of prejudice, discrimination, violence or genocide have you seen in the news? Who is leading efforts to help? What are they doing to help?
6. In his speech, Roman Kent also mentions the importance of helping others, of not being a bystander to acts of prejudice, hatred, and cruelty. He also said, **“We survivors share a common goal with the current generation and hopefully, with our future generations. We do not want our past to be our children’s future... Because that’s the key to my existence: We survivors do not want our past to be our children’s future.”**
- Think about what you might do to make sure the past Roman Kent spoke of is not part of your generation’s future. How will you help create light in a world of darkness, combat the pyramid of hate? Begin by thinking locally. What can you do in your school? In your neighborhood? In your town or city? What issues or causes light a fire inside you?
 - Do your friends or family members share your passion for those issues or causes? Who might you get to help you get involved in making positive change?
 - Talk with your small group about the kinds of issues, causes, challenges, problems, or ideas that motivate you to want to act.
7. Consider sharing the following resources with students to help them identify ways they can participate in creating change in their communities:
- **Anti-Defamation League Goldensohn Initiative for Teens (GIFT)**
<http://houston.adl.org/gift-2/>
 - **Teen Life Volunteer Opportunities**
<https://www.teenlife.com/category/volunteer/>
 - **American Red Cross: Mobilizing the Power of Youth**
<http://www.redcross.org/support/volunteer/young-humanitarians>
 - **Go-Eco Teenage Volunteering**
<http://www.goeco.org/tags/teenage-volunteering>
 - **United Way: Youth and Volunteering**
<http://www.unitedway.org/take-action/youth-volunteering>
8. Challenge students to participate in the IWitness Video Challenge (<http://iwitness.usc.edu/SFI/iwitnesschallenge/>). See the attached flyer for additional information.

Extension Option #1

Students will work in small groups to research individuals and groups who helped Jewish people escape Nazi persecution before and during World War II. Each group will create a presentation about their individual or group. Students will set up their presentations in stations around the room and conduct a Gallery Walk to learn about the different people and groups who refused to be bystanders during the Holocaust. This activity will help students learn about people who found strength and purpose in helping others and combatting prejudice and hate.

Extension Option #2

Students will work in teams to learn more about current examples of antisemitism or human atrocity and identify individuals and groups who are working to help. Students will share their findings with classmates and, if possible, take steps to get involved in causes that are important to them to be part of positive change in the world. This activity will help students understand that people around the world are working to create positive change and will reveal opportunities for them to get involved in causes that are important to them.

Appendix D

Excerpts from Roman Kent's Speech

- A. **"We survivors continuously came face to face with death. Yet, despair was not our response. Despite hopelessness, we created light out of the world of darkness and we now remember the all-consuming evil we were forced to endure. We survivors cannot, *dare not*, to forget the millions who were murdered. For, if we were to forget, the conscience of mankind would be buried alongside the victims." (3:47-4:39)**
- B. **"Today, in this place, we are part of the 70th anniversary commemorating the liberation of Auschwitz, held under the auspices of the government of Poland. What a superb opportunity to extend a meaningful heartfelt message to the leaders of all nations to the world at large: We must *all* remember! For if you, the leaders in the world, will remember and to teach others to remember, then the Holocaust and other atrocities like Darfur, Biafra, Kosovo, as well as attacks as the present one in Paris, will have no place on the face of the earth." (4:40-5:40)**
- C. **"But to remember is not enough. Deeds, deeds as well as thoughts, are crucial. It is our mutual obligation – that of survivors and that of national leaders – to instill in children, in future generations, the understanding of what happens when virulent prejudice and hatred are allowed to flourish. We must all teach our children tolerance and understanding both at home and at school. For tolerance cannot be assumed. It must be taught. We all must make clear that hate is never right and love is never wrong." (5:40-6:45)**
- D. **"There are but few holy acts that I consider really holy and which redeem my faith in mankind. Without hesitation, the courageous and heroic deeds of the non-Jews, those we call the Righteous Gentiles, who saved Jewish lives during the Holocaust fall into this category. To save innocent Jewish lives, the Righteous Gentiles endangered their own life and that of their family to save the life of a stranger. Righteous Gentiles, just a few against tens of millions, showed the world that the answer to tyranny and indifference is involvement and the courage to make moral choices and act in accordance with their choices. There these should serve as an example of what could have been done and as an indictment of what was not done and as a moral torch in a world of oppression and darkness. The rescuers – nobles by deed but modest by character – told us that even in the Hell known as the Holocaust the individual had a choice and a capacity to behave humanly if she or he only cared and had the courage to act accordingly." (6:45-8:55)**

- F. **“We survivors share a common goal with the current generation and hopefully, with our future generations. We do not want our past to be our children’s future... Because that’s the key to my existence: We survivors do not want our past to be our children’s future. I hope, I hope and *believe* that this generation will build on mankind’s great traditions tempered by understanding that these traditions must embrace pluralism and tolerance, decency and human rights for all people, and must include opposition to antisemitism and to racism of any sort. It should be commonplace, rather than exceptions.” (8:55-10:25)**
- G. **“It is now up to the leaders of tomorrow. But there remains so much more to be done. We all must be involved and stay involved. No one should ever be a spectator. I feel so strongly about this point that if I had the power, I would add an 11th commandment to the universally accepted Ten Commandments. You should never, *never* be a bystander. Thus I hope against hope that there is a brighter future for mankind. After all, we live together on the same planet. Perhaps, when we all finally realize that we are one people we can then make sure that a tragedy like Auschwitz will never happen again to us or to any other people.” (13:41-14:52)**

Teacher Note:

The following clip was used to identify the time codes for this activity:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_fk0xQ-u4.

Appendix E

Teacher Guide for Excerpts from Roman Kent's Speech

- A. **"We survivors continuously came face to face with death. Yet, despair was not our response. Despite hopelessness, we created light out of the world of darkness and we now remember the all-consuming evil we were forced to endure. We survivors cannot, *dare not*, to forget the millions who were murdered. For, if we were to forget, the conscience of mankind would be buried alongside the victims."** (3:47-4:39)

Themes/messages: It is important to remember the Holocaust and those who died. Those who survived are the voice and memory of those who did not survive. If the stories are not told, it will be as if the Holocaust – and the lessons of that atrocity – never happened.

- B. **"Today, in this place, we are part of the 70th anniversary commemorating the liberation of Auschwitz, held under the auspices of the government of Poland. What a superb opportunity to extend a meaningful heartfelt message to the leaders of all nations to the world at large: We must *all* remember! For if you, the leaders in the world, will remember and to teach others to remember, then the Holocaust and other atrocities like Darfur, Biafra, Kosovo, as well as attacks as the present one in Paris, will have no place on the face of the earth."** (4:40-5:40)

Themes/messages: The leaders of the world must also remember the Holocaust and those who died. Human atrocities continue to happen around the world. World leaders have a responsibility to send a message that these events are not acceptable and that the events of the Holocaust must not be repeated.

- C. **"But to remember is not enough. Deeds, deeds as well as thoughts, are crucial. It is our mutual obligation – that of survivors and that of national leaders – to instill in children, in future generations, the understanding of what happens when virulent prejudice and hatred are allowed to flourish. We must all teach our children tolerance and understanding both at home and at school. For tolerance cannot be assumed. It must be taught. We all must make clear that hate is never right and love is never wrong."** (5:40-6:45)

Themes/messages: Children, now and in the future, must be taught tolerance and understanding. Children must be taught that hate and prejudice are never right and love is never wrong.

- D. **"There are but few holy acts that I consider really holy and which redeem my faith in mankind. Without hesitation, the courageous and heroic deeds of the non-Jews, those we call the Righteous Gentiles, who saved Jewish lives during the Holocaust fall into this category. To save innocent Jewish lives, the Righteous Gentiles endangered their own life and that of their family to save the life of a**

stranger. Righteous Gentiles, just a few against tens of millions, showed the world that the answer to tyranny and indifference is involvement and the courage to make moral choices and act in accordance with their choices. There these should serve as an example of what could have been done and as an indictment of what was not done and as a moral torch in a world of oppression and darkness. The rescuers – nobles by deed but modest by character – told us that even in the Hell known as the Holocaust the individual had a choice and a capacity to behave humanly if she or he only cared and had the courage to act accordingly.” (6:45-8:55)

Themes/messages: Ordinary people can change the lives of others by having courage and making the decision to get involved. The only way to overcome tyranny and indifference is by people getting involved and helping to make change. It is part of the human experience to help each other. Courage is a choice. You do not have to be exactly like someone else to feel compassion, humanity, sympathy, and love for them. When we help people who are different from us, we embrace the humanity in them and in ourselves.

- E. **“We survivors share a common goal with the current generation and hopefully, with our future generations. We do not want our past to be our children’s future... Because that’s the key to my existence: We survivors do not want our past to be our children’s future. I hope, I hope and *believe* that this generation will build on mankind’s great traditions tempered by understanding that these traditions must embrace pluralism and tolerance, decency and human rights for all people, and must include opposition to antisemitism and to racism of any sort. It should be commonplace, rather than exceptions.”** (8:55-10:25)

Themes/messages: We must not repeat the past. We cannot allow atrocities like the Holocaust to occur again. We can only do this by embracing people from all cultures, races, regions, and religions, by treating everyone humanely and with decency, and by opposing antisemitism and racism. This kind of behavior should not be unusual, but should be a matter of course for everyone.

- F. **“It is now up to the leaders of tomorrow. But there remains so much more to be done. We all must be involved and stay involved. No one should ever be a spectator. I feel so strongly about this point that if I had the power, I would add an 11th commandment to the universally accepted Ten Commandments. You should never, *never* be a bystander. Thus I hope against hope that there is a brighter future for mankind. After all, we live together on the same planet. Perhaps, when we all finally realize that we are one people we can then make sure that a tragedy like Auschwitz will never happen again to us or to any other people.”** (13:41-14:52)

Themes/messages: One of the basic rules that guides our lives should be, “Don’t be a bystander.” Only when we choose to help others in the face of atrocity can we assure ourselves a brighter future. We are not so different from each other. We are

all people and we all live on the same planet together. With that understanding, we can prevent human atrocities like the Holocaust.

Teacher Note:

The following clip was used to identify the time codes for this activity:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_d_fk0xQ-u4.

Common Core Standards

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.6](#)

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas clearly and efficiently.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.9-10.6](#)

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.6](#)

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.1.c](#)

Pose and respond to specific questions with elaboration and detail by making comments that contribute to the topic, text, or issue under discussion.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.1.c](#)

Pose questions that elicit elaboration and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant observations and ideas that bring the discussion back on topic as needed.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.1.c](#)

Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1.c](#)

Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1.c](#)

Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.1.d](#)

Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.1.d](#)

Acknowledge new information expressed by others and, when warranted, modify their own views.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.1.d](#)

Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views in light of the evidence presented.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1.d](#)

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1.d](#)

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.5](#)

Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, images, music, sound) and visual displays in presentations to clarify information.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.5](#)

Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations to clarify claims and findings and emphasize salient points.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.5](#)

Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.5](#)

Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5](#)

Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.