

## **Classroom Study Guide for *Let Your Children Tell***

### ***Part One—to be presented prior to the performance***

#### **Abstract**

“History has many stories to tell. Some of the most important are those of the oppressed and the oppressor—the Israelites in Egypt, the Africans in America, the Blacks in South Africa. But throughout the history of humankind only one story is the story of an oppressor who attempted wipe out the entire population of those it oppressed. This is that story.”

So begins the theatre documentary, *Let Your Children Tell*, produced and performed by the Touring Theatre Ensemble of North Carolina. It is the story of what we now refer to as the Holocaust told in the words of four young people who experienced it. Taken from diaries, interviews, and testimonials, these five people, one each from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, The Netherlands, and Hungary, respond to the decrees and deeds of Hitler and his Nazis by providing intimate glimpses of their lives in hiding, in exile, in ghettos, and in labor and concentration camps.

Portrayed by five actors, one of whom is a narrator who assumes several roles, we meet these people as they watched and listened and recorded the dark deeds visited upon them. Our hope is that the story of this darkest hour of history can be kept alive through the telling and thereby remind the world what can happen when racism and prejudice go unchecked.

#### **Background**

World War II is rightly called “Hitler’s War.” And Hitler would quite rightly have called his war as being one against the Jews and all other people and nations he believed to be racially and biologically inferior. Hitler labeled “inferior” everyone who was not like him and his Nazi followers. These included Americans, Frenchmen, Englishmen, Russians, Poles, and the handicapped, but above all Jews and Gypsies. For that reason Jews and Gypsies were the main victims of the death camps he established in Eastern Europe. He tried to destroy the Jewish people in their entirety. Gypsies were not far behind. In all cases he was especially interested in destroying children and young people because they were a threat to his future.

What follows is the story of young people, Jewish and Gypsy, who were Hitler’s victims.

#### **Glossary**

**Anti-Semitism**—hatred of the Jews

**Aryans**—a name given by Nazi racists to those that they believed to be a superior people of Nordic European background

**concentration camps**—30 or 40 large camps and dozens of smaller ones established as prisons for anyone considered undesirable, the most well known of which are Bergan Belsen, Buchenwald, Dachau, Flossenbergr and Theresienstadt

**crematorium**—building which houses furnaces to burn dead bodies

**Deutschmark**—basic unit of German currency

**extermination camps**—Auschwitz, Belzec, Chelmno, Treblinka, Maidonek, and Sobibor, camps with gas changers built exclusively to kill people.

**gendarmes**—a French term for policemen widely used throughout Europe.

**ghetto**—a district within a city in which Jews were constricted by varriers and forced to live until they were transported to a concentration or extermination camp

**genocide**—the systematic planned annihilation or a racial, political or cultural group.

**Gypsy**—members of a largely nomadic group of people scattered widely through Europe

**labor camp**—a prison camp where the prisoners were used as slave labor

**Lake Balaton**—a huge shallow lake in southern Hungary

**Nazism**—Hitler’s racist ideology

**Nuremberg Laws**—the laws which robbed Jews of citizenship and the right to marry non-Jews.

**Rosengracht**—a street along a canal in Amsterdam

**SS**—Hitler’s elite guard responsible for carrying out Hitler’s anti-Semitic decrees and who controlled the concentration and death camps

**Stormtroopers**—Hitler’s party army, in actuality, Nazi “toughs”

**Third Reich**—the name the Nazis gave their government which means Third Empire

**Typhus**—a deadly disease carried by lice

**Westorbork**—a transit camp in the Netherlands designed to imprison Jews until they could be transported to the extermination camps.

## *Part II—to be presented following the performance*

### **Discussion Questions**

1. When was the first time that you recall hearing the word “Holocaust”?  
What did you learn about the Holocaust in school?
2. What conditions and circumstances made the Holocaust possible and what should we do to prevent such a series of events from occurring?  
*(these conditions could be any of the following: the brutality of war, economic problems, racism, and extreme nationalism. Since the events of September 11 some of us have develop new prejudices against fellow human beings because of their ethnicity or religion.)*
3. What does the Holocaust tell us about human nature? Could this kind of thing happen in our society?
4. Do you see examples of prejudice in your nation that could lead to something like the Holocaust? your state? your county? your city? your school?
5. One of the things the Nazis did was strip their victims of their dignity and humanity. What examples of this did you see in the theatre piece? Have you seen examples of individuals stripped of their dignity in your community? in your school? *(Name calling, exclusion from social groups)*
6. Since the Holocaust there has been “ethnic cleansing” in the Balkans and “genocide” in Cambodia, Rwanda and Sudan. What are some things you can do to prevent events that led to the Holocaust or “ethnic cleansing” or “genocide” from happening in our society?
7. Why do you think it is important for us to pay attention to the Holocaust? *(After the events of September 11, we, as Americans, may more easily identify with those groups the Nazis selected for persecution and murder during the Holocaust. Although to a far lesser degree than Jews or Gypsies, we now have some understanding of what it is like to have groups of people who hate us enough to attempt to kill us.*
8. What part of the theatre presentation touched you the most?

### **Recommended Reading**

1. *Anna Is Still Here*, Ida Vos, Puffin. 1995 paperback. The effects of the Holocaust, after the liberation, on the life of a young girl are portrayed in this poetic novel
2. *The Diary of David Sierakowiak: Five Notebooks from the Lodz Ghetto*.

Oxford . University Press, New York. 1996 paperback.

3. ***Parallel Journeys***, Eleanor Ayer, Helen Waterford and Alfons Heck. Atheneum. 1995 paperback. Two stories of Hitler's Germany, one of a Jew, the other a loyal German.
5. ***Children of the Holocaust and World War II: Their Secret Diaries***, Laurel Holliday, ed. Washington Square Press,, 1995 paperback.
6. ***Images from the Holocaust: A Literature Anthology***. Brown, Stephens, Rubin. NTC Publishing Group. Lincolnwood, Illinois, 1996.