

# The New Jersey Mandate to Teach About the Holocaust and Genocide

by Barbara Lorfink Hadzima

The original effort to provide systematic instruction in New Jersey on the history of Holocaust began in 1973. The first high school courses in the United States on the Holocaust were offered in Vineland and Teaneck. The New Jersey Advisory Council on Holocaust Education was created by Governor Thomas Kean on October 5, 1982 to assist with and advise in the implementation of Holocaust and genocide educational programs in New Jersey public schools. In 1994, Governor Christine Todd Whitman signed into law the New Jersey State Mandate to teach the Holocaust and Genocide. The law states: "The instruction shall enable pupils to identify and analyze applicable theories concerning human nature and behavior; to understand that genocide is a consequence of prejudice and discrimination; and to understand that issues of moral dilemma and conscience have a profound impact on life. The instruction shall further emphasize the personal responsibility that each citizen bears to fight racism and hatred whenever and wherever it happens."

Because many young Americans draw bold lines between what they perceive of as "us" and "them," between people they consider like themselves and people they view as different, a major focus of the New Jersey Holocaust curriculum is "prejudice reduction" education. The middle school curriculum provides guidance, lessons, and enrichment through the use of books, poetry, art, music, photographs, and audio-visual materials. Recommendations are organized by grade level and content. Units include Prejudice and Discrimination; Rise of Nazism; Life in the Ghettos and Camps; Hiding, Escape, and Rescue; Resistance; Survival, Liberation and Legacy. Each unit is introduced by a section with background information to assist teachers. There is also a teacher information/materials section, a glossary, and an Internet site list. Two sample lessons follow. The first lesson is taken from the Resistance unit and is suggested for students in grades 7-8. The second sample lesson is taken from the Survival, Liberation, and Legacy Unit and is recommended for grades 6-8.

**In Kindling Flame: A Biography of Hannah Senesh** by Linda Atkinson (Beech Tree Books, 1985)

**Synopsis:** Through the use of her diary, letters, poetry, interviews with her mother and brother, and official documents, this book for young adults tells the story of Hannah Senesh. The story unfolds with Hannah's happy life before anti-Semitism took hold in Hungary. Hannah decides to immigrate to Palestine. Readers follow Hannah's adventures and learn of Hannah's compelling desire to contribute to Jewish society. Readers will learn of Hannah's training through the British commandos and her unsuccessful mission to return to Hungary to save Jews who remained there.

**Quote:** "There was nothing the Jews could do to end it, because it wasn't anything they did that caused it. It was what they were in the eyes of others: strangers, outsiders, people who did not belong" (p. 36).

## **Pre-Reading Activities**

Discuss and explain *Kristallnacht*.

Review knowledge of Nazi terminology and methodology.

Identify the location of Hungary and Palestine/Israel on a world map.

Introduce and review the movement of Zionism.

Discuss the history that is included in Chapter 4 of the book.

## **Discussion Questions**

Discuss the depth of self-reflection that Hannah wrote about in her diary.

Discuss Hannah's attitude about the events that were occurring in Germany in comparison with the attitude of Catherine.

Discuss the importance and value of being a Zionist at that time and in the following period of time.

Analyze how choices and behaviors of individuals and groups influenced events and consequences.

Discuss the history of the Zionist movement.

Why did Hannah decide to leave the relative safety of Palestine to return to Nazi-controlled Europe?

How did Hannah prepare for her return to Europe?

What was Hannah's mission? What went wrong on Hannah's mission?

Explain what is known about Hannah's fate after she was captured.

Do you think Hannah made the correct decision to become involved in the resistance and rescue efforts? Explain your answer.

How did Hannah's family respond to her decision to return to Europe? What was their response to her capture and fate?

How did Hannah's comrades view her decision and her actions after she was captured?

What is Hannah's legacy? Explain your answer.

### **Activities**

Create a timeline or an outline of the historical events found in Chapter 4.

Divide the class into groups. Assign each group one of the following activities.

Research *Kristallnacht* further and prepare an oral presentation.

Identify, by listing, the barriers and sacrifices Hannah would have to overcome to join the Zionist movement. (Research of Zionism is needed.)

Through research, identify and explain several forms of anti-Semitism that have occurred throughout history.

Investigate and then draw a kibbutz setting. Write an accompanying explanation of the illustration.

### **After the War** by Carol Matas (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1996)

**Synopsis:** When Buchenwald is liberated at the end of World War II, fifteen-year-old Ruth is the only member of her family to survive. Ruth returns to her village in Poland hoping to find a friend or relative, but she finds that everything has changed. Ruth has no place to go, so she joins an underground organization that helps people go to Palestine. She risks her life to lead a group of children there.

**Quote:** "I know he is wrong. I haven't beaten Hitler. He's beaten me. Before the war there'd been almost eighty in my family, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents. Now? Am I the only one left? And if so, why me? I don't deserve it. Or maybe it is my punishment for being the bad child of the family. Doomed to live when everyone else has left me. Why did I survive?" (pp. 8-9).

### **Pre-Reading Activities:**

Define, discuss, and explain the background of the history of the British Palestine Mandate.

Review examples of Nazi methodology toward their victims.

Identify the location of Eastern Europe and Palestine/Israel on a map.

Provide background information on the map given on the title page.

### **Discussion Questions:**

Discuss the changes that occur in Ruth's attitudes throughout the book in regard to her feelings of hope and a future life of happiness.

Discuss the importance and value of "Brichah" (Rescue).

Why does Ruth initially feel that her survival is a punishment for having been "the bad child" of the family? What is meant by the phrase "survivor guilt"? What would you say to Ruth about this feeling?

Explain how Ruth becomes involved in the underground operation to take children to Palestine. Why does the operation have to be underground or secret? What fate awaits the children if they are caught?

How does involvement in this operation change Ruth's view of herself and her survival?

What were the consequences of the choices and behaviors made by individuals and groups in this story?

Identify some of the trained behaviors exhibited by the children as a result of their experiences in a concentration camp. Explain how these behaviors were a response to those experiences.

**Activities:**

Draw a map of Europe and the Middle East. Draw the route taken by the Brichah on the map.

Write a letter of encouragement to Ruth as she journeys with the group.

Using a Venn diagram, compare and contrast Ruth's feelings before and after joining the Brichah.

Draw an illustration to depict one of the boat scenes.

Imagine that you are one of the children on the Brichah and write a series of journal entries describing your experiences and emotions on the journey.