

# Testimony, Virtual Reality, and Inquiry

## Overview

ITwitness360 brings together individual testimonies and virtual reality (VR) film to promote empathy, among other positive educational outcomes. This guide serves to help introduce teachers to the use of VR, testimony, and inquiry-based instruction through the use of the short film *Lala*. In this 360° VR blend of animation and live-action video, Holocaust survivor Roman Kent shares the story of his time in Nazi-occupied Poland with his beloved dog, *Lala*, who taught him a timeless lesson: "Love is stronger than hate."

*Note:* For more resources on teaching with VR, testimony, and access to other instructional activities, please visit [itwitness360](https://www.itwitness360.com).

## Teaching Considerations for VR and Inquiry

The National Council for the Social Studies advocates for social studies instruction to be meaningful, active, value-based, integrative, and challenging. Combining VR with the power of testimony for the young learner can be an effective way to engage students in accomplishing these goals while building understanding of challenging topics from the past.

While digitizing history is not new, the application of testimony through the use of VR is unique and can provide an immersive experience for students. Beyond engagement with the past, this 360° VR blend of animation and live-action video can help students build empathy, foster curiosity, improve literacies, and introduce new habits of mind and thinking.

Some questions to reflect upon to fully integrate VR testimony, curriculum standards, and inquiry in the most meaningful way include

- In what ways can VR enhance the student experience through engagement and interaction?
- How should VR be integrated to promote discipline specific literacies in social studies and ELA education?
- How does the unique combination of testimony and 360° VR provide new opportunities for student through access and agency?

*Lala* presents a unique opportunity to integrate the use of testimony and VR into a student-centered, inquiry-based experience for the young learner. The following section provides examples of how *Lala* could be used within each of the four dimensions of the C3 Inquiry Arc. The Inquiry Arc is a scaffolded approach to inquiry that helps students engage in inquiry-based learning through four interlocking dimensions.

## Using *Lala* and the C3 Inquiry Arc

The four dimensions of the Inquiry Arc are described below, along with questions to consider on how *Lala* could be used in authentic and discipline-specific ways depending on your desired learning outcomes.

**Note:** For more information on the C3 Inquiry Arc, please visit [C3Teachers](https://www.c3teachers.org).

### Asking Questions

Questions form the basis of authentic inquiry. While teachers often prescribe questions, digital history testimonies like *Lala* invite curiosity rather than provide a succinct narrative of the past. As students explore the 360° VR world of Roman Kent and his family's resilience in the face of hate, they are uniquely positioned to explore the task of asking their own questions.

- As students view the film, how might you scaffold student curiosity before, during, and after?
- As students generate their own questions about the film, how might they be categorized, used to drive further understanding, or connected to larger themes?

### Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools

In this phase of inquiry, students engage the deeper understandings of historical thinking. At the elementary and middle grades level, students begin understanding the role empathy plays in understanding events of the past. Students can begin engaging with understanding historical events and thematic concepts. *Lala* provides an important opportunity for students to explore multiple forms of literacy beyond the written word.

- Why might this new technological experience for students lead to greater understanding of historical events? How does the VR experience lead to building context and empathy?
- While viewing testimony may not be new for many students, interacting within the testimony could be. How does this technology create opportunities for new and explicit literacy instruction?

### Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence

In this phase, students engage in analyzing the sources by using evidence to make claims. *Lala* models historical thinking through the presentation of both evidence and source material from testimony and visual art.

- When introducing the 360° component to students, how might you take into account the new tools for analyzing the visual testimony?
- How might students use the video to make the connection between testimony and evidence from events in the past?

### Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action

To help drive learning home, students need an opportunity to communicate their reasoning, findings, or thoughts. *Lala* provides students a rich opportunity to practice their writing, speaking, and listening skills that are specific to each grade level.

- As students view *Lala*, what questions or aspects of the film would you consider to be most important for students to reflect upon?
- In what ways could *Lala* be used as a window into student understanding of not only events of the past but also of testimony?