

VIDEO

Write With... Life Stories: Storytelling Is Who We Are with Tova Friedman

by 826 National and Life
Stories

GRADES 9–12

TYPE

NARRATIVE

PRESENTED BY

LIFE STORIES

Stories can bridge our past to our future—but only if we build them. In this lesson, you will reflect on a story from your personal history that you think others could learn from.

WHAT YOUR STUDENTS WILL LEARN**About [Life Stories](#)**

Life Stories is a non-profit media organization that creates and distributes documentaries, interviews, and educational resources about people whose lives inspire meaningful change. These stories address issues of civics, history, politics, the arts and culture by shining the spotlight on relatable human stories of purpose and meaning in times of change. Life Stories provides open access to all their content for communities and classrooms through their curated website and YouTube channel.

About [The Thread](#)

The Thread is a new documentary interview series by Life Stories, exploring what it means to live a purpose-driven life through conversations with multi-faceted people who have helped shape our society. Each 30-minute episode takes viewers on a personal journey into the life of extraordinary people who candidly share their triumphs and failures. *The Thread* is available on the Life Stories website and YouTube channel, and as a podcast across all major platforms. Teaching

The Thread brings the series into the classroom with episode lessons designed to strengthen social emotional learning and media literacy skills and expand the scope of subject matter in Social Studies and English Language Arts. Future seasons of *The Thread* will include similar curricular support.

WHAT YOU WILL DO

Introduction:

In this video, Tova Friedman reflects on being a Holocaust survivor, vividly describing her time in the ghettos, labor camps, and eventually Auschwitz. Friedman shares the challenges her family faced as survivors in postwar America. She emphasizes the importance of storytelling and her commitment to ensuring her children and grandchildren carry on the legacy of remembrance and resilience. Please visit [“Tova Friedman: Surviving Auschwitz”](#) to view the full lesson created by Life Stories.

Content Notes:

- In this video, Tova Friedman reflects on being a Holocaust survivor, vividly describing her time in the ghettos, labor camps, and eventually Auschwitz concentration camp. **This video contains sensitive content** that might be upsetting to students. As you watch Tova Friedman’s story, we encourage you to use your discretion and pause the video to check in with students.
- Before watching the video, we suggest you provide students with an overview of the Holocaust, to ensure that they all understand the historical context of Tova Friedman’s testimony. [The lesson](#) provided by Life Stories provides resources to support you in this conversation.
- The explanation of testimonies in STEP 2 is provided by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). For further support teaching Holocaust survivor testimony, please visit [this guide](#) created by the USHMM.
- While delivering this lesson, it is important to be mindful that every student will react differently to recounting events from their personal histories. For this reason, we suggest you give students the

freedom to dig as deeply into their chosen topic as they feel comfortable and to open the prompt to include positive memories that students feel are valuable to write about. Every student should feel welcome to participate.

STEP 1

In the video, Tova Friedman shares a *survivor testimony*: a firsthand account of the events, [feelings](#), and fears she experienced while living through the Holocaust as a young child.

Testimonies are a distinct type of storytelling. They provide a window to an historical event that only someone who lived through it can offer; testimonies are deeply personal and reflective of that individual's experience. Details of an event might be recounted differently, depending on who is sharing; however, each person's retelling is valid and true to what they know.

Anyone who listens to a testimony is said to “bear witness,” and this act comes with the responsibility to carefully listen and acknowledge the reality of the experiences being shared. With Holocaust testimony, it's especially important to ask yourself, “What do I do with this information?”

Sit with that question for a moment, and write your reflections on these questions in your writing journal:

Now that you've borne witness to Tova Friedman's testimony of the Holocaust, what is one takeaway from her story? How do you see yourself applying that takeaway to your life, now or in the [future](#)?

STEP 2

Now that you know more about testimonies, you will put them in context by relating them to another type of nonfiction writing: personal narratives. Find Testimonies in Context on page 1 of the [Storytelling Is Who We Are—Handout](#) On this page, write about what you already know about personal narratives, compared to what you’ve been learning about testimonies. On the bottom of the handout, write about their similarities, in your own words. Continue in your writing journal if you need more space.

STEP 3

Next, you will write your own version of a testimony that draws on an experience from your personal history. Find Your Personal History on page 2 of the handout. Write your name in the gray box. At the end of each line, write an experience that has taught you something. Choose experiences you feel would be valuable for others to know about. These can be experiences that taught you about something hard, about something you need to be happy, or about any of the emotions in between—**whatever you feel comfortable writing about**. Add more lines as you need them. Circle the experience you’d like to continue writing about.

STEP 4

Next, answer the reflection questions on page 3 of the handout. These questions will help you reflect on the experience you chose and the lessons you learned from it.

STEP

Last, use pages 4–6 of the handout to help you write your testimony:

- Your Testimony: Section 1 (page 4): Write about the experience itself. Share relevant details that will help your reader fully understand your point of view. Continue in your writing journal if you need more space.

- Your Testimony: Section 2 (page 5): Write about the lessons you learned. Share details about how you learned these lessons—did anyone help you? How do you feel about the lessons you learned? Continue in your writing journal if you need more space.
- Your Testimony: Section 3 (page 6): Write about what you hope someone else will do with the lessons you've shared. Do you have a call to action you'd like to make? Do you hope someone else will be kinder to themselves or to others? Continue in your writing journal if you need more space.

Optional Extension: Ask someone you trust to read your testimony to continue the conversation about this important experience you had. As Tova Friedman said, one of the best ways we can keep our stories alive is to keep talking about them.

MATERIALS

- Tova Friedman: Surviving Auschwitz – *The Thread* video
- [Storytelling Is Who We Are—Handout](#)
- Writing journal and writing utensil