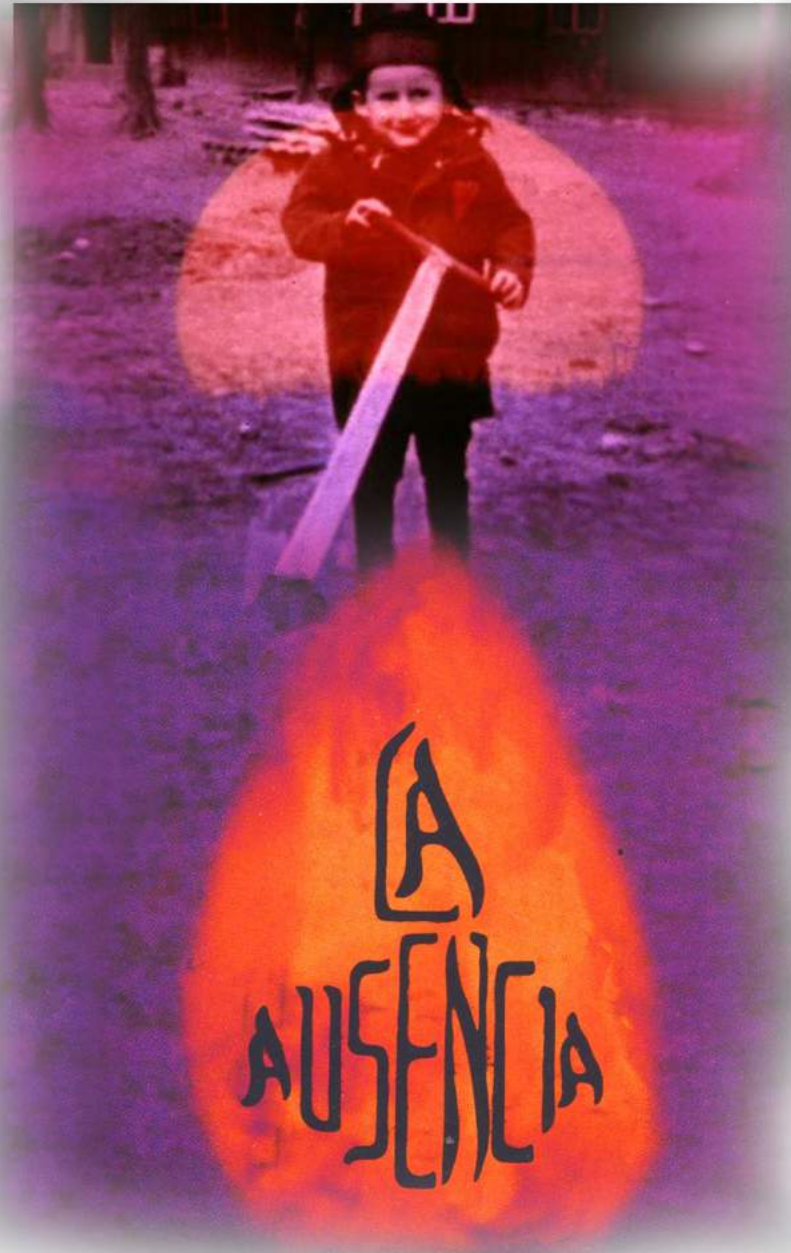


THE ABSENCE • LA AUSENCIA

STUDY GUIDE

TEACHERS AND STUDENTS



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**I Synopsis – II History of “The Absence” – III Description of the film.
IV Questionnaire – V Research – VI Insight Questions – VII Creative Writing.**

THE ABSENCE- LA AUSENCIA (35mm film, color, Spanish – English sub-titles, 1995, Venezuela, 4 hrs.). Edited Educational version, 1 hrs. Educational documentary film of the complete history of The Holocaust, featuring twelve Survivors, narrated historical context of why it occurred and how the Final Solution was implemented, relevant archival footage, re-created scenes, and a message to humankind.

I SYNOPSIS

THE ABSENCE presents the complete history of “The Holocaust”, featuring Survivors from the majority of countries in which it took place. The film encompasses a historical narration of the events during World War II leading to the systematic destruction of the European Jewry, as well as other minorities victimized by the Nazis.

THE ABSENCE describes how “The Final Solution” was implemented through re-created scenes of the mass graves, death trucks, death camps and labor camps.

It presents a meticulously researched re-creation of the death camps: Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka, where no one was expected to survive.

THE ABSENCE is enriched with revealing archival footage obtained from the most relevant sources of the world.

Artistic illustrations with musical and theatrical scenes bring messages throughout the film in which present and past are intertwined, contrasting liberty vs. captivity.

THE ABSENCE is a historical legacy for present and future generations.

It presents The Holocaust in a universal context, with lessons that embrace humankind in its desire to strive for liberty and peace.

II HISTORY OF “THE ABSENCE”

THE ABSENCE was conceived when Survivors met at the Yad Vashem Venezuelan Committee, and opened their old wounds with heartbreaking accounts of their experiences. The oldest, Regina Hirshorn, brought a well kept letter from her son stating:

“This beautiful world is not for me...for me they prepare trains that take me to my death in Belzec”

Judy Rodan, an orphan whose entire family was murdered in Auschwitz, listened to their stories.

She related them to her daughter Lizbeth, who envisioned LA AUSENCIA, as it came to be.

From then on, film makers, artists and intellectuals, worked pro-bonno in order for this educational non-profit project to come to fruition. Fifty college students interviewed Survivors.

The re-created scenes are enacted by 300 women and children, men, young and old, from the Community.

The artistic and the musical illustrations are performed by 400 children from schools of diverse cultures and ethnicities.

THE ABSENCE is a living legacy in which students will participate by learning about The Holocaust, with their teachers, and will preserve the message of the Survivors, to the benefit of a world in peace.

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III DESCRIPTION OF THE FILM

chapter 1 – time code 0:00

* REGINA HIRSHORN – Holocaust Survivor – POLAND

Mrs. Hirshorn, a survivor of Lvov, Poland, presents a letter written by her son Henrik at age 14, about mass killings of men, women and children in Camp Janover Lager and deportation to the Death Camp Belzec.

Mrs. Hirshorn states how in Janover Lager, 8,000 children were killed within two months. She implores the youngsters of the present time not to be indifferent to human suffering. Henrik, who was 10 years old when taken to Janover Lager, contemplates the beauty of nature, while awaiting his death, and writes:

... This beautiful world is not for me,
for me they prepare trains that take me to my death in Belzec”.

Regina Hirshorn – Holocaust Survivor – Poland



chapter 2 – time code 4:00

* TITLE OF THE FILM THE ABSENCE – LA AUSENCIA

Rare American filmed color archival footage of a boy liberated from Buchenwald Concentration Camp is presented to honor the children during the Holocaust.

The boy tries to smile.

A tear slides through his cheek and he reflects a profound sadness. He is a Survivor. He serves as the representation of Henrik, the introductory testimony of the film.

Archival Footage – Liberation of Buchenwald Camp



chapter 3 – time code 4:34

* CHILDREN OF THE PAST – Pre-Holocaust Photos – Roman Vishniac

Healthy and content children of today, and children of the past, the infants in the ghettos, where hunger and death threatened their innocent lives. Many became orphans. In many cases mothers chose to die with their children, rather than separate themselves from them.

Between 750,000 and 1,000,000 Jewish children were killed in the gas chambers. Another five hundred thousand died by other means.

Photo: Between 1,250,000 and 1,500,000 Jewish children killed



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* chapter 4 – time code 6:44

WHY DID THE HOLOCAUST OCCUR – Historical context

The Holocaust was the systematic destruction of the European Jews. It was initiated in Nazi Germany with the purpose of redesigning the human race, following the Aryan model, and converting the “inferior races” to be their slaves. Jews were not even valued as slaves, they were to be eliminated, which ultimately took form of systematic annihilation.

Genocide has occurred in history before and after The Holocaust: The Indian Tribes in the Americas, Armenia, Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda and Darfur. But the Holocaust was an unprecedented event in human history, the killings were done in a technological, efficient, and systematic manner.

In order to promote the Holocaust, hate became a doctrine.

Hate towards the Jews began many centuries ago. Toward the end of the 19th century, religious antisemitism became political antisemitism in Germany and other European nations.

In the XX century modern racial antisemitism was born, following a theory based on racism.

These ideas received wide support in Germany after its defeat in World War I.

In 1933 Hitler assumed power legally and integrated old nationalistic ideals with historic hatred toward the Jews. He offered the German people “the world” in exchange for the recognition of the Jew as their racial enemy. He was supported by the terror of a totalitarian regime.

His ability to communicate and his personality unified a “mass” desperate to follow a leader. Goebels: “Follow the Führer blindly and we will make you rich, the rest of the world will be your slave.”

The concept of Jew as a race is unaccepted by anthropology. A racial war, however, was set off to murder – the Nazis called it extermination – the Jews. In addition to Jews, two groups were targeted for murder: Those Germans who were mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed or congenitally ill and handicapped – who were considered “life unworthy of living” – and Roma and Sinti, commonly called Gypsies. They also persecuted, but not systematically kill: prostitutes, homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, the homeless and political prisoners, included in this group were Marxists, Liberals, Internationalists and Pacifists. Press and radio services promoted an extensive defamation campaign. Schools and universities taught “The science of the race”. Children were taught to hate.

The desperate attempt of a Jewish youth who shot a Third Secretary in the German Embassy in Paris was seized as an excuse to initiate a horrifying pogrom: “Kristallnacht”: The night of Broken Glass” or “November Pogroms”. On the night of November 9 1938, synagogues were set on fire, and temples, schools and cemeteries were reduced to rubble. The perpetrators destroyed Jewish businesses and homes, brutalizing their occupants. In 1938, Germany annexed Austria and entered parts of Czechoslovakia. It was allied with Romania, Hungary and Italy. In 1939, Hitler entered Bohemia and Moravia. On September 1, 1939 Hitler ordered the march through Poland. World War II began, bringing death, destruction, and suffering. Rivers of blood started to flow, as fifty million people died: thirty million civilians and twenty million soldiers. In 1940, the Germans invaded Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and France. In 1941 they invaded Greece, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. By then, beginning in 1939 ghettos were established in German occupied Poland. Jews were forced to live in a segregated sub-world, where their destruction was to take place. In 1941 the biological extermination of the Jewish people began: “The Final Solution”.

In the German-occupied Soviet Union and some Eastern territories Jews were taken to burial grounds to dig their own graves and were shot by the Nazi mobile killing units called Einsatzgruppen. In many other occupied countries Jews were taken into transports and killed with poison gas. From most regions of Europe they were taken by wagons to extermination camps to the gas chambers. Six million Jews died. The survivors carry in their hearts a sanctuary in solitude.



The Genocide of the Jews in Europe



“The Masses”



The Ghettos

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chapter 5 – time code 13:00

* ANNIE REINFELD – Holocaust Survivor HOLLAND

During a Passover celebration which commemorates the passage from slavery to freedom, Annie Reinfeld tells her granddaughters her life story. She was ten years old, in Amsterdam, when the bombing of the city began. She may have attended the same school as Anne Frank. She was deported to the transit Camp Westerbork. They were the first Jews to arrive in this camp. Then she was transported on cattle wagons to Bergen Belsen, then to Theresienstadt and again to Auschwitz, where they took her mother away from her, not to see her ever again, since they murdered her in the gas chambers.

Annie Reinfeld – Survivor – from Holland Testimony: Concentration Camps



chapter 6 – time code 17:31

* LIBERTAD (LIBERTY) Tribute to the children

The children of the past and the children of today, dance in circles... the same circles.
The children of the past, portray images of hunger, deported to their death, their arms marked with numbers.
The children of today will always dance for them.
The children of the past will always live through them.

Archival Footage and 180 children of the present from diverse communities



chapter 7 – time code 20:03

* SYLVIA PRESSNER – Holocaust Survivor ROMANIA

In a family gathering, Sylvia Pressner recalls how her family remained buried in Ukraine in a mass grave, in a forgotten camp. They had to dig a grave for 300 people, which took enough time for them to think about which member of the family would die first. The hope for something to happen or someone to save them prevailed until the end, The granddaughter compares the life of her grandmother to her own life.

Sylvia Pressner – Survivor – Rumania Testimony: Mass Graves



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chapter 8 – time code 23:21

* MASS GRAVES – Re-created scene KILLING PROCESS “THE FINAL SOLUTION”

The historical witnesses’ written testimony of what took place in the mass graves. A re-created scene together with archival photos allow to visualize the testimony. Victims were taken to open fields for Einsatzgruppen where they had to undress, and put their belongings into piles. They were then shot into the graves. Layers of bodies lay atop one another. The soil of Lithuania, Ukraine and Byelorussia was filled with mass graves by the end of 1942, with at least 1,4 million Jews. In some Eastern European countries this killing process was taking place.

Re-created scene – Mass Graves – “The Final Solution”



chapter 9 – time code 25:10

* ROSA KLEINER – Holocaust Survivor – POLAND

While looking at photos of joyous moments, Rosa Kleiner observes a picture of her father, and tells her family’s story to her grandson. Her father was buried alive, her mother and her siblings were taken to Treblinka. Rosa was taken to Auschwitz. She lived in Block 25 Birkenau. Every night she saw the smoke of those who were burned.

Rosa Kleiner – Survivor from Poland – Testimony: Deportation



chapter 10 – time code 27:24

* DEATH TRUCKS – Re-created Scene KILLING PROCESS “THE FINAL SOLUTION”

The historical witnesses’ written testimony of the manner in which children were killed in Death Trucks, mobile gas vans. They were taken for an outing in adorned trucks. The tail pipe from the engine was hooked up directly to the closed cargo space in the rear of the truck. The Death Camp Chelmno was installed for killings with Gas Vans. The re-created scenes in THE ABSENCE are presented within a candle flame, in commemoration of The Holocaust.

Re-created Scene – Death Trucks – “The Final Solution”



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chapter 11 – time code 28:54

* AGATHA BUBOLA – Holocaust Survivor HUNGARY

She felt the Antisemitism in Hungary in the classroom, and her entry in the conservatory to study piano was prohibited. Jews had to wear a Star of David, bicycles and jewelry were taken away. The whole town witnessed their humiliation as they were gathered in the Synagogue to be deported. Thirty three families were chosen, as was her own, because the men were doctors. Her father, along with the other doctors, had to inject the elderly with morphine since they would die in the train rides anyway. All the other families were deported by trains to the death camps. She was taken to Theresienstadt a camp where they had many musicians, writers, artists, and many half Jewish children whose mothers were Christians, from all parts of Europe. There was no time to kill them since the Russians liberated them.

Agatha Bubola – Survivor – Hungary Testimony: Theresienstadt

chapter 12 – time code 31:42

* DEPORTATION OF THE GHETTOS – POLAND

Archival Footage of the Warsaw Ghetto of Jews rushed out of concentrated buildings. There were 400 ghettos in Poland of different sizes. Warsaw was the largest of the ghettos with almost a half a million Jews followed by Lodz, the industrial city of Poland with more than 165,000 Jews. We now know that the Ghettos were a temporary measure, a place to contain Jews on reservations until the infrastructure was built for their murder. But neither Nazi nor Jews knew that at its inception. In Poland, 100 orphanages were emptied and their 4,000 were deported to the Death Camps. Children were separated from their mothers to be deported, and mothers were separated from their children. Between 750,000 and 900,000 Jews, as well as thousands of Gypsies, were deported to Treblinka to be gassed.

Archival Footage – Deportation of the ghettos

chapter 13 – time code 33:35

* CATTLE WAGONS to Treblinka – Belzec – Sobibor.

The trains often had as many as sixty closed wagons, lacking air, water, or food. Jewish families strived to keep together to meet their death. When the train changed direction to the East, they screamed and then collapsed. The historical written testimony of a witness is re-created with visuals to foretell how a mother asphyxiated her baby, to give him a more gentle death than the one that awaited him.

Recreated Scene: Cattle Wagon – Deportation



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chapter 14 - time code 36:22

•TREBLINKA - Death Camp - POLAND KILLING PROCESS "THE FINAL SOLUTION".

Written historical testimonies of witnesses are reenacted, together with archival footage. Treblinka, Belzec and Sobibor followed the same murderous path. The Jews arrived in cattle wagons, lined up in a "Recollection Plaza", had to give out their personal effects: rings, glasses, valuables. The elderly, the sick and invalids were taken to the "Lazaretto or Infirmary" to be shot and thrown to the fire. The rest of the Jews were marched into the gas chambers. Their hair was shaved and then they were forced into sealed chambers. The worst scenes were in winter when women had to undress their children. The women were taken to cut their hair in a large barrack. Later, they decided to take away the babies from their mothers' arms before passing on to the barrack where they cut their hair. The creatures were thrown alive into the "Lazaretto" fire. After, they passed to an area of thirteen gas chambers, while workers hit them with sticks. Fifteen minutes had gone by after their arrival. The men had already died in the gas chambers. After their death, they extracted their gold teeth. When Himmler visited Sobibor, a Death Camp, such as Treblinka, he ordered that the most beautiful young girls of the Bialystok Ghetto should be gassed in the chambers, in order to observe their gracious death from the small window. (Nuremberg trial).

Re-created scenes - Treblinka - "The Final Solution"

chapter 15 - time code 40:27

* FRANÇOISE SITZER - Holocaust Survivor- FRANCE

A hidden child praises the altruism of the rescuers, the many human beings who risked their lives to save the lives of innocent people. Without them, the number of victims would have been even greater. They were giants of morality and decency. As it is written: "Whoever saves a human life, saves the world entire".

Françoise Sitzer - Survivor from France - Testimony: Hidden Child

chapter 16 - time code 40:56

* LADISLAO PERLMUTTER - Holocaust Survivor - CZECHOSLOVAKIA

As he enjoys watching his grandson playing soccer, he recalls not being able to play on the team because he was Jewish. The team helped him change his name and was then able to play. In Koscicze, his home town, the laws against the Jews forbade them to attend school or possess factories, and were exposed to attacks and atrocities from the fascists groups. Still the family was together. The tragedy began when families were deported.

Ladislao Perlmutter - Survivor from Czechoslovakia-Deportation

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chapter 17 - time code 43:17

* AUSCHWITZ - BIRKENAU - Archival Footage - German occupied-Poland

The largest Concentration, Death Camp and Slaved Labor.
Between 1,1, - 1,300,000 Jews, as well as 23,000 Gypsies were murdered there.
In Auschwitz, they used the slave labor of millions of people of diverse nationalities.
They murdered Jews upon arrival, all Jews when they had no need of workers and those Jews whom they assumed were not capable of work. Those selected to live had to work so intently that when they were no longer capable of working they were sent to the death camp at Birkenau for gassing.

At first, the wagons arrived directly at a railroad track outside of Birkenau, but in 1944, a ramp was built to go directly to Birkenau, in anticipation of the arrival of Hungarian Jews. Newly arriving prisoners could see the smoke coming out of the crematories.
The men had to line up to the right in rows of five. The women and children to the left, in rows of five. The elderly and invalids were sent to the gas chamber, walking or in trucks.
They passed in front of a selection team, where Dr. Josef Mengele would often preside.
He indicated with his finger:
those above sixteen years old, healthy and able to work,
"to the right" "to their slave work".
Those unable to work, to the larger column,
"to the left"... to the gas chambers.

When the women sent to die neared the crematoria, they screamed and only quieted down when they were told that by screaming they would frighten their children even more.
When entering the crematoria, they had to undress and hang up their clothes.
Then they entered the gas chambers, first the men, then the women and children.
After 25 minutes, all had died.



"The Selection - "Auschwitz"



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chapter 18 – time code 47:35

* HELEN SCHONFELD Holocaust Survivor – CZECHOSLOVAKIA

In May 1944, she was taken with her parents and siblings to Auschwitz, a three day trip. At arrival she was separated from her mother, not to see her ever again. The women were taken to a disinfection building, had their hair shaved, and were given clothes belonging to the people that had been exterminated. They had to wake up at five A.M. every morning to be counted in the roll call (L'Apell). They beat them for no reason. After, they were given some water they called coffee. At noon, they were given water they called soup, and at night a slice of bread.

Helen Schonfeld – Survivor from Czechoslovakia –Testimony: Auschwitz

chapter 19 – time code 51:00

* JUSTINA GOLDSZTAJN Holocaust Survivor – POLAND

In 1940 the Warsaw Ghetto was established. 500,000 Jews were confined and forced to live there. Children died of hunger in the streets and there were homes in which entire families died of starvation. The people were being deported in wagons to Treblinka, to their death. Treblinka opened on July 22nd, 1942. Deportations from Warsaw began the very next day and between the 23rd of July and the 21st of September some 265,000 Jews were sent to be killed by gas at Treblinka – men, women and children. There had been no resistance during these 60 days. Those who remained behind in the ghetto were shocked and depressed.

They vowed to resist.

On the 19th of April of 1943, the Germans surrounded the ghetto expecting to deport the remaining Jews. But the ghetto Jews rose in resistance. The uprising of The Warsaw Ghetto began. That night, it was the first night of Passover for the Jews.

It was also the eve of Hitler's birthday. It seems as if the Nazi commanders wanted to give their führer a present, a Judenrein or Jew free, Warsaw.

Jews defended themselves in any way they could, with Molotov cocktails prepared in their hiding places. They would not die without resistance. The Nazis were afraid to enter. Some 7,000 Jews were killed in the uprising. Some 49,000 were deported to death camps. They died with courage.

Justina Goldsztajn – Survivor–From Poland –Testimony: The Warsaw Ghetto

Mrs. Goldsztajn was the only one to survive from her family.

In Auschwitz where she was deported, they killed 10,000 Jews daily in the gas chambers. In 1944, when the Jews arrived in Auschwitz from Hungary, they didn't know where they were taken. Children came with their strollers and their dolls, not knowing they were going to be killed. Day by day ... for weeks, months and years, the dark smoke and the stench of burned human flesh, came out of the crematories.

Archival Footage: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising



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chapter 20 – time code 54:55

* Eli (Musical scene) Tribute to the Children

Train in a park at the present time
takes us to wagons of the past.
Children of today and the beauty of nature,
children of the past condemned to the dark.
The train now carries them all together...
together, as one.

Musical Scene Eli – Archival Footage and Children of Today



chapter 21 – time code 56:38

* DAVID YISRAEL – Holocaust Survivor – CZECHOSLOVAKIA

In his home town Satmar, lived more than 100,000 Jews.
Eichmann ordered the deportation, and of the Jewish school he attended,
only five children returned.
He arrived at Auschwitz–Birkenau.
They had to exit the wagons and stand in lines,
men to the right, women to the left.
This was the last time he saw his mother and little sister.
They could see the smoke from the crematories.
In the eight months of his stay in Auschwitz,
he learned of all the horrors that took place there.

David Yisrael – Survivor from Czechoslovakia – Testimony: Birkenau



chapter 22 – time code 58:12

* TRUDY SPIRA – Holocaust Survivor – CZECHOSLOVAKIA

When she was transported to Auschwitz, it was the last time her family was together.
At the age of twelve, she found herself in Birkenau, absolutely alone.
They were liberated in 1945. Liberated. Free.
Could there be a life beyond the barbed wires?
Her anguish was to know who had survived from her family, and to return home.
A home which a year and a half ago, she had left behind.

Trudy Spira – Survivor from Czechoslovakia – Testimony: Birkenau – Liberation



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Archival F. AUSCHWITZ THE CREMATORIES LIBERATION

chapter 23 – time code 59:27

* CONCLUSION : “Children of the World“

“Facing our armed planet and space
it is left to man to recall the Sanctity of Life.
We must confront Peace, to solve our conflicts.
May we evolve with these same trees and the same seas?
with those whom we love, and with those whom today
we do not accept?
It is in our hands to find out“

Children of diverse ethnicities

chapter 24 – time code 1:00:43

* Saviors of the world – Artistic scene

Survivor’s grandson contemplates a photo in a Holocaust text book,
and daydreams of a concentration camp today where children of all
ethnicities are captured.
He takes action.
He leads saviors from all parts of the world who reach out to them
and set them free.
The hands of the captives and the hands of the saviors embrace.
The hands of a person with his arm marked with numbers,
from The Holocaust, appear amongst them... in peace.

Youngsters of diverse cultures



STUDENTS

IV QUESTIONNAIRE

(concepts found in Chapter 4)

- a. Define The Holocaust.
- b. Beside the Jews, name the other minorities included in the killing and the persecution by the Nazi Regime.
- c. Describe what occurred in “Kristallnacht”: “The Night of Broken Glass”, also known as “November Pogroms”.
- d. During what war did the Holocaust take place?
- e. Define “The Final Solution” and mention the methods by which it was implemented.

V RESEARCH

- a. When the countries in Europe were invaded in WWII, the Nazis imposed liberty restrictions to the Jewish population. Research these restrictions, and describe which of these impact you the most, and why.
- b. The Jews lived in the ghettos before the deportations. They were submitted to starvation, disease and forced labor. Research about “The Warsaw Ghetto”. Describe the facts that interest you and explain why.

VI INSIGHT QUESTIONS

- a. In order to perpetrate the destruction of the Jews, hate became a doctrine. It was taught in schools, and was institutionalized.
The Survivors in THE ABSENCE, tell you how they could not attend public schools, study music in the conservatory, or participate in sports teams.
Discrimination and prejudice was promoted by the Nazi Regime.
Why is it important to respect and protect the human rights of all the members of the world community?

- b. In history, before The Holocaust, other genocides were committed, such as those against The Indian Tribes of the Americas and the Armenians.
After “The Holocaust”, genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur have occurred.
Explain the reason you consider it is so important to learn about these events.

- c. The Survivors of The Holocaust from many different countries in Europe had left their stories as a historical legacy to you, the new generations.
Which of these stories or events impacted you the most? Why?

VII CREATIVE WRITING

- a. Many rescuers risked their lives, and the lives of their families, to save Jews. Some are well known, and some are only known by the Survivors whom they saved. It is determined that the number of victims would have been even greater without them. Express a dedication to the saviors.

- b. A Survivors’ final message in the film, is: “Liberty is the greatest desire of all humankind”
What is your final message?

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