

# Teaching with Testimony

Drawing upon the USC Shoah Foundation's vast library of audiovisual testimony from survivors and witnesses of genocides, *Teaching with Testimony* empowers students to find their voices and take action for a better future.

## About the *Testimony and Civic Skills Ready to Use Series*

The Testimony and Civic Skills ready to use activities are designed to be student facing explorations that help students analyze the ways in which testimony can introduce and reinforce important civic skills like empathy, courage, resilience, and more. This ongoing series provides educators with flexible and more narrowly focused resources that put students in control of their own learning as they listen, analyze, and reflect on the testimonies they viewed.

## What is a testimony?

A testimony is when someone shares their experience, and the listener gains a new understanding. Testimonies, or people's stories, are deeply personal and can have a tremendous impact on our own lives. For the following activities, testimony serves as an effective primary source that contextualizes historical events for students and allows them to consider not just the historical context, but also the human experience.

## Connections to civic skills?

When you think of the term "civics," you might first think about factual knowledge related to federal and state governments, like the three branches of government, or the differences between the Senate and the House of Representatives. While those facts are important, this series of activities explores the connection between testimonies and civic skills.

Civic skills refer to the habits and behaviors that strengthen a person and their community. These might include listening to others, a commitment to service, showing empathy, participating in advocacy, and others. These habits are not just nice to have, they are crucial for building a strong community and democracy.

In these activities, students not only listen to *what* the speaker is saying, but *how* they say it. By analyzing the *what* and the *how*, students can:

- build their sense of empathy.
- engage in questioning and reasoning.
- make connections between people and events.
- explore the connections between actions and consequences, both past and present.
- understand how the decisions that individuals and governments make can have lasting impacts on all people.
- feel empowered to take action.

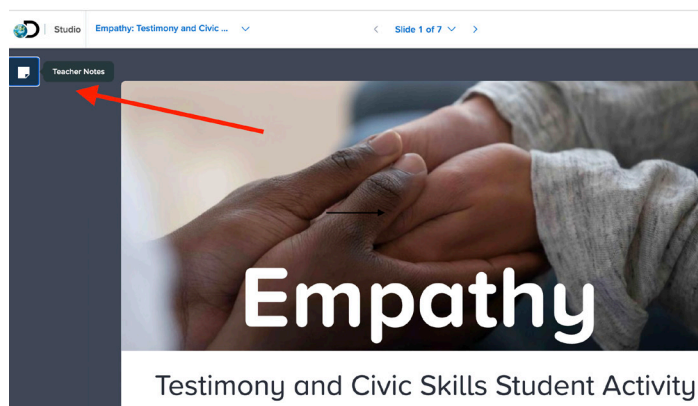
## Ready to Use activities in your classroom

Ready-to-use activities can be used to focus on a particular topic. This collection of student-driven activities empowers learners to build knowledge around the topic of civics and testimony. These resources pair digital media with easy-to-follow instructions that guide students through analyzing a testimony and reflecting on how to apply concepts in their own lives.

The following activities are designed to be completed in 8-10 minutes and can be used in a variety of ways. These might include but are not limited to:

- introductions to testimony
- bellringers
- checks for understanding
- before, during, or after another activity

Each ready-to-use activity has additional educator supports located in the “Teacher Notes” section. You can access the notes by clicking on the notepad icon to the left of the slides located here.



Included in the educator support tab are relevant standards and objectives, a driving question, and a student capture sheet that you may choose to use to help students reflect on their learning. The student capture sheet can be used for all of the activities.

## Activity 1: Empathy

### Overview

In this ready-to-use activity, students explore the meaning of empathy using the testimony from Floyd Dade. Students then reflect on the role empathy plays in their life and the way it could be used to make a positive difference in their community.

### Objectives

- Consider how empathy can help us make a positive difference.
- Analyze testimony of witnesses and survivors of genocide.

### Speaker Biography

#### FLOYD DADE



Floyd D. was a soldier in the 761st Tank Battalion, a segregated unit comprised of Black men. His unit was present at the liberation of the concentration camp named Guns kirchen, a subcamp of Mauthausen, and he witnessed the aftermath of its operations.

**Experience Group:** Liberator (World War II)

**Born:** May 5th, 1924 Texarkana (Texas, USA)

**Date of Interview:** July 15th, 1999

**Location of Interview:** San Francisco, California, U.S.A.

### Extension Ideas

Consider the following ideas to extend student learning about the connection between empathy and civic skills, testimony, or build a greater understanding of the historical context surrounding Mr. Dade's testimony.

- Have students view another testimony related to empathy from the options below. As students watch the testimony, have them complete a Venn diagram that compares and contrasts the speakers' stories.
- Encourage students to share ways in which they could practice using empathy in their daily lives. Share out the ideas as a class and keep track of ways in which they practiced the civic skill.
- Share a version of Mr. Dade's biography and use the [Timeline of the Holocaust](#) as an extension activity to learn more about the events that Mr. Dade speaks about in his testimony and how the events impacted his life.

## Additional Testimonies on Empathy

[Itka Zygmuntowicz](#)



Itka remembers surviving because of the friendship and spiritual resistance she shared with Bina, a girl she met in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

[George Papanek](#)



George reflects on the importance of learning from the Holocaust and working to make the world a better place.

[Marion Blumenthal Lazan](#)



Marion reflects on how welcomed and accepted she felt at her school after she arrived in the United States.

## Activity 2: Courage

### Overview

During this ready-to-use activity, students will learn about the meaning of social courage and the role it plays in making the world a better place. During the activity students will better understand what social courage means in the context of their community or school. Next, students will analyze an example of social courage using the testimony of Hedy Epstein and then chart what they have learned about social courage.

### Objectives

- Consider how social courage can help make a positive difference in the world.
- Analyze testimony of witnesses and survivors of genocide.

### Speaker Biography

#### HEDY EPSTEIN



Hedy Epstein, an only child, was born on August 15, 1924, in Freiberg (Baden), Germany, to Ella and Hugo Wachenheimer. Hedy did not know she was Jewish until she was six years old because her family was a nonpracticing Jewish family. Growing up, Hedy felt her family were outsiders because she was not part of the general community and not part of the Jewish community. However, although she felt she was an outsider, Hedy did not experience antisemitism until Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933. Hedy fled from Nazi-controlled Germany on May 18, 1939, on a children's transport (Kindertransport) to England. This was the last time she saw her parents. This interview was conducted in St. Louis, Missouri on December 7, 1995.

**Experience Group:** Jewish Survivor

**Born:** Aug 15, 1924 Freiburg (Baden, Germany)

**Date of Interview:** Dec 7, 1995

**Location of Interview:** St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A.



## Extension Ideas

Consider the following ideas to extend students learning about the connection between courage and civic skills, testimony, or build a greater understanding of the historical context surrounding Ms. Epstein's testimony.

- After completing the activity, hold a class discussion that centers on the challenges of demonstrating social courage, especially as teenagers. Encourage students to share how and why social courage is an important civic skill.
- Using the additional testimonies, ask students to consider what other types of courage they know about. Encourage students to share out examples of when they have demonstrated other types of courage and why.
- Have students create a call to action for social courage. Using art supplies or available technology, ask students to create some form of artistic expression that empowers students to do what is right, even when it may seem hard.

## Additional Testimonies on Courage

[Alice Boddy](#)



Alice describes how she had the strength to travel and register herself for the Kindertransport and face changes in her life by always believing in herself no matter what.

[Alicia Appleman-Jurman](#)



Alicia describes when her house was attacked. She recognized one of the attackers, and she made a speech to him that caused him to leave.

[Esther Bem](#)



Esther was born in the former Yugoslavia, but fled in 1943 at the age of 13. Esther's family sought refuge in a village in the northern Italian mountains.

# Activity 3: Resilience

## Overview

In this ready-to-use activity, students learn about the meaning of community resilience and its connection to civic skills. Students often hear about resilience or perseverance, but not often in the context of their community. During this activity students are introduced to ways in which being part of a resilient community can build their own resilience. Students then reflect on the communities they belong to and how they have been resilient.

## Objective

- Consider how community resilience can help strengthen yourself and others.
- Analyze testimony of witnesses and survivors of genocide.

## Speaker Biography

### HELEN FAGIN



Helen N. Fagin was born February 1, 1922, in Radomsko, Poland. After graduating high school, Helen attended the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. Within a couple of months of the invasion of Poland, the German authorities turned the town into a ghetto. Helen, who was seventeen at the time, set up a clandestine school. In October 1942, Helen's parents were taken away in a raid while Helen and her two sisters managed to hide. They never saw their parents again. After liberation the sisters returned to Radomsko and eventually went to Bad Gastein, Austria, a displaced persons' camp. Wanda met her future husband, an American Army lieutenant and director of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration team, in Bad Gastein.

He helped the three sisters immigrate to the United States in 1946. On May 15, 1947, Helen went to a dance in New York City where she met her future husband, Sidney Fagin. At the time of her interview in 1996, Helen and Sidney were living in Sarasota, Florida.

**Experience Group:** Jewish Survivor

**Born:** Feb 1, 1922 Radomsko (Łódź, Poland)

**Date of Interview:** Feb 11, 1996

**Location of Interview:** Sarasota, Florida, U.S.A.

## Extension Ideas

Consider the following ideas to extend students learning about the connection between courage and civic skills, testimony, or build a greater understanding of the historical context surrounding Ms. Epstein's testimony.

- Have students take time to reflect on the different communities they belong to. These might include social, athletic, religious, interest driven, or other associations. Invite students to share how these communities strengthen their sense of belonging and connection.
- Encourage students to keep track of the ways they demonstrate resilience over the course of a week. Have students reflect on those moments or the choices they made in a journal and invite students to share how these moments of choices made them stronger.
- Provide time for students to research a community or group that is or has demonstrated strong community resilience. Provide examples of the different ways this might be reflected in the challenges different communities or groups face.

## Additional Testimonies on Courage

[Eva Freedman](#)



Eva offers a message seeking to unite the community of humanity.

[Margaret Lambert](#)



Margaret describes her Jewish identity and the community in the city where she grew up.

[Pinchas Gutter](#)



In his interactive biography filmed in 2014, Pinchas asks today's youth to be accepting and tolerant of one another. You can also learn more about Pinchas in his first USC Shoah Foundation testimony, filmed in 1995.