



# TEACHING BEHIND HER EYES

HOLOCAUST LESSONS FOR THE DIGITAL AGE



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# Introduction

## LESSON OUTCOMES

Tova Friedman’s story of survival offers a deeply personal lens for understanding the realities of the Holocaust. As one of the youngest survivors of Auschwitz, Tova’s story offers a powerful lens through which middle and high school students can connect to this period in history.

Integrating this documentary as an introduction to, or culmination of, any unit on the Holocaust deepens historical understanding and critical thinking, and can serve as a meaningful catalyst to fight against hate, bigotry, and prejudice.

To prepare yourself for any instruction on the Holocaust, spend time reviewing teacher preparation materials from these leading authoritative sources on the Holocaust.

- **US Holocaust Memorial Museum’s** [Guidelines for Teaching with Holocaust Survivor Testimony](#)
- **Yad Vashem:** [Using Testimony in Holocaust Education | Learning Environment](#)

See Appendix for ELA, World and U.S. History standards.

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## ADDITIONAL LESSON OUTCOMES:

- **Deepen Holocaust knowledge:** Prioritize survivor testimonies and reputable historical organizations and institutions.
- **Develop media literacy:** Evaluate historical information about the Holocaust across various platforms
- **Analyze historical sources:** Interpret first-person accounts to deepen historical understanding.
- **Cultivate empathy:** Understand the human cost of identity-based hatred through individual experiences.
- **Connect past and present:** Relate Tova Friedman’s experiences to contemporary issues of antisemitism, White nationalism, hate speech, and violence.
- **Provide historical context:** Supplement film and social media content with in-depth historical information
- **Explore intergenerational trauma:** Examine the Holocaust’s long-lasting impact on families, memory, trauma, and resilience.

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**Grade Level:**

9-12, higher education

**Time Required:**

Two or more, 60-minute class periods

**Materials:**

- Access to *Behind Her Eyes*
- Access to *Behind Her Eyes* [Transcript](#)
- Handout: Active Viewing
- Access to TovaTok Table
- Access to [TovaTok](#) online

## LESSON OVERVIEW

This section provides flexible lesson frameworks for educators to integrate *Behind Her Eyes* into discipline specific curriculum. The overarching goal is to facilitate a meaningful exploration of the Holocaust through Tova Friedman's survival as a child, understand how this experience shaped her life and perspective, and reflect and discuss how the legacy of these events continue to affect our world today.

The recommended two-day structure (expandable as needed) guides students through **engagement, investigation, active watching, and synthesis**. Students will listen to Tova Friedman's testimony, discuss it as a historical record, connect her reflections to contemporary issues, and analyze her use of social media to reach new audiences.

Knowing that student background and educators' learning objectives on the Holocaust will vary considerably, these frameworks are uniquely designed to be adaptable. Educators can select activities, inquiry questions, and resources aligned for History, English Language Arts (ELA), Media Literacy, Psychology, or Sociology.

*Educator Note: These lessons are based on the classroom viewing of the documentary *Behind Her Eyes* (38 minutes). It is recommended to watch the documentary several times before sharing it in class in order to select the 'pause points' for student reflection time.*

## GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Why document Holocaust survivor testimonies?
- What can we learn about the Holocaust from a survivor's testimony that we cannot learn from other primary sources?
- How is a documentary film based on a Holocaust survivor testimony different from an unedited testimony or other primary sources on this period?
- What challenges and opportunities does social media present when learning about the Holocaust?

## LESSON ONE

# Active Viewing of *Behind Her Eyes*

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**STEP ONE:**

Introduce the media literacy skill of active watching by sharing this definition:

*Active viewing means doing things before, during, and after watching media including watching with a purpose, paying attention, taking notes, and asking good questions about what you're seeing.*

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**STEP TWO:  
SHARE GUIDELINES****1 | BEFORE WATCHING**

- **Set a Purpose:** Establish and communicate clear learning objectives
- **Accessing Prior Knowledge:** This step is critical to enable students to jot down key information they know about the topic before watching. For example, ask students to reflect on the title, what questions they have about watching a survivor testimony, or about the Holocaust in general.
- **Preview:** When possible, look at a trailer or excerpt. For this lesson, we have suggested watching the first 3:00 minutes of *Behind Her Eyes*.

**2 | WHILE WATCHING: ACTIVE VIEWING**

- **Pause and Take Notes:** At key scenes pause the film so students have a bit of time to process or even discuss what they're seeing or to ask questions. During these pauses, encourage students to first write down thoughts, questions, or feelings. You might even consider rewinding and rewatching a particular scene.

**3 | AFTER WATCHING: INTROSPECTION AND SYNTHESIS**

- **Reflect, Discuss, and Connect:** Give students time to self-reflect and write down final observations and reactions before turning to a discussion. Open up the discussion for students to connect with prior knowledge or previous experiences with the content.

## DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC LESSONS: HISTORY

# Historical Context, Perspective, and Memory

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What historical events and conditions shaped Tova's experiences during the Holocaust?
- How does Tova's personal narrative add to or challenge existing historical accounts?
- How does her perspective as a child survivor influence her understanding of the Holocaust?
- What is the role of historical memory in preserving the legacy of the Holocaust?

### DAY ONE: TOVATOK IMMERSION

- **Start:** Introduce the lesson by sharing the Guiding Questions and reading the Director's Letter included in the beginning of this guide.
- **Activity: Watch TovaTok** videos about her experiences in the ghetto or Auschwitz and research the historical places or context of events she describes. (See Appendix for TovaTok Table)
- **Discuss:** Compare her personal account with other historical sources and share new learnings, questions, and reflections.
- **Watch** the first 3:00 minutes of *Behind Her Eyes*. Pause the film and invite students to discuss new historical information learned from the opening of the documentary.

### DAY TWO: INVESTIGATION

- **Actively Watch** *Behind Her Eyes* (runtime: 38 minutes).
- **Discuss:** Use the Historical Extension Questions or Guiding Questions to guide students in unpacking Tova's story.
- **TovaTok Connections:** Students identify connections between the documentary and the TovaTok videos viewed on Day One, noting similarities, differences, and additional insights.
- **Synthesis, Creative Expression and Action:** Individually or in pairs, have students create their own TovaTok-style video synthesizing how Tova's story informed their historical understanding of the Holocaust.
- **Closing:** Share student videos in small groups then discuss as a class the impact of Tova's story.

“

*I had no name.  
My name was 27,633.”*

- Tova Friedman,  
Shared on TovaTok

## HISTORICAL EXTENSION QUESTIONS

- Tova states, “This is who I am because in a sense, Auschwitz were my parents. I didn’t have normal parenting. Auschwitz was my learning. When you’re five [to] six and a half, that’s what you learn about life.”
  - » What does this metaphor suggest about how the environment of the camp replaced the nurturing role of a family in shaping her identity?
- Knowing that the Holocaust was not one event but an escalation of legal persecution, dehumanization, isolation and ghettoization, and eventual mass murder, what facets of Tova’s childhood were impacted by these events?
- What do you know about other Jewish children’s experiences during the Holocaust? To what extent can Tova’s story be considered representative or different?
- What do you know about the post-war experiences of Jewish refugees?
- Tova did not speak about her experiences for decades. She recalled her 7th grade teacher telling her to hide her number tattoo, to forget about the war, to look more like an American, and not talk about the atrocities.
  - » Why do you think Tova’s teacher gave her this advice?
  - » In what ways does Tova’s post-war experience resonate with contemporary issues of migration, assimilation and resettlement?
- In the face of growing Holocaust denial, distortion, and misinformation, what is the responsibility of historians, filmmakers, and individual survivors to preserve historical memory?
- Is there a risk of survivor testimony being challenged or dismissed in the future? Why? What are strategies to prevent that?
- How can we ensure that survivor testimony is preserved?
- Tova recalls her mother taught her to always tell the truth. That the way to protect anyone is to let them know what is going on so “when you are not around, they are able to guide themselves.” How did this principle of truth-telling help Tova survive?

## DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC LESSONS: ELA (ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS)

# Narrative, Voice, and Persuasion

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How does the film's narrative structure contribute to its overall impact?
- What specific language or imagery evokes strong emotions in the viewer?
- How does Tova's personal voice and perspective shape the story?
- In what ways does the film try to persuade viewers to take action against hate?

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### DAY ONE: TOVATOK IMMERSION

- **Start:** Introduce the lesson through sharing the Guiding Questions and reading the Director's Letter included in the beginning of this guide.
- **Activity: Watch TovaTok** videos where she and her grandson use different narrative techniques.
- **Discuss** the similarities and differences between the videos, what emotions they evoked, and their reactions to these choices.
- **Watch** the first 3:00 of *Behind Her Eyes* and discuss how the opening of the documentary compares to TovaTok. If time permits, watch Tova's commemorative address on the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau [here](#).

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### DAY TWO: INVESTIGATION

- **Actively Watch:** *Behind Her Eyes* (runtime: 38 minutes)
- **Discuss** responses to the film using the lesson's Guiding Questions or any of the ELA Extension Questions.
- **Activity: TovaTok/Documentary Connections**
  - » Students identify connections between the narrative techniques used in the documentary and in TovaTok viewed on Day One before, noting similarities and differences, and any additional insights.
- **Synthesis, Creative Expression and Action:** Individually or in pairs, have students create their own TovaTok-style video either mirroring or departing from the narrative style used in TovaTok.

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## ELA EXTENSION QUESTIONS

- How does *Behind Her Eyes* balance bearing witness to atrocities with the ethical responsibility of avoiding exploiting or sensationalizing suffering?
- Does the film succeed or fail in this balancing act, and why?
- Is social media an effective tool for education and learning history, or does it risk trivializing complex historical events and have them become entertainment?
- If Tova had chosen not to share her story on TikTok, would the lessons of her experience be as relevant or accessible to younger generations?

## DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC LESSONS: MEDIA LITERACY

# TikTok, History, and Memory

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How is social media being used to educate audiences on historical events?
- What are the advantages and challenges of using platforms like TikTok for Holocaust education?
- In what ways can media literacy help us recognize misinformation, bias, or sensationalism in stories about the Holocaust or other traumatic histories?
- How can social media and documentaries be used to promote empathy and take social action against identity-based violence?
- As consumers and creators, what responsibilities do we have when sharing or engaging with stories of trauma online?

### DAY ONE: TOVATOK IMMERSION

- **Start:** Introduce the lesson through sharing the Guiding Questions and reading the Director's Letter included in the beginning of this guide.
- **Activity: Watch TovaTok** videos with different visuals, music, and editing techniques. (See Appendix for TovaTok Table)
- **Discuss** the potential biases and limitations of social media as a source of information on the Holocaust.
- **Watch** the first 3:00 of *Behind Her Eyes* and compare and contrast the differences in storytelling between TikTok and the documentary.

### DAY TWO: INVESTIGATION

- **Actively Watch:** *Behind Her Eyes* (runtime: 38 minutes)
- **Discuss** responses to the film using the lesson's Guiding Questions or any of the Media Literacy Extension Questions.
- **Activity: TovaTok/Documentary Connections**
  - » Students identify connections between the narrative techniques used in the documentary and in TovaTok viewed on Day One, noting similarities and differences, and any additional insights.
- **Synthesis, Creative Expression and Action:** Individually or in pairs, have students create their own TovaTok-style video either mirroring or departing from the narrative style used in TovaTok.

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**MEDIA LITERACY  
EXTENSION  
QUESTIONS**

- How does understanding responsible content development and media techniques deepen your engagement with survivor stories or other accounts based on history and social issues?
- How can media literacy empower you to be a responsible creator and consumer of social media content related to history and social issues?

## DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC LESSONS: PSYCHOLOGY

# Trauma, Resilience, and Identity

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What were the immediate and long-term psychological effects of the Holocaust on Tova and her family?
- What factors contributed to her ability to cope with and overcome the trauma she experienced?
- How did the Holocaust shape her sense of self and her identity?
- How did the Holocaust impact her mother and father?
- What can we learn from Tova's story about the importance of empathy and support for survivors of trauma?

### DAY ONE: TOVATOK IMMERSION

- **Start:** Introduce the lesson through sharing the Guiding Questions and reading the Director's Letter included in the beginning of this guide.
- **Activity: Watch TovaTok** videos where Tova reflects on her resilience and coping mechanisms.
- **Discuss** what students heard or interpreted about the effects of trauma and the importance of empathy.
- **Watch** the first 3:00 of *Behind Her Eyes* and discuss how Tova's personality and identity are represented.

### DAY TWO: INVESTIGATION

- **Actively Watch:** *Behind Her Eyes* (runtime: 38 minutes)
- **Discuss** responses to the film using the lesson's Guiding Questions or any of the Psychology Extension Questions.
- **Activity: TovaTok/Documentary Connections**
  - » Explain to students that after viewing this story they will now focus on analyzing specific values, lessons, and coping mechanisms Tova learned from her mother.
  - » **Step One:** Have students organize themselves into small groups (3 or 4 students)
  - » **Step Two:** Read the Handout: Quotes from *Behind Her Eyes*. After reading these four quotes, have students identify specific values Tova's mother instilled in her from these passages and their last effects on her life.. (e.g., importance of remembering).
- **Synthesis, Creative Expression and Action:** In small groups, have students create their own TovaTok-style video using one of the quotes and the values that they believe were instilled by her mother.

# Handout: Tova Friedman Quotes from *Behind Her Eyes*

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**A:**

“My mother’s promise to me, you’ll go home and you’ll see how many wonderful cousins you’ll have and aunts and uncles. You have the most wonderful family that you don’t even know about. But we have to get strong. So, we stayed in Auschwitz for a few months. Before we left, she showed me to all the different places where the clothing was kept. We had the shoes of children, we had the teeth, there was jewelry, eyeglasses, and furs. And she said to me, you see, I can take any of this. Nobody’s here to stop me, but I’m not going to. I’m not going to benefit from somebody who was murdered. She was very careful to teach me to respect the dead, the murdered people. When we walked out, she took my hand, and I remember she said, remember what you saw, remember this, remember all of this. GEDDING! (remember in Yiddish) When I walked out of Auschwitz with my mother, I was six and a half.”

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**B:**

“It was a very difficult time going back. The city was bombed. There was no place to eat, no place to live, no place to sleep. My father wasn’t around. We didn’t know where he was. We were just the two of us walking on the street. And then within about a year, my father came back. And what’s very interesting to me, human nature, is that people came back to the place where they saw their family last. Without ever saying to each other, I’ll meet you here one day. Once you’re no longer in danger, then you think about life. And you think, where is my family? I remember my mother said, where is, where’s my brother and sister? She had 10 of them. The Jewish community and the Red Cross put an information board of living people. And then my mother checked to see if any of her family was alive, and they were all dead. And that’s when the agony comes. I think my mother suffered probably more after the war when she realized that she was a sole survivor. And that’s when she got very, very, very depressed.”

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**C:**

“When I first came to the States, I was ignored. Nobody was interested. And in fact, my teachers told me to cover up my arm, the long sleeve. She said, forget about it. That was in seventh grade. Forget about it, you’re here. Look more like an American, cut your braids, change your clothes. Don’t look like a refugee. And don’t talk about the atrocities. We don’t have to know about that. And that’s why for many, many years I didn’t talk about it. In the beginning, we didn’t know any English. We spoke Yiddish. My mother said, you know, in this country, you’re going to forget about Judaism, but you can’t do that. And she found a school of all places in Manhattan. It was a Hebrew school.”

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**D:**

“My mother was still very sick with depression. Hardly left the house. My mother really did not want to learn English. I made all the phone calls for her. I spoke to the neighbors. I went to the library and I brought her books, Polish books, and she cried all the time. She was telling me and telling me and telling me about the family that’s no longer here. I did not share my story with her because she always said to me, oh, I’m so glad you were young. You don’t remember some of the horrors. And to protect her, I said, you’re right. I think she felt guilty for being alive. I loved her and I understood it. I was her caretaker.”

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**PSYCHOLOGY  
EXTENSION  
QUESTIONS**

- How might Tova's trauma from the Holocaust affect her children and grandchildren, even though they didn't experience the events?
- What are the ethical implications of exploring intergenerational trauma, and what support systems can help families cope?

**Read these quotes from Tova Friedman in *Behind Her Eyes*:**

*"There is no way to describe what happens to your mind and your body when you are deprived of food for a very long time with no hope of getting any. Your mind just takes over."*

*"By then a dead body was as normal as somebody passing a flower in a garden. They were around, every place you go. You know when you grow up like that and you know nothing else, even horror becomes normal."*

*"In a sense, Auschwitz were my parents."*

- What are the ways individuals find meaning and purpose even in the face of unimaginable suffering such as the Holocaust?
- In what ways does Tova's decision to share her story on TikTok reflect a developing sense of identity and agency?
- How do these statements reflect facets of Tova's trauma?

## DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC LESSONS: SOCIOLOGY

# Social Structures, Prejudice, and Social Action

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How did social structures and systems contribute to the persecution and murder of Jews during the Holocaust?
- What are the psychological and social roots of prejudice and discrimination?
- How can Tova's story inspire us to challenge prejudice and promote tolerance in our own communities?
- What is the role of social media in raising awareness about the Holocaust and combating contemporary hate?

### DAY ONE: TOVATOK IMMERSION

- **Start:** Introduce the lesson through sharing the Guiding Questions and reading the Director's Letter included in the beginning of this guide.
- **Activity: Watch TovaTok** videos where Tova uses the platform to address current issues of prejudice and discrimination and shares the actions she is taking.
- **Discuss** what students interpreted as Tova's point of view on these issues.

### DAY TWO: INVESTIGATION

- **Actively Watch:** *Behind Her Eyes* (runtime: 38 minutes)
- **Discuss** responses to the film using the lesson's Guiding Questions or any of the Sociology Extension Questions.
- **Activity: TovaTok/Documentary Connections.**
  - » Students identify scenes in the documentary where Tova discusses prejudice, dehumanization, and discrimination.
- **Synthesis, Creative Expression and Action:** Individually or in pairs, have students create their own TovaTok-style video in which they share their point of view and what they learned from Tova about these issues.

“

*You entered a person and you walked out on the other side, you were no longer yourself.*

**- Tova Friedman,  
*Behind Her Eyes***

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**SOCIOLOGY  
EXTENSION  
QUESTIONS**

- What did you learn from Tova's story about the extent of ordinary citizens' complicity in the Holocaust, even if they didn't actively participate in violence?
- What social pressures, biases, or fears might have led individuals to turn a blind eye to the suffering of others? How can we prevent such complicity in the face of injustice today?

"After the war I refused to go to school because they called me a dirty Jew. Europe was still terribly antisemitic. Too many refugees, too many homeless. Refugees are not loved anywhere" Tova states.

- » Why do you believe Europe remained so antisemitic after the war?
- » What do you believe is the root fear of refugees?
- If prejudice is rooted in the fear of the "other", how can we create a world that fosters empathy and understanding?
- Is it possible to eliminate prejudice entirely or is it part of human nature?
- In an increasingly politically polarized world, what are the most effective ways to counter hate speech and promote respect and dignity?
- Are there limits to tolerance?
- Is it ever justifiable to restrict freedom of speech to protect vulnerable groups?

TOVA TIKTOK VIDEO DESCRIPTION	DATE POSTED	LINK
Tova replies to a TikTok comment asking her to show/tell the story behind her tattoo.	2021-10-14	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7018874882096155910?lang=en">https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7018874882096155910?lang=en</a>
Tova answers viewer's question: How did you end up in the death camp?	2021-10-18	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7020361343161158917?lang=en">https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7020361343161158917?lang=en</a>
Tova replies to the question, "Were you separated from your parents? Did your parents survive?"	2021-10-25	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7023014498868972805?lang=en">https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7023014498868972805?lang=en</a>
Tova replies to the question, "How would you say the concentration camp affected your outlook on life as an adult?"	2021-11-01	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7025453712428682543?lang=en">https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7025453712428682543?lang=en</a>
Tova replies to the question: "What was liberation like for you and what was the cattle car ride like for you?"	2021-11-30	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7036397320275217710?lang=en">https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7036397320275217710?lang=en</a>
Tova replies to a TikTok comment asking "does she still speak German? Or did she at all after being liberated."	2022-01-13	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7052679452576320815?lang=en">https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7052679452576320815?lang=en</a>
Tova replies to a TikTok comment "why did they have you undress?"	2022-01-15	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7053515979564879109?lang=en">https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7053515979564879109?lang=en</a>
Tova tells the story when she was beaten by a Nazi S.S. officer at 5 years old in Auschwitz	2022-03-08	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7072746356376407339?lang=en">https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7072746356376407339?lang=en</a>
Tova tells the story of when she was tattooed in Auschwitz upon arrival at 5 years old	2023-03-10	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7208970578185899310?lang=en">https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7208970578185899310?lang=en</a>
Aron, Tova's grandson, interviews students in his high school about the Holocaust; we see many students know nothing.	2022-03-25	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7079058261684571435?lang=en">https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7079058261684571435?lang=en</a>
Tova replies to a TikTok comment asking if she was ever close to escaping camp	2022-04-06	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7083675673553833262?lang=en">https://www.tiktok.com/@tovafriedman/video/7083675673553833262?lang=en</a>
Tova talks about family after liberation	2022-11-14	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP8YamB9w/">https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP8YamB9w/</a>
Tova talks about witnessing the Death March in Auschwitz	2024-03-24	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP8Yam89u/">https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP8Yam89u/</a>
Tova talks about dreaming of food in Auschwitz	2024-6-21	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP8YauGSV/">https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP8YauGSV/</a>

# Standards for Behind Her Eyes (History and ELA)

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## WORLD HISTORY

Era 8 (1900-1945) & AP World History Framework

Standard 4: Causes and global consequences of World War II

4B: Understand the human costs and impact of WWII, including the Holocaust.

Standard 5: Major global trends from 1900 to WWII

5A: Explain technological, scientific, and political developments contributing to conflict and atrocities.

Period 6: (c. 1900-Present): Accelerating global change and conflicts

6.1: Scientific innovations, demographic shifts, and their contributions to conflict.

6/2: The impact of global conflicts, including resistance movements during WWII.

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## U.S. HISTORY CONTENT STANDARDS

Era 8 (1929-1945):

Standard 3: Causes and course of WWII and its impact on the United States.

AP U.S. History Framework, Period 7 (1890-1945)

7.3: U.S. military and scientific advancements, including atomic bombs and technological impacts.

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## ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (ELA) AND MEDIA LITERACY STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1: Support analysis of primary sources-survivor testimonies, documentaries, social media content

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.-10.6: Compare perspectives in different primary sources of the Holocaust

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.9: Analyze relationships between primary survivor testimonies and secondary historical accounts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCR.MED.3: Critique media messages about historical events, assessing bias, tone, and purpose.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCR.MED.4: Create media content that responsibly conveys historical and social justice messages.