Teaching the Holocaust through Works of Art

This resource was developed for middle-school and high-school teachers. These materials can be used to supplement and enhance ongoing studies in history, art, and literacy.
Acknowledgments

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Holocaust:
An Educator’s Guide

Historical Background

To understand the significance of works of art and artifacts, it is important to understand their political, historical, and social context.

The Holocaust (1933-1945) was a time of fear, brutality, and tremendous bloodshed. The National Socialist German Workers’ Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei in German), commonly known as the Nazi Party, came to power in Germany in 1933. Its ideology of racial superiority targeted the Jews of Europe not only as inferior but also as “the enemy.” By the end of World War II in 1945, the Nazis and their collaborators had murdered approximately six million Jews, along with millions of others, including Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), disabled individuals, political prisoners, Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals, and Slavs (such as Poles, Ukrainians, and Byelorussians).

Over the course of twelve years, the Nazis gradually implemented their systematic, government-sponsored persecution of European Jewry. Shortly after coming to power in 1933, Adolf Hitler began a book-burning campaign, destroying books that were written by Jews or that contained ideas opposed to Nazi ideology. Two years later, the Nuremberg Laws stripped German Jews of their citizenship and outlawed marriages between Jews and non-Jews. On November 9-10, 1938, Nazi mobs attacked and burned Jewish homes, shops, and synagogues in an event that has come to be known as Kristallnacht, or the “Night of Broken Glass.” With the invasion of Poland and the beginning of World War II in September 1939, the Nazis extended their persecution of Jews to the countries they occupied.

During the war, the Nazis seized Jewish businesses and property and started rounding up Jews and sending them “to the East.” The Nazis deliberately kept their intentions secret. Most Jews were not aware that they were being sent to ghettos, concentration camps, or even death camps.

The Nazis intimidated and isolated the Jews in order to implement their policies more easily. In early 1942, at the Wannsee Conference near Berlin, Nazi officials discussed details of the Final Solution, a plan to methodically kill an estimated eleven million Jews in Europe. By February 1942, the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp in Poland began murdering Jews in gas chambers designed to kill the maximum numbers of inmates in the most efficient manner. The peoples and governments of the world barely responded as word leaked out that Jews and others were being systematically put to death.

Despite the violence that dominated this era, some individuals and groups, both Jews and non-Jews, demonstrated considerable resourcefulness, compassion, and bravery. Some Jews were able to stay alive through a combination of luck, inventiveness, the help of friends, and, sometimes, the assistance of strangers who lent a hand despite the considerable danger.

Jewish Life in Europe Before World War II

During the Middle Ages, Jews resided in tightly knit communities throughout Eastern and Western Europe, generally living separately from their non-Jewish neighbors. Although many Jews had lived in their towns and villages for generations, they were frequently subjected to anti-Jewish measures and even periodic expulsions. Because they were generally banned from craft guilds and other desirable professions, many Jews earned their living as merchants and moneylenders.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Jews increasingly moved out of their insulated communities in an effort to become more integrated into the broader European culture. While many Jews guarded their traditional customs and lifestyles closely, others looked for ways to blend their Jewish and secular identities.

Although Jews in many parts of Central and Western Europe had been granted emancipation (full civil rights) by the end of the nineteenth century, age-old anti-Jewish attitudes remained. The increasingly active participation of Jews in secular society made them even more vulnerable to attack. Economically and racially based antisemitism replaced traditional, religious anti-Judaism. Jews came to be viewed as a distinct race—one that could not be absorbed into European society. In parts of Russia and Poland, anti-Jewish riots, or pogroms, raged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Many European Jews searched for political solutions to the challenges they faced. Zionism was a political movement that aimed to obtain long-term security for the Jews by establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The aim of socialism was to create a new European society based on social and economic equality. Some Jews opted to give up Judaism altogether through assimilation into European society, while others immigrated to America in the hopes of finding a better life.

Map courtesy of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC.
Works of Art

This section offers ideas for exploring the Holocaust through art and artifacts by highlighting ten unique objects from the Jewish Museum’s extensive collection.
Nancy Spero

Masha Bruskina

Nancy Spero (American, 1926–2009)

Masha Bruskina, 1995

Acrylic on linen 122 1/4 x 146 1/2 in. (310.5 x 372.1 cm)

The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Fine Arts Acquisitions Committee Fund, Blanche and Romie Shapiro Fund, Kristie A. Jayne Fund, Sara Schlesinger Bequest, and Miki Denhof Bequest, 2002-12a-c
About the Work

Masha Bruskina was a Jewish volunteer nurse and a leader of the resistance in Minsk, Belorussia. At age seventeen, she disguised herself as a non-Jew and went to work in a local hospital where she helped wounded Soviet prisoners escape. Even after she was arrested and tortured by the Nazis, Bruskina never revealed the names of her fellow resisters. Bruskina was publicly hanged on October 26, 1941. She and two of her male comrades were led through the streets of Minsk—wearing large placards proclaiming that they were partisans. They were hanged one at a time, and their bodies were left hanging for several days as a grim reminder to others.

Masha Bruskina has appeared in many of Nancy Spero's works. Here, Spero intersperses images and texts from different periods and sources to tell Bruskina’s story. Spero includes an October 26, 1941, newspaper article describing the hanging of an anonymous girl, a 1960s article that reveals the discovery of the woman's Jewish identity, and pictures of Bruskina's death march and execution. The work consists of three unstretched canvases affixed to the wall with pushpins. These materials give the piece a feeling of immediacy and are more suggestive of a political banner than a work of art.

In her work, Nancy Spero has paid homage to many strong female figures who have been overlooked historically. In her native Belorussia, Bruskina is still unrecognized; the woman in the photo is identified as “unknown.” By publicizing Bruskina’s name and identity, Spero reinvests her with a measure of dignity.

About the Artist

Nancy Spero was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1926 and received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Spero was a pioneering figure in the feminist art movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In 1972, together with five other artists, she created AIR (Artists In Residence, Inc.), the first women's gallery in New York. Drawing on current and historical events, Spero's art examines traditional representations (or non-representation) of women and challenges ideas of male dominance in Western history and art history.

Resources


Galerie Lelong: Gallery representing Nancy Spero’s work

Further Information

Resistance And Rescue

Masha Bruskina is a symbol of strength and resistance. She is one of thousands—some renowned, some virtually unknown—who resisted the Nazis or risked their lives to save others.

Jewish resistance against the Nazis was extremely difficult. Jews in hiding or living in ghettos or camps had few resources and were often weakened by disease and hunger. And they were frequently unaware of the Nazis’ true plans and motives until it was too late. Nonetheless, many found ways to fight back, even in the harshest of circumstances.

Resistance movements existed in almost every concentration camp and ghetto. With a few smuggled weapons, homemade bombs, and sheer courage and endurance, residents of the Warsaw Ghetto managed to stave off the German army for a month in April and May of 1943. Even in the death camps of Sobibor and Treblinka, there were armed rebellions. Other prisoners escaped to the countryside and joined underground partisan fighting squads.

Resisting the Nazis to help others was extremely dangerous. One could be shot on the spot for helping a Jew elude capture. Yet, many took the risk. In every land occupied by the Nazis, there were people who hid Jews in basements, attics, and farmhouses; gave food to the starving; or helped an innocent victim escape. Sadly, though, these Righteous Among the Nations, as they were called, were far outnumbered by those who collaborated with the Nazis or simply stood by and did nothing.

Throughout Europe—especially in the expansive forests of Eastern Europe—Jews and non-Jews also joined partisan groups. These were covert militias that engaged in guerrilla warfare against the Nazis and their collaborators. Partisans sabotaged factories, derailed trains, cut communication lines, and blew up bridges in an attempt to undermine the Axis war effort.
Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

- What are the various elements that make up this painting? What do the writing and images remind you of?
- What do you notice about the way the painting is hung on the wall? Why do you think the artist hung the sections with push pins instead of framing them?
- From looking at the images and reading some of the text, what can you tell about the subject matter of this artwork?

For Further Discussion:

After giving students ample opportunity to examine this painting, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:

Nancy Spero has reproduced sections of newspaper articles and old photos to tell the story of Masha Bruskina, a young Jewish woman who resisted the Nazis during World War II. Spero combines these elements in a seemingly haphazard way. Why do you think this is? What is the effect of this approach? Do you think it is the most effective way to tell the story? If not, why do it this way?

Why do you think Spero tells the story through newspaper accounts and photographs published in the press? Why not rewrite the story in her own words or through interviews or other sources? What do you think Spero is saying about the ways we get information?

Masha Bruskina was only seventeen when she helped Soviet prisoners escape from the Nazis. What do you think causes one person to defy the Nazis and another to go along with their policies? What factors come into play?

Is Masha Bruskina a hero? What makes a hero? Who are your heroes?

Research Topics / Content Connections
- Resistance
- Biography
- Contemporary Art

RELATED WORK OF ART:

Christian Boltanski
Monument (Odessa)

Christian Boltanski (French, b. 1944)
Monument (Odessa), 1989–2003
Gelatin silver prints, tin biscuit boxes, lights, and wire Installation approximately: 80 x 72 in. (203.2 x 182.9 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Melva Bucksbaum Contemporary Art Fund, 2003–11a–kk ©Courtesy of the Marian Goodman Gallery, New York Not on view

In Monument (Odessa), Christian Boltanski includes anonymous photographs of Jewish children in Europe before World War II. Have students compare Boltanski’s work with Masha Bruskina by Nancy Spero:

- What do these two works have in common in terms of subject matter, formal elements, and media?
- Why do you think Boltanski presents his subjects anonymously while Spero clearly identifies her subject? How do these choices serve each artist’s goals? What do you think the goals of each work are?
- What is the overall impact of each work? How does each artist’s choice of materials and media contribute to this?
Felix Nussbaum

Study of Skeleton Playing a Clarinet for the Painting “Death Triumphant”

Felix Nussbaum (German, 1904-1944)
Study of Skeleton Playing a Clarinet for the Painting “Death Triumphant,” c. 1944
Pencil, gouache, and chalk on paper 10 7/8 x 8 13/16 in. (27.7 x 22.4 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Mildred and George Weissman Philanthropic Fund of the Jewish Communal Fund Gift, 1985-140 © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn
About the Work

Felix Nussbaum made this drawing while hiding from the Nazis in Brussels, just months before he was captured and sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Is the figure in the drawing alive or dead? Dressed in a tattered cloth (a funeral shroud?), the figure seems to walk the line between this world and the next. Nussbaum created this sketch as a study for his last known work, a painting titled *Death Triumphant or The Skeletons Play for a Dance*. In the painting, a group of skeletons dance and play music in a landscape strewn with the ruins of western civilization, as Allied bombers streak across the sky.

About the Artist

Felix Nussbaum was born to a Jewish family in Osnabruck, Germany, in 1904. Nussbaum studied art in Hamburg, Berlin, and Rome before fleeing to Belgium in 1935. There, he lived as a refugee until 1940, when he was arrested for being an enemy alien and sent to Saint Cyprien, an internment camp in southern France. Nussbaum later escaped and returned to Brussels, where he lived in hiding until 1944, when he was captured by the Nazis. He was murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau in August 1944, just one month before the liberation of Brussels.

Amazingly, Nussbaum continued to paint and draw throughout his ordeal. His art was his personal refuge, a way to maintain his spirit and sanity in the face of overwhelming danger. In 1942, Nussbaum brought some of his paintings to a friend in Brussels, along with a request: “If I perish,” Nussbaum implored his friend, “do not let my pictures die; show them to the public.” Nussbaum’s surviving works remain a testament to the horrors of Nazi oppression and the triumph of the human spirit.

Further Information

**The Dance Of Death: A Medieval Motif**
The horn-playing skeleton in Nussbaum’s painting *Death Triumphant* borrows from a medieval allegory known as the Dance of Death (Totentanz in German). Depicted in art and literature from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, the Dance of Death consists of the personification of Death leading dancing figures from all walks of life to the grave. It was meant as a reminder of the universality of death and the vanity of earthly glories.

**Spiritual Resistance**
Felix Nussbaum’s constant drive to create art while in hiding and in captivity is an example of spiritual resistance—the refusal to have one’s spirit broken by degradation and dehumanization. In ghettos, in camps, and in hiding, Jews found ways to maintain some measure of dignity and humanity in the face of Nazi brutality. In the ghettos, for example, inmates organized concerts, plays, and art exhibitions. Despite the official policy banning education, they created makeshift classrooms for children. And they found spiritual solace in Jewish ritual even though religious observance was forbidden. Even a simple act of kindness from one person to another reflected a powerful assertion of an individual’s humanity.

Resources


Links:
Felix Nussbaum Haus, Osnabruck
http://www.osnabrueck.de/fnh/10508.asp
Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

- What is the first thing you notice about the figure?
- Do you think the figure is alive or dead? Support your answer.
- What adjectives would you use to describe the attitude of this figure? What do you think this figure is feeling? What about the drawing makes you say that?
- What is the mood of the drawing? How do the colors contribute to the mood?
- If you could hear this drawing, what would it sound like?

For Further Discussion:

After giving students ample opportunity to examine this drawing, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:

- Felix Nussbaum drew this picture in 1944 while hiding from the Nazis. He had already escaped from a work camp and was later murdered at Auschwitz-Birkenau. How does this information affect your response to the work?
- Why would this skeleton be playing a horn? For whom is he playing? If this figure could speak, what do you think he would say?
- Nussbaum produced art throughout his time in the camps and in hiding. Why do you think he put so much energy into his art when his life was so endangered? In what way can art be considered a form of resistance? What purposes can art serve?
- In 1942, Nussbaum said, “If I perish, do not let my pictures die; show them to the public.” Why did he want his pictures to survive? What insights does this statement shed on Nussbaum’s art?
- How is this drawing a kind of historical document? How do you think it represents Nussbaum’s experiences of the time? How is it different from other types of historical documents of the period?
- Can you think of other examples of spiritual resistance?

Research Topics / Content Connections:

- Concentration Camps
- Spiritual Resistance
- Drawing

RELATED WORK OF ART

Margaret Bourke-White
Liberated Prisoners at Buchenwald, Germany

Margaret Bourke-White (American, 1904-1971)
Liberated Prisoners at Buchenwald, Germany, 1945
Not on view

Margaret Bourke-White took this photograph in 1945 as the Buchenwald concentration camp was being liberated by the Americans. Compare this photograph to Felix Nussbaum’s drawing, Skeleton Playing a Clarinet.

- What are the similarities between the subjects of Margaret Bourke-White’s photograph and the figure in Felix Nussbaum’s drawing? What are the differences?
- What do you think accounts for these differences (for example, the difference between drawing and photography, the different perspectives of the artists, the different reasons for which each work was created)?
- How could each work be considered an historical document of the Holocaust? Is one more “accurate” than the other?
Wedding Sofa, Danzig Sofa

North Germany, possibly Danzig (Gdansk, Poland), 1838
Birch veneer over pine; linden wood: painted, gilded, and upholstered 38 3/16 x 63 x 27 15/16 in. (97 x 160 x 71 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of the Danzig Jewish Community, D 280
About the Work

This elaborately decorated sofa is a splendid example of nineteenth-century Biedermeier furniture. Inscribed with a Hebrew date corresponding to the secular year 1837-38, the sofa also bears a gilded Hebrew donor inscription that indicates that it was presented to a synagogue in the city of Danzig by Rabbi Shlomoh Friedlander and his wife. The curious original upholstery stuffing of kelp and seashells is evidence that the couch was manufactured near the sea, possibly in Danzig itself.

The intricately carved detail of clasped hands above the inscription symbolizes marriage. This Jewish wedding sofa, possibly the only one in existence, was probably used for the pre-wedding ceremony known in Yiddish as Bedeken, in which the groom veils the bride. This custom is associated with the biblical matriarch Rebecca, who showed her modesty by veiling herself in the presence of her future husband, Isaac.

About the Danzig Collection

The city of Danzig (Gdansk in Polish) sits on the southern edge of the Baltic Sea. A prominent seaport and shipbuilding center, the city has been under Polish and German sovereignty at various times in its history. After World War I, Danzig became an autonomous city-state under the protection of the League of Nations.

A vibrant Jewish community developed in Danzig during the nineteenth century and grew in the early decades of the twentieth century with the influx of Eastern European Jews. But the community began to face grave challenges during the 1930s. Although Danzig was not directly under German rule at the time, the Nazi party achieved a victory in local elections in 1933. At first, the Jews of Danzig were granted greater freedoms than their brethren in Germany. But by the late 1930s, they were subject to the same harsh policies faced by German Jews.

By 1939, more than half the city’s 10,000-plus Jews had fled, and more were planning to evacuate. Feeling the threat of destruction at the hands of the Nazis, the remaining members of the community gathered their most prized objects of Judaica and shipped them to New York for safekeeping at The Jewish Theological Seminary (which housed The Jewish Museum at the time). The Danzig collection included objects given to the Danzig Jewish community in 1904 by Lesser Gieldzinski, a wealthy merchant and art collector; objects from the Great Synagogue of Danzig, which housed the collections of Danzig’s older synagogues; and objects donated by individuals shortly before the entire collection was shipped to America. In an accompanying statement, the Danzig community requested that the objects be returned if their community still existed in fifteen years. If not, however, the collection was to remain in New York “for the education and inspiration of the rest of the world.”
Resources


Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

- What do you notice about this piece? What do you think it might have been used for? What clues are there about its use?
- What designs or decoration do you see on this piece? How would you interpret these details?
- What do you think its original setting looked like?

For Further Discussion:

- After giving students ample opportunity to examine the wedding sofa, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:
  - Share the story of this sofa with your students. Why do you think it was so important for the Danzig Jewish community to save some of their treasured things?
  - What, if anything, does this object tell you about the Jewish community of Danzig?
  - If it were up to you to determine where the sofa would go today, what would you decide? Would you keep it in the museum? Give it to a synagogue in the United States? Send it back to Poland?
  - What objects do you want to have preserved when you are no longer around? Why? What do these objects say about you, your family, or your community?

Research Topics / Content Connections:

- Jewish Life in Europe before World War II
- Nazi Rise to Power
- Community, Jewish Tradition and Practice

RELATED WORKS OF ART

Cas Oorthuys

*Untitled (Man with Jewish Treasures Discovered after Liberation)*

*Cas Oorthuys (Dutch, 1908-1975)*

*Untitled (Man with Jewish Treasures Discovered after Liberation),* 1945, printed 1997 Gelatin silver print 11 x 11 1/4 in. (27.9 x 28.6 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of the Netherlands Photo Archives in Honor of Eric A. Zafran, commemorating The Jewish Museum’s exhibition “The Illegal Camera: Photography in the Netherlands During the German Occupation, 1940-1945”, 1997-28

Not on view

During the Holocaust, the Nazis stole thousands of books and religious objects from the Jewish families they deported and the Jewish institutions they destroyed. Many of the metal objects were melted down for the raw materials, but quite a few were preserved so the Nazis could study the extinct Jewish culture once they had destroyed it. After the war, efforts were made to return these objects, but they often had no owners to claim them. Many of the items were sent to museums, synagogues, Jewish libraries, and other institutions around the world.

For discussion:

- Why do you think the Nazis wanted to save Jewish religious objects?
- What do you think should have been done with the objects after the war?
- Why is it significant that the Danzig objects were kept together and sent out before the war started?
RELATED WORKS OF ART

Memorial Plaque of the Great Synagogue of Danzig

Memorial Plaque of the Great Synagogue of Danzig

Danzig (Gdansk, Poland), c. 1918
Marble: carved, painted, and gilt 62 3/4 x 46 1/2 x 1 in. (159.4 x 118.1 x 2.5 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of the Danzig Jewish Community, D 284

This plaque was one of the items that the Danzig Jewish community sent to New York for safekeeping in 1939. It originally hung on a wall of the Great Synagogue of Danzig as a testament to the fifty-six members of the community who fought and died for Germany — the Fatherland — during World War I. (Danzig was part of the German state of Prussia from the late eighteenth century until 1919, when the Treaty of Versailles granted the city independent status.)

Despite growing antisemitism in Danzig in the years before World War I, the Jewish community remained strongly identified with Germany. With the outbreak of World War I, Danzig Jews signed up in large numbers for military service as did other German Jews. Of the twelve thousand German Jewish casualties of the war, perhaps as many as ninety-five were from Danzig (although the plaque only lists fifty-six names).

For discussion:

- What do you notice about this plaque? What symbols do you see? What dates? In what language do you think the text is written?

- Based on what you see, what do you think was the significance of this plaque? Have you seen similar objects?

- Hitler later accused the Jews of being disloyal to Germany and a source of all of Germany’s problems. How does this plaque challenge that statement?

- Why do you think the Jews of Danzig wanted this plaque to be saved?
Christian Boltanski

Monument (Odessa)

Christian Boltanski (French, b. 1944)

Monument (Odessa), 1989–2003

Gelatin silver prints, tin biscuit boxes, lights, and wire Installation approximately:
80 x 72 in. (203.2 x 182.9 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York

About the Work

This installation is one of a group of works that Christian Boltanski calls his “Monuments” series. In this particular piece, Boltanski has appropriated a snapshot of Jewish students in France in 1939. He has reproduced and enlarged their individual faces and combined them with tin biscuit boxes and incandescent bulbs. The design suggests an altar, with the electric lights substituting for votive candles. The slightly unfocused, anonymous faces of the children convey the transience of life and a collective consciousness of the dead. At the same time, Boltanski challenges our capacity to truly capture the past. Can photographs really reclaim lost lives? Does memory allow us to return to the past or merely to mourn its loss?

The reference to Odessa in the title recalls the birthplace of the artist’s paternal grandfather. He says, “My work is about the fact of dying, but it’s not about the Holocaust itself.” However, having grown up in postwar France with the knowledge of his father having hidden in fear during the occupation, Boltanski was never far removed from the reality of genocide.

Knowing the religion of the children in this work and the year in which they were photographed inevitably links them to the Holocaust and evokes thoughts about their unknown fate. The lights illuminating their images thus suggest another interpretation—namely, Yahrzeit candles to honor and remember the dead. The empty, rusted tin biscuit boxes, a fixture in Boltanski’s works, hold more than childhood treasures and memories—they hold the unwritten histories of unrealized lives.

About the Artist

Christian Boltanski was born in occupied Paris in 1944 to a Jewish father and a Catholic mother. Although he had no formal training in art, he started painting as a teenager. By the late 1960s, Boltanski had abandoned painting, choosing instead to produce short avant-garde films and publish notebooks in which he explored aspects of his own childhood—real and imagined. Through the 1970s and ’80s, Boltanski continued to experiment with materials, constructing theatrical installations from photographs and found objects. His work is highly conceptual in nature, exploring notions of childhood and memory, fiction and reality.

Resources


Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

• What is the first word that comes to mind when you look at Boltanski’s Monument (Odessa)?

• What are the different components that make up the work? What different media does the artist use? How do they work together to create a coherent whole?

• What do you see in the photographs? What do these images remind you of?

• Does this piece evoke any specific sensation or emotion in you? What is the overall effect of the work?

• Why do you think the artist chose to leave the wires hanging the way he did?

• Would you consider Boltanski’s work a sculpture? Why or why not? How does Boltanski’s installation challenge your expectations of a traditional sculpture or work of art?

For Further Discussion:

After giving students ample opportunity to examine this installation, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:

• How is Boltanski’s work similar to or different from other artworks you have seen?

• How is it similar to or different from other Holocaust memorials you have seen?

• Boltanski says, “My work is about the fact of dying, but it’s not about the Holocaust itself.” Can the work be interpreted in the context of the Holocaust if the artist himself downplays that association?

• The children in the photos were Jewish students in pre-War France. If you did not know that, would it change the meaning or impact of the piece?

• What is the purpose of memorializing the dead? For whom do we make memorials? For the dead? For the living?

• Boltanski’s work is about memory. What are your strongest personal memories? What keeps these memories alive in your mind? What objects or images evoke these memories for you?

Research Topics / Content Connections:

• Holocaust Memorials

• Jewish Life in Europe before World War II

• Contemporary Art, Installation Art

RELATED WORKS OF ART

Nancy Spero, Masha Bruskina

Nancy Spero (American, 1926–2009)  
Masha Bruskina, 1995  
Acrylic on linen 122 1/4 x 146 1/2 in. (310.5 x 372.1 cm)  
The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Fine Arts Acquisitions Committee Fund, Blanche and Romie Shapiro Fund, Kristie A. Jayne Fund, Sara Schlesinger Bequest, and Miki Denhof Bequest, 2002-12a-c  
Not on view

In Masha Bruskina, Nancy Spero uses text and photographic images to highlight the identity of a formerly little-known Jewish participant in the resistance movement during the Holocaust. Have students compare Masha Bruskina with Boltanski’s installation:

• What do these two works have in common in terms of subject matter, formal elements, and media?

• Why do you think one artist chose to present his subjects anonymously while the other artist does not? How do these choices serve each artist’s goals? What do you think are the goals of each work?

• What is the overall impact of each work? How does each artist’s choice of materials and media contribute to this?
Michael David

Warsaw

Michael David (American, b. 1954)

Warsaw, 1980

Pigment and wax on Masonite 63 x 63 in. (160 x 160 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Lenore B. Lippert and Barbara E. Lippert in memory of Michael Myron Lippert, 1986–92
About the Work

Michael David’s *Warsaw* consists of a large, yellow Jewish Star. Although the star is sharply outlined, its surface is rough and abstract. David employs a technique called encaustic, which involves combining pigments with hot wax. This allows him to build up a rich, thick texture. *Warsaw* is one of four paintings created by the artist in the late 1970s and early ‘80s in which he uses the Star of David.

David explains how he came to use this symbol:

“In 1979 I started a series of paintings called “Symbols.” They were an attempt to expand the Minimalist language, and its strict concerns with process and the use of materials—by including subject matter such as history, politics, and religion.

I tried to expand the rectangle as a way to open the imagery. Limitations in craftsmanship forced me to work only with right angles; that led me to the cross, which became an immediate bridge to the religious, political, and historical…. I did two swastika paintings—a small, blood-red molten-surfaced piece called *Never Again* and a gray flesh-colored painting called *The Golem*. The images were painful and difficult, and were misunderstood. Very few could get past the immediate revulsion of the Nazi connotations to allow for any continued reading of these multilayered statements. I tried to clarify my views on the Holocaust by creating *Warsaw*, a Star of David that referred to the yellow star Polish Jews were forced to wear in the ghetto, and *Missing in Action* (another Star of David) with its fields of molten flesh in red and blue.”

David’s work carries powerful emotional associations. It challenges viewers to consider the various meanings of the star symbol. A six-pointed star can be a symbol of Nazi oppression or a symbol of Jewish pride. Is David’s large, thickly textured, wax-and-paint star a memorial to those who suffered in the Warsaw Ghetto? Is it an attempt to reclaim a cultural symbol? Is it both?


The Jewish Star

The six-pointed star is often known as the Jewish Star, the Star of David, or the Shield of David (*Magen David* in Hebrew). The origin of the star’s connection to Jewish identity is uncertain. The six-pointed star has long been used as a decorative motif, and by the Middle Ages, it was also associated with the Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical tradition. The symbol was first used as the emblem of a Jewish community in medieval Prague. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, its use spread from Prague to other Jewish communities in Europe. It was only in the nineteenth century—and especially after the star was chosen as the emblem of Zionism in 1897—that the Magen David became universally recognized as a distinctly Jewish symbol.

During World War II, the Nazis appropriated the Jewish Star for their own ends. Soon after the German invasion of Poland in 1939, the Nazis ordered all Polish Jews over the age of twelve to wear a white armband inscribed with a blue Star of David. The use of a Jewish badge gradually expanded to other territories occupied by the Nazis, often taking the form of a yellow cloth star marked with the word Jew in the local language. In some places, children as young as five were required to wear the badge.

The badge was meant to differentiate and isolate the Jews. If a Jew was caught without a badge, he or she was subjected to harsh punishment—sometimes even death. The use of the Jewish badge was a revival of a medieval practice; in many lands during the Middle Ages, Jews were required to wear identifying articles of clothing to set them apart.
Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

- What are the first words that come to mind when you look at this artwork?
- What associations do you have with this symbol?
- How does the color affect your response?
- Describe the surface of the piece. What do you think the texture feels like?
- The artist used a technique called encaustic that combines pigments and hot wax to create the thick, molten surface texture. What is your response to this textural effect?

For Further Discussion:

After giving students ample opportunity to examine this artwork, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:

- Before World War II, Warsaw—the Polish city this work refers to—was home to more than 350,000 Jews. The city’s Jewish population was second in size only to New York City. Warsaw became the site of Europe’s largest Jewish ghetto during World War II. When Soviet troops liberated the city in January 1945, only about 11,500 Jewish survivors remained. How does the title of the piece influence your response?

- The six-pointed star is a Jewish symbol. During the Holocaust, however, the Nazis forced Jews to wear yellow six-pointed stars on their clothing to identify them as outsiders. Do you think the artist is presenting the star as a positive or a negative symbol? Can it be both? How can someone turn a negative symbol into something positive or vice versa?

- How do you think the Jews felt about being forced to wear the star? How would you feel?

- What symbols have meaning for you? What makes them powerful?

Research Topics / Content Connections:

- Nazi Racial Policies
- Symbols
- Abstract Art
- Encaustic Technique

RELATED WORKS OF ART

**Yellow Badge**

*Yellow Badge*, France, c. 1942  
Cotton: printed 3 3/4 x 3 1/8 in. (9.5 x 8 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Juliette Stern, Paris, S 1403  
Not on view

This yellow star is inscribed with the word *Juif* (“Jew” in French). Jews in German-occupied France were forced to wear the yellow stars beginning in 1942. Michael David’s painting *Warsaw* refers to the yellow badge that Jews throughout Europe were forced to wear during the Holocaust, but it does not recreate it exactly.

Discuss:

- How is Michael David’s piece different from the actual Jewish badge?
- Are these differences relevant to the meaning of David’s work? How?
- What kind of response do you have when you look at this badge? What about when you look at David’s artwork? How are your responses similar or different?
Michael David
A Jew in Germany

Have students compare this work with Michael David's painting, Warsaw:

- What are the differences between these two works by Michael David?
- What different associations or feelings do the two works elicit in you? What does the color of this work suggest to you? What if it were a different color—blue, or pink, or red? What would the effect be?
- Like Warsaw, this work is also quite large. How would its effect be different if it were very small?

Shoshana Dentz
Broken Glass

Like Michael David, Shoshana Dentz uses emotionally charged symbols in her abstract compositions. Here, she employs the yellow star, the same symbol that David uses in Warsaw. Dentz creates a field of stars, all pushed up to the surface of the picture plane. Her title, Broken Glass, is a reference to a specific historical event, Kristallnacht, the “Night of Broken Glass.” Dentz writes, “The nature of the gouache on the waxed paper, the particular transparency of that combination, along with the imperfect ‘boxes’ in which each of the stars is enclosed, all made me think of stained glass and of broken glass.”

Have students examine this work in relation to Michael David’s Warsaw:

- What are the similarities between Shoshana Dentz’s Broken Glass and Michael David’s Warsaw?
- What are the differences?
- What is the effect of Dentz’s use of multiple stars? What does her work make you think of?
- Notice the yellow rift running across the watercolor. How does it affect the work’s composition? Does it have any symbolic connotations?
- How does the title, Broken Glass, affect your understanding of the work? Why do you think the artist chose this title?
Margaret Bourke-White

Liberated Prisoners at Buchenwald, Germany

Margaret Bourke-White (American, 1904–1971)
Liberated Prisoners at Buchenwald, Germany, 1945
About the Work

The Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany was liberated by the Fourth Armored Division of General George S. Patton’s Third United States Army on April 11, 1945. The Americans found more than twenty-one thousand people alive in the camp. They were sick, emaciated, and exhausted but still alive. This was a mere fraction of the quarter of a million prisoners who had passed through the camp’s gates during the previous eight years, the vast majority of whom were murdered at the hands of the Nazis.

Photojournalist and war correspondent Margaret Bourke-White was with the troops during those first days when they discovered the victims and survivors of the camp. With unflinching directness, she captured enduring images of the walking skeletons, the heaps of bodies, and the barbaric conditions in the camp. Life magazine published several of her photographs in its May 7, 1945, issue. These images became iconic documents of the Holocaust, showing many for the first time the extent of the suffering caused by Nazi brutality.

About the Artist

Born in 1904 in New York City and raised in Bound Brook, New Jersey, Margaret Bourke-White grew up to become a pioneer in the field of photojournalism. Her father was an amateur photographer, and she began to pursue photography seriously as a college student. By 1928, Bourke-White’s photographs were appearing in newspapers and magazines across the country. In 1929, magazine publisher Henry Luce invited her to take photographs for Fortune magazine, and in 1936, she became one of the first staff photographers for Luce’s new publication, Life magazine. Her picture New Deal, Montana: Fort Peck Dam appeared on the cover of the first issue of the magazine on November 23, 1936.

Bourke-White was strongly committed to social causes, and she used her photographs to address the issues that were important to her. In 1937, her photographs of rural poverty in the American South were published in the book You Have Seen Their Faces, a collaboration between Bourke-White and her husband, the novelist Erskine Caldwell. She traveled throughout Europe during World War II as a war correspondent and was with General Patton’s forces when the troops liberated the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1945. The following year, Bourke-White published a book of war photographs called Dear Fatherland, Rest Quietly, which helped her come to terms with the horrors she had witnessed during World War II.

Bourke-White was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease in 1952, and she became increasingly infirm over the years. She died in 1971.

Further Information

About Buchenwald

The Buchenwald concentration camp was built in 1937 about five miles outside the German city of Weimar. It was one of the largest Nazi concentration camps. Although the camp’s first inmates were mainly political prisoners, about ten thousand Jewish men were sent to the facility in November 1938, in the aftermath of Kristallnacht. From then through the end of the war, Buchenwald housed not only Jews and political prisoners but also Jehovah’s Witnesses, Roma and Sinti, German military deserters, resistance fighters, and prisoners of war.

Buchenwald and its many smaller satellite camps were important sources of forced labor for the Nazis. Inmates worked on construction projects, in munitions plants, and in stone quarries. Periodically, the prisoners underwent “selection,” in which those who were too sick or weak to work were killed by lethal injection or sent elsewhere to be gassed. Some prisoners were also subjected to medical experiments, which resulted in hundreds of deaths.

About the Ghettos and Camps

Before and during World War II, the Nazis set up an elaborate system of ghettos and camps across Germany and occupied Europe. Ghettos were created in urban areas to separate the Jews from the rest of the population and facilitate their deportation to camps. Concentration camps were used to detain Jews, political prisoners, and other perceived enemies. The Nazis built the first concentration camp, Dachau, in 1933; by the end of the war, there were thousands of camps.

Although concentration camps were not built for the purpose of mass murder, many prisoners were killed in the camps, while others died from starvation, disease, or the rigors of forced labor. The Nazis also built six death camps, or killing centers, specifically for the mass murder of Jews and Gypsies, primarily by poison gas. Most of those who arrived at the death camps were immediately sent to gas chambers to be killed. The remaining prisoners were kept alive temporarily to work in the camps.

About Liberation

As the American, British, French, Canadian, and Russian forces made inroads against the German army in late 1944 and 1945, the Allied troops came upon the Nazi concentration camps and death camps. Although reports of the Nazis atrocities had already been leaked to the Western press, many did not believe or fully understand the extent of the suffering. The liberating soldiers were shocked and sickened to find piles of corpses, gas chambers, human crematoria, mass graves, rooms full of victims’ shoes and eyeglasses, and survivors as thin as skeletons. Although caring for the survivors was not their primary duty, these unwitting liberators did their best to provide comfort and basic supplies for the victims.
Resources


Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

Encourage students to look at this photograph carefully:

- What do you notice about the people in this photograph? Describe their physical attributes, clothing, and expressions. Based on what you see, what can you say about them?
- Describe the setting. What can you say about the conditions? What clues are there as to where they are?
- Think about how the photograph is laid out. How do the shapes and lines, the arrangement of the figures, and the way the photograph is cropped contribute to the effect of the image?

For Further Discussion:

After giving students ample opportunity to examine this photograph, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:

- Photojournalist Margaret Bourke-White took this picture in the days immediately after the Buchenwald concentration camp was liberated. How does this photograph compare with what you know of the concentration camp? What does this photo tell you about life in the Buchenwald camp? What does it not tell you?
- They say a picture is worth a thousand words. Do you think a photograph can fully capture the experience of an environment like this? Why or why not?
- Bourke-White’s photographs of Buchenwald were published in *Life* magazine in 1945. How do you think Americans might have reacted to the photographs at the time? Do you think the impact of an image like this changes over time? Would people react the same way today?
- Photojournalists like Margaret Bourke-White try to tell stories about the world with their photographs. Think about some iconic images you have seen, for example, the collapse of the World Trade Center, the wars in Iraq or Darfur, or Hurricane Katrina, or look for some strong images in a recent newspaper. What are the stories they are telling? What makes these images powerful or effective?

Research Topics / Content Connections:

- Concentration Camps
- Liberation
- Photojournalism
In 1947, the Polish Parliament voted to create a museum on the site of the Auschwitz concentration camp. Today, more than half a million people visit each year to tour the grounds, explore the museum exhibits, and learn about what happened there. In 1994, American photojournalist Jill Freedman toured Eastern Europe, and during her visit to Auschwitz, she took this photograph.

Before telling students the title of the photograph, invite them to comment on it:

- Describe what you see in the photo. How would you describe the setting? What is the atmosphere like?
- How would you describe the people? How are they dressed? What else can you say about them? Where do you think this is?
- Reveal the title of the photograph to your students. Discuss:
  - How does the title affect your response to the photograph? How does it affect your initial reaction?
  - Do you think the photograph is a form of social commentary? What do you think its message is?
  - Look at this photograph alongside Margaret Bourke-White’s photograph of prisoners in Buchenwald. Discuss:
  - Half a million people visit Auschwitz every year. Do you think it is a good thing that tourists are visiting Auschwitz? Why?
  - Does it honor or trivialize the victims and events of the concentration camps when these sites are turned into tourist destinations?

This photograph is one of a series that the artists Andrea Robbins and Max Becher took at the Dachau concentration camp near Munich, Germany. Robbins and Becher’s photos almost resemble tourists’ snapshots, recording the reality of the camp today in all its ordinariness. Regarding this series, the artists write, “We were primarily interested in how inadequately such a place transports the past into the present.”

Discuss:

- Describe what you see in this photograph.
- What do you think this could be? What clues are there?
- Is there anything unique or special about this image?
- Do you think concentration camps (or any places) are inherently special or hallowed? What makes a place special or important?
- The artists write that in their photos of Dachau they are “primarily interested in how inadequately such a place transports the past into the present.” What do you think they mean by that?
Felix Nussbaum

*Study of Skeleton Playing a Clarinet for the Painting “Death Triumphant”*

Felix Nussbaum (German, 1904-1944)

Felix Nussbaum made this drawing while in hiding, after he had already spent time in a Nazi work camp and before he was sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

**Discuss:**

- What are the similarities between this figure and the subjects of Margaret Bourke-White’s photograph? What are the differences?

- What do you think accounts for these differences (for example, the difference between drawing and photography, the different perspectives of the artists, the different reasons for which each work was created)?

- How could each work be considered a historical document of the Holocaust? Is one more “accurate” than the other? If so, why?
William Gropper

Untitled, from The Illustrious Dunderheads

William Gropper (American, 1897-1977)

Untitled, from The Illustrious Dunderheads, 1942
Ink and gouache on paper 15 x 15 1/2 in. (38 1/8 x 39 3/8 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William S. Konecky, 2000-83
About the Work

This cartoon was one of many studies William Gropper made for the 1942 book, *The Illustrious Dunderheads*, edited by Rex Stout. The book combines pro-Nazi statements by congressmen with Gropper’s satirical cartoons to show how members of the American government had been influenced by Nazi propaganda in the period leading up to the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. The “Dunderheads” were those American politicians whom the book accused of bowing to Hitler and his allies. In his introduction to the book, Frank Sullivan describes the publication as “a collection of some of the silliest, stupidest, and most dangerous statements that have ever been made by men laying claim to being leaders of the American people,” and “a sorry record of stupidity in high places; selected gems from the writings and roarings of some of the most outstanding bombasts whose oratory ever cracked the ceilings of the Capitol.”

In this cartoon, Hitler, Mussolini, and Japanese emperor Hirohito (the leaders of the three Axis nations) recline regally in a rickshaw while an American “fat cat” pulls them. Spread across the laps of the three leaders is a blanket emblazoned with the Nazi swastika.

About the Artist

William Gropper was a painter, muralist, and cartoonist who expressed his deep commitment to social justice and economic equality through his art. Although he was inspired and influenced by the Old Masters, the subjects of Gropper’s work reflect the American reality of the twentieth century. He was a social advocate and a champion for the downtrodden.

Born in 1897 to a poor Jewish family on New York’s Lower East Side, Gropper first studied art at the Ferrer School in Greenwich Village, where he was influenced by the social realist painters of the Ashcan school. Gropper went on to study at the New School of Fine and Applied Art and then landed his first job—as a cartoonist for *The New York Tribune*. Throughout his career, Gropper contributed cartoons and illustrations to many popular publications, including *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, and *Vanity Fair*. His cartoons often satirize the rich and powerful.

Gropper once said, “That’s my heritage. I’m from the old school, defending the underdog. Maybe because I’ve been an underdog or still am. I put myself in their position. I feel for the people. I have to face things in the most brutal way that I can and let it out and then feel better. Maybe it’s my heredity or maybe it’s my way of life. I can’t close my eyes and say it is the best of all possible worlds and let it go at that. I become involved.”

Further Information

American Response to the Holocaust

During the 1930s and ’40s, the United States and most other Western nations maintained strict immigration policies that severely limited the number of refugees allowed in. Even as the situation in Europe deteriorated and war became imminent, the American government did nothing to change its policies. As a result, those who were able to escape the Nazis frequently had nowhere to go.

As the war progressed, reports about Nazi atrocities leaked out of occupied Europe. But the Allies held fast to their war policy, which was to focus all resources on the war effort in order to defeat Germany. It was believed that this was the best way to help those caught in the Nazi vise. In April 1943, the Americans and the British convened a conference in Bermuda on the topic of refugees. Rescue options for victims of the Nazis were discussed, but no action was taken. Many people still believe the United States could have done more to save Jewish lives during the Holocaust.

Resources


The William Gropper Website
http://www.gropper.com/

Gropper exhibition at the Syracuse University Library
http://library.syr.edu/digital/exhibits/g/Gropper/index.html
Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

- Describe the different characters in this drawing. What are some of the attributes of each?

- Can you identify any of the characters? What clues are there to their identities? What does the way the artist has drawn each character tell you about what he thinks of them?

- What do you think William Gropper is saying about the relationship between certain American politicians and the Axis powers early in World War II?

For Further Discussion:

- After giving students ample opportunity to examine this drawing, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:

  - Other than with political cartoons, how else could Gropper have made these comments about the United States government? Do you think cartoons are an effective way to make political statements? Why or why not? What other methods might be more effective? Gropper was criticizing the actions of the United States government in a time of war. Do you think it is appropriate to challenge your own government at such a time? If so, what are the best ways to do so?

  - What American policies would you take a stand on today? How could you make your opinions known?

Research Topics / Content Connections:

- Axis Powers
- American Response to the Holocaust
- Political Cartoons

RELATED WORKS OF ART

William Gropper
Untitled, from The Illustrious Dunderheads

William Gropper (American, 1897-1977)
Untitled, from The Illustrious Dunderheads, 1942
Ink, crayon, and gouache on paper 15 3/16 x 16 1/2 in. (38.6 x 41.9 cm)
The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William S. Konecky, 2001-39
Not on view

William Gropper made numerous cartoons for The Illustrious Dunderheads. In this one, the three Axis leaders wave goodbye as a “Dunderhead” drops obliviously from their plane.

- What is going on in this cartoon?

- What do you think Gropper is trying to say here?

- How does this cartoon build on the other Gropper cartoon? How do the two cartoons work together?
Albert Bloch

*March of the Clowns*

*Albert Bloch (American, 1882–1961)*

*March of the Clowns*, 1941

Oil on canvas mounted on composition board 36 x 40 in. (91.4 x 101.6 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Oscar and Regina Gruss Memorial Fund, 2001-42

On view

Albert Bloch and William Gropper both created their art in the early 1940s. Their work deals with the world political situation at the time. There are a number of other similarities between the two.

* What connections do you see between these two works?

* Both works take a mocking, satirical approach to their subject matter. Do you think they are meant to be funny? Is it appropriate to use humor in the context of war and suffering?

* How do these works differ from each other in mood, medium, or other characteristics?
Albert Bloch

March of the Clowns

Albert Bloch (American, 1882-1961)
March of the Clowns, 1941
Oil on canvas mounted on composition board 36 x 40 in. (91.4 x 101.6 cm)
The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Oscar and Regina Gruss Memorial Fund, 2001-42
About the Work

In *March of the Clowns*, Albert Bloch creates a parade of uncanny clowns—at once comical and sinister—celebrating Hitler’s defeat. In his prophetic vision of the war’s end, painted in 1941, Bloch mocks the Fuehrer (“the leader” in German) by reducing him to a tiny and ridiculous doll. Looking shocked and startled, Hitler hangs from a swastika that is surmounted by a victorious Jewish star. Other cultural symbols appear as well, including an arch (a symbol of power and triumph), a cross (representing Christianity), a crescent moon and star (representing Islam), and festive-looking skeletons, often associated with the Mexican Day of the Dead. The parade’s spectators include Popeye, Olive Oyl, Krazy Kat, Ignatz Mouse, and other American cartoon characters from the 1920s and ‘30s.

Music plays an integral role in Bloch’s work, and one can imagine hearing the bombastic marching tune emanating from this absurd parade. The lead clown plays the bassoon, spewing smoke that obscures the surroundings. The scene is at once grandiose, silly, and deeply disturbing.

Bloch probably painted this picture before the United States entered World War II. The cartoon characters may represent America looking on helplessly from the periphery or perhaps Bloch’s own feelings of isolation and powerlessness as he watched the war unfolding overseas.

About the Artist

Albert Bloch was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1881. He began his artistic career as an illustrator and cartoonist for *The Mirror*, a weekly literary and political newspaper. (Evidence of his early experience in cartooning can be seen in the painting *March of the Clowns.* In 1909, Bloch sailed for Europe. He spent most of the following decade in Germany working as an artist. He became known for his richly colored, emotionally charged figurative paintings.

Bloch was the only American-born member of the Blue Rider (*Der Blaue Reiter* in German), a group of artists founded by Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc in Germany in 1911. Bloch met these two artists on his first visit to Munich, and they included six of his paintings in the group’s first exhibition. The Blue Rider artists strove to express spiritual truths through art and the symbolic use of color, and they stressed the connections between visual art and other art forms, including music. The artists differed in their specific styles and techniques. What they had in common was that their art was in the service of “an outward expression of an inner feeling.”

Bloch returned to the United States in 1921. From 1923 to 1947, he served as the Head of the Department of Drawing and Painting at the University of Kansas, Lawrence. He died in 1961.
Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

- What is the mood of this painting? How does the artist create this mood?
- Which, if any, of the figures in this painting do you recognize? Do any of these surprise you? Why?
- What symbols do you recognize? What do they symbolize?
- What can you tell about the setting? What do you think is going on in this image?
- What do you think this scene would sound like?
- What is the focal point of the painting? Describe the central imagery. How does the artist portray Hitler?

For Further Discussion:

After giving students ample opportunity to examine this painting, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:

- Albert Bloch painted this canvas in 1941, four years before the end of World War II. What do you think he was trying to express about his own hopes, worries, and expectations for the war?
- Bloch’s painting includes clowns and cartoon characters. Do you think the painting is supposed to be funny? If not, why are these figures included?
- Why do you think Bloch included the Christian cross, the Jewish star, and the star and crescent (a symbol of Islam)? How do these important symbols relate to the other images in the picture?

Research Topics / Content Connections:

- American Response to the Holocaust
- Painting
- The Blue Rider

RELATED WORKS OF ART

William Gropper
Untitled, from The Illustrious Dunderheads

William Gropper (American, 1897–1977)
Untitled, from The Illustrious Dunderheads, 1942
Ink and gouache on paper 15 x 15 1/2 in. (38 1/8 x 39 3/8 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William S. Konecky, 2000–83
Not on view

Albert Bloch and William Gropper created their art in the early 1940s. Their work deals with the world political situation of the time. There are a number of other similarities between the two.

- What connections do you see between these two works?
- Both works take a mocking, satirical approach to their subject matter. Do you think they are meant to be funny? Is it appropriate to use humor in the context of war and suffering?
- How do these works differ from each other in mood, medium, or other characteristics?
George Segal

The Holocaust

George Segal (American, 1924–2000)
The Holocaust, 1982
Plaster, wood, and wire Dimensions variable The Jewish Museum, New York
Purchase: Dorot Foundation Gift, 1985-176a-l Art © The George and Helen Segal Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY
## About the Work

George Segal created *The Holocaust* as a memorial to the horrific events of World War II. Using his signature technique, he posed live models and cast them in plaster. Segal based the installation on photographs of the concentration camps that were taken immediately after liberation. But he added a degree of order and organization to the piles of corpses seen in those pictures because he found the Nazi disregard for the dead so offensive. Segal once said, "In any culture, if a human being dies, there’s an elaborate, orderly ritual that accompanies the burial. The body is laid out in a straight line. Hands are crossed. There’s a burial case and a prescribed, almost immovable succession of events that involve the expression of grief of the family, the expression of love, the expression of the religious beliefs in whatever civilization. It’s a prescribed order, and if a modern state turns that order topsy-turvy and introduces this kind of chaos, it is an unthinkable obscenity.”

Segal also includes a variety of literary and personal symbols in the scene. One of the figures, for example, holds a half-eaten apple in her hand, representing Eve in the Garden of Eden. Elsewhere, a man cradles the head of a young boy in a reference to an earlier work by Segal titled Abraham and Isaac, while another man lies with arms outstretched like Jesus on the cross, a symbol of suffering. In the foreground, Segal inserts a standing figure clutching the barbed-wire fence. This figure, cast from a Holocaust survivor living in Israel, is a witness to the atrocities and may provide even a glimmer of hope. He also serves as a mediator for viewers, creating a necessary emotional distance.

## About the Artist

George Segal was born in the Bronx, New York, on November 26, 1924. As a child, he moved with his family to a poultry farm in New Jersey, and he often worked on the farm to help the family through difficult times. In the 1940s, Segal studied art in New York City, but uncertain of his ability to earn a living solely through his art, he bought his own poultry farm nearby the family homestead. Segal painted and taught art throughout the 1950s, finally converting his farm into a studio in 1958.

In the early 1960s, Segal began using found objects to create environments that reflected the mundane realities of the workaday world. He populated these with plaster figures cast from living models. Segal’s work is often associated with Pop art, although his work reflects a strong current of personal experience and human emotion. George Segal died on June 9, 2000, at the age of seventy-five.

**George Segal’s Technique**

To create his life-sized figures, George Segal wrapped his models in medical bandages dipped in plaster. Once the plaster dried, he would cut off the hardened cast. Segal would often cast the forms in sections and then assemble the completed figure afterward. He rarely used professional models, instead casting his sculptures from family, friends, neighbors, and even himself.

## Resources


George and Helen Segal Foundation
Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

- What is the first thing you notice when you look at this installation? What is your emotional response? What does it make you think of?

- What materials do you think the artist used to create this work?

- What do you notice about the standing figure? Why do you think the artist included it? What do you think this figure would say if it could talk?

- How do you think it would be different to view this work in person? How would the effect of the work be different? How would it feel to view the work from a different angle, for example, from behind the barbed wire looking out?

- Why do you think the artist left the figures unpainted? How would the effect of the work be different if Segal had painted them?

For Further Discussion:

After giving students ample opportunity to examine this installation, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:

- Read this quote by George Segal:
  “In any culture, if a human being dies, there’s an elaborate, orderly ritual that accompanies the burial. The body is laid out in a straight line. Hands are crossed. There’s a burial case and a prescribed, almost immovable succession of events that involve the expression of grief of the family, the expression of love, the expression of the religious beliefs in whatever civilization. It’s a prescribed order, and if a modern state turns that order topsy-turvy and introduces this kind of chaos, it is an unthinkable obscenity.”

- How does Segal’s work challenge the Nazi disregard for human life?

- This installation at The Jewish Museum was a study for Segal’s completed work cast in bronze, which is on view in Lincoln Park, San Francisco. Do you think this work would be more powerful or effective indoors in a museum or outdoors in a public setting? Why?

- Do you think Segal presents an accurate portrayal of life in the concentration camps? Do you think that was his goal? Why or why not? What do you think were the goals of his work?
RELATED WORKS OF ART

Margaret Bourke-White
Liberated Prisoners at Buchenwald, Germany

Anni Albers
Six Prayers

Margaret Bourke-White (American, 1904-1971)
Liberated Prisoners at Buchenwald, Germany, 1945

George Segal’s decision to include a standing figure in The Holocaust was influenced by the survivors in a photograph by Margaret Bourke-White. Segal used a friend of his, an Israeli survivor of the camps, as the model for the figure.

- How is Segal’s figure similar to or different from the people in this photograph by Bourke-White?

- Is it significant that Segal’s figure was cast from a Holocaust survivor? Why or why not?

Anni Albers (American, b. Germany, 1899-1994)
Six Prayers, 1965-66
Not on view

Unlike George Segal’s Holocaust memorial, textile artist Anni Albers created a memorial that is nonrepresentational. Some artists feel that figurative approaches are inadequate when it comes to dealing with the Holocaust, and they turn to abstraction as a means to express the inexpressible. Discuss:

- Which work do you find more powerful, the Albers or the Segal? Why?

- Why do you think an artist would choose a nonrepresentational approach over a figurative approach?
Anni Albers

Six Prayers

Anni Albers (American, b. Germany, 1899–1994)

Six Prayers, 1965–66

About the Work

In 1965, The Jewish Museum commissioned textile artist Anni Albers to create a piece in memory of the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust. The resulting work, called Six Prayers, is composed of six vertical tapestries woven in beige, black, white, and silver and mounted side-by-side. Despite the limited palette, each tapestry varies subtly in color. Threads of black and white meander across the grid of each panel, suggesting perhaps the infinity of potential life paths, the scribbled letters of some unknown language, or the randomness and complexity of human experience.

Albers believed in the capacity of non-objective art to reach beyond the communicative capacities of the representational. Her “six prayers” cannot be contained within the realm of human expression. They are ineffable, almost unimaginable, yet universally understood.

About the Artist

Anni Albers was born Annelise Fleischmann in Berlin, Germany, on June 12, 1899. She was raised in an affluent Jewish home but as an adult decided to forgo a comfortable life for a rugged artist’s existence. In 1922, she moved to the city of Weimar to study at the Bauhaus. Founded in 1919, the Bauhaus was a school of design and architecture that sought to unify fine arts, applied arts, and technology.

At the Bauhaus, Albers studied textile arts, developing her own style of “pictorial weavings.” These wall hangings and other textiles go beyond traditional decorative and utilitarian forms, equaling the aesthetics of many modernist paintings of the period. They stand on their own as works of abstract art.

While at the Bauhaus, Albers met her future husband, fellow artist Josef Albers. The two married in 1925, and in 1933, following the school’s forced closing by Nazi authorities, immigrated to the United States. Anni Albers continued to create her extraordinary textiles, while also teaching and writing on the topic of design, until her death in 1994.

Resources


http://www.albersfoundation.org
The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation

Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

- Describe what you see. For example, what kinds of patterns, shapes, colors, and textures do you see?
- What do the colors make you think of?
- What do you associate the rectangular shapes with? Notice the black-and-white patterns within each rectangle. Do they remind you of anything?
- What is your overall impression of this piece? What sort of mood or atmosphere does it evoke?

For Further Discussion:

After giving students ample opportunity to examine this artwork, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:

- Anni Albers designed this piece as a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust. How do you interpret her work in this context?
- Albers called this work Six Prayers. What do you think is the significance of this title? What title would you give this work?
- Do you find this to be a fitting memorial? Do you find it meaningful? Why or why not? How does it compare with other memorials you have seen? What do you think is the purpose of a Holocaust memorial? To elicit an emotional response? To honor the victims? To educate the public? To provide the artist with a means of expression?

Research Topics / Content Connections:

- Holocaust Memorials
- Textiles
- Abstract Art
- Bauhaus
George Segal (American, 1924–2000)
*The Holocaust*, 1982
Plaster, wood, and wire Dimensions variable The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Dorot Foundation Gift, 1985-176a-l Art © The George and Helen Segal Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY
Not on view

Unlike Anni Albers’s abstract Holocaust memorial, George Segal’s memorial is figurative. Discuss:

- Which of the two works do you find more powerful? Why?
- Why do you think an artist would choose an abstract approach over a figurative approach?
Themes

Memory
Explore how these works of art relate to the theme of memory.

*Wedding Sofa, Danzig Sofa*
North Germany, possibly Danzig (Gdansk, Poland), 1838
Birch veneer over pine; linden wood: painted, gilt, and upholstered 38 3/16 x 63 x 27 15/16 in. (97 x 160 x 71 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of the Danzig Jewish Community, D 280

Christian Boltanski (French, b. 1944)
*Monument (Odessa)*, 1989–2003

Michael David (American, b. 1954)
*Warsaw*, 1980
Pigment and wax on Masonite 63 x 63 in. (160 x 160 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Lenore B. Lippert and Barbara E. Lippert in memory of Michael Myron Lippert, 1986–92

Margaret Bourke-White (American, 1904–1971)
*Liberated Prisoners at Buchenwald, Germany*, 1945

George Segal (American, 1924–2000)
*The Holocaust*, 1982
Plaster, wood, and wire Dimensions variable The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Dorot Foundation Gift, 1985–176a–I Art © The George and Helen Segal Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Anni Albers (American, b. Germany, 1899–1994)
*Six Prayers*, 1965–66

Community
Explore how these works of art relate to the theme of community.

*Wedding Sofa, Danzig Sofa*
North Germany, possibly Danzig (Gdansk, Poland), 1838
Birch veneer over pine; linden wood: painted, gilt, and upholstered 38 3/16 x 63 x 27 15/16 in. (97 x 160 x 71 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of the Danzig Jewish Community, D 280

Christian Boltanski (French, b. 1944)
*Monument (Odessa)*, 1989–2003

George Segal (American, 1924–2000)
*The Holocaust*, 1982
Plaster, wood, and wire Dimensions variable The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Dorot Foundation Gift, 1985–176a–I Art © The George and Helen Segal Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Anni Albers (American, b. Germany, 1899–1994)
*Six Prayers*, 1965–66

Resistance
Explore how these works of art relate to the theme of resistance.

Nancy Spero (American, 1926–2009)
*Masha Bruskina*, 1995
Acrylic on linen 122 1/4 x 146 1/2 in. (310.5 x 372.1 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Fine Arts Acquisitions Committee Fund, Blanche and Romie Shapiro Fund, Kristie A. Jayne Fund, Sara Schlesinger Bequest, and Miki Denhof Bequest, 2002–12a–c
Felix Nussbaum (German, 1904–1944)
Study of Skeleton Playing a Clarinet for the Painting “Death Triumphant,” c. 1944
Pencil, gouache, and chalk on paper 10 7/8 x 8 13/16 in. (27.7 x 22.4 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Mildred and George Weissman Philanthropic Fund of the Jewish Communal Fund Gift, 1985-140 © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Wedding Sofa, Danzig Sofa
North Germany, possibly Danzig (Gdansk, Poland), 1838
Birch veneer over pine; linden wood: painted, gilt, and upholstered 38 3/16 x 63 x 27 15/16 in. (97 x 160 x 71 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of the Danzig Jewish Community, D 280

William Gropper (American, 1897-1977)
Untitled, from The Illustrious Dunderheads, 1942
Ink and gouache on paper 15 x 15 1/2 in. (38 1/8 x 39 3/8 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William S. Konecky, 2000–83

Albert Bloch (American, 1882–1961)
March of the Clowns, 1941
Oil on canvas mounted on composition board 36 x 40 in. (91.4 x 101.6 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Oscar and Regina Gruss Memorial Fund, 2001–42

Propaganda
Explore how these works of art relate to the theme of propaganda.

Nancy Spero (American, 1926–2009)
Masha Bruskina, 1995
Acrylic on linen 122 1/4 x 146 1/2 in. (310.5 x 372.1 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Fine Arts Acquisitions Committee Fund, Blanche and Romie Shapiro Fund, Kristie A. Jayne Fund, Sara Schlesinger Bequest, and Miki Denhof Bequest, 2002–12a–c

William Gropper (American, 1897–1977)
Untitled, from The Illustrious Dunderheads, 1942
Ink and gouache on paper 15 x 15 1/2 in. (38 1/8 x 39 3/8 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William S. Konecky, 2000–83

Albert Bloch (American, 1882–1961)
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George Segal (American, 1924–2000)
The Holocaust, 1982
Plaster, wood, and wire Dimensions variable The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Dorot Foundation Gift, 1985–176a–l Art © The George and Helen Segal Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY
Resources

Books for Students:


Bauer, Yehuda. They Chose Life: Jewish Resistance in the Holocaust. American Jewish Committee/Institute of Contemporary Jewry, the Hebrew University, 1973.


Books for Teachers


**Links**

Facing History and Ourselves [http://www.facing.org](http://www.facing.org)


The Jewish Museum [http://www.thejewishmuseum.org](http://www.thejewishmuseum.org)

Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust [http://www.museumofjewishheritage.org](http://www.museumofjewishheritage.org)


A Teacher’s Guide to the Holocaust [http://fcit.coedu.usf.edu/holocaust/default.htm](http://fcit.coedu.usf.edu/holocaust/default.htm)

The United State Holocaust Memorial Museum and Holocaust Encyclopedia [http://www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)

Yad Vashem: The Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority, Israel [http://www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)

Anne Frank House [http://www.annefrank.org](http://www.annefrank.org)

**Films**


Abstract
Art is described as abstract when it does not depict recognizable scenes or objects but instead is made up of forms and colors that exist for their own expressive sake.

Allies
In World War II, the group of nations led by England, the United States, and the Soviet Union that fought against what was known as the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, Japan, and their allies).

Antisemitism
Hatred, hostility, or discrimination directed at people because they are Jewish.

Ashcan school
A group of early twentieth-century American artists, including Arthur B. Davies, Robert Henri, and John Sloan, who sought to paint “real life” and urban reality. They often painted pictures of the grittier side of New York City life.

Assimilation
The process of adapting one’s behaviors and attitudes to become like those of the surrounding culture.

Auschwitz-Birkenau
Located in Poland, this complex of concentration and extermination camps was the largest in the Nazi system. Auschwitz was established in 1940 as a concentration camp, and the killing center at Birkenau was added in 1942. By the end of the war, one million Jews had been killed in its gas chambers or as a result of the horrifying living conditions in the camp.

Axis powers
The name given to the alliance of Germany, Italy, Japan, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, and Slovakia before and during World War II.

Bauhaus
The influential school of art, architecture, and design founded in 1919 in Weimar, Germany, by Walter Gropius. The school moved to Dessau, Germany, in 1925 and was closed down by the Nazis in 1933. Many world-famous artists, designers, architects, and craftspeople taught and studied at the Bauhaus. The Bauhaus tried to bridge the gap between fine art and craft. Its style included simplified forms as well as materials and techniques borrowed from industry and manufacturing.

Biedermeier
A style of art and design that was popular with the middle class in Germany and Austria during the first half of the nineteenth century. It was a simplified interpretation of the French Empire Style, which preceded it.

The Blue Rider
A German art movement based in Munich during the 1910s. The artists of the Blue Rider (Der Blaue Reiter in German) sought to express spiritual truths through their expressionistic paintings. The Blue Rider included Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, August Macke, and others.

Concentration camp
A prison camp established by the Nazis, in which the inmates were used as slave labor. Because of the inhumane living conditions there, millions of people suffered and died in the camps.

Death camp
A Nazi camp to which Jews and other prisoners were brought to be killed, primarily by gassing. The Nazis set up six death camps (all in Poland) at which more than three million people were killed. They included Chelmno, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, and Majdanek.

Emancipation
Emancipation literally means freeing an individual from unjust legal restrictions. The term is often used to refer to the granting of civil rights to Jews in Western and Central Europe during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in response to the spread of Enlightenment philosophy.

Encaustic
A method of painting that uses pigments mixed with hot wax. Encaustic was used by artists in the ancient world and in early Byzantine icons up to the seventh century, and the practice was revived in the twentieth century. Encaustic can be built up on a surface to create a low relief and can be reheated to produce a glossy finish.

Enemy Alien
An individual whose native country is considered to be in conflict with the country in which he or she is living.

Figurative
Art is described as figurative when it represents recognizable figures or objects.

Final Solution
The term the Nazis used to refer to their plan to kill all the Jews of Europe.

Glossary
Fuehrer
Literally meaning “The Leader” in German, Der Fuehrer was the title Adolph Hitler gave himself in Nazi Germany.

Genocide
First used in print in 1944, the term genocide refers to the deliberate destruction of a religious, racial, national, or cultural group.

Ghetto
The term ghetto originated in Venice, Italy. In 1516, Venetian Jews were forced to live in an area called the Ghetto Nuovo (New Foundry). Eventually, the word came to be used for any area in which Jews were forced to live. During World War II, the Nazis created ghettos in cities and towns throughout Eastern Europe. They were usually enclosed in walls or barbed wire, and the residents were not free to enter and leave as they wished. Starvation, disease, and overcrowding were common.

Gouache
An opaque watercolor paint or a painting created in this medium.

Installation
A work of art that occupies a space and transforms the way in which the space is experienced. Often, viewers are able to enter the space and become immersed in the work. Installation art makes use of a wide range of media.

Internment camp
A detention center for political opponents, enemy aliens, and other residents who are believed to present a danger to a country, especially in wartime. During World War II, thousands of Jews in the unoccupied zone of France (particularly those without French citizenship) were imprisoned in internment camps. Many were subsequently sent to Auschwitz.

Kristallnacht
German for “Night of Broken Glass.” On the night of November 9–10, 1938, anti-Jewish riots (organized by the Nazi leadership) raged across Germany and Austria. Thousands of windows were smashed, and synagogues and other Jewish-owned buildings were set on fire. At least ninety-one Jews were killed, and some thirty thousand Jewish men were arrested and deported to concentration camps. This event, which came to be known as Kristallnacht, was the first large-scale attack on Jews by the Nazis.

Liberation
The discovery and evacuation of Nazi concentration camps by Allied forces in late 1944 and 1945.

Magen David
Hebrew for “Shield of David.” Also known as the “Star of David,” the Magen David is a six-pointed star that serves as an emblem of Jewish people and as the central image of the Israeli flag. During the Holocaust, Jews throughout Europe were required to wear Stars of David on their clothing to identify and isolate them.

Nazi
Short for the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers’ Party) founded in Germany in 1919. The Nazi Party took control of Germany in 1933 under the leadership of Adolf Hitler. The Nazi regime was a fascist dictatorship based on military force, the suppression of dissenting opinions, violent antisemitism, and a belief in the racial supremacy of the German people.

Non-objective art
Art is described as non-objective when it contains no recognizable figures or objects.

Nuremberg Laws
A set of laws issued in 1935 that systematized the exclusion and persecution of Jews and other “non-Aryans” in Germany. The first, the Reich Citizenship Law, stripped German Jews of their citizenship and all associated rights. The second, the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor, outlawed marriages between Jews and non-Jews. Additional regulations further removed Jews from German political, social, and economic life.

Pearl Harbor
A harbor on the Hawaiian island of Oahu. On December 7, 1941, Japanese bombers attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, crippling the American fleet in the Pacific and prompting the American entry into World War II.

Photojournalism
An approach to photography, such as is typically seen in newspapers and magazines, in which the images create a narrative about current events.

Picture Plane
The flat surface of a painting or drawing, or the imaginary surface from which objects seem to recede in a painting or drawing that uses perspective to suggest three-dimensional space.

Pogrom
From a Russian word meaning "havoc." A mob attack in which Jewish men, women, and children were brutalized and killed and their homes sacked and looted. Pogroms in Eastern Europe were often carried out with the support of local authorities.

Pop art
An art movement of the 1950s and ’60s that drew inspiration from and used images common in popular culture, such as comic books, Hollywood movies, product packaging, and advertisements. Leading practitioners of Pop art include Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and Claes Oldenburg.

Resistance
A term used to describe the ways in which Jews and other targeted groups opposed Nazi persecution. In addition to armed revolts in ghettos and camps and underground partisan activities, many Jews engaged in spiritual resistance—
that is, they refused to let the Nazis break their spirit or defeat their humanity. Acts of spiritual resistance include religious observance, cultural events, artistic expression, education, and mutual assistance.

**Righteous Among the Nations**
Non-Jews who risked their own lives in order to save Jews during the Holocaust. Visit the Yad Vashem website for more information.

**Roma and Sinti**
Two closely related European ethnic groups. Often referred to as Gypsies (based on the mistaken notion that they originated in Egypt), the Roma and Sinti were traditionally nomadic. Most Roma and Sinti, however, no longer travel. Members of these groups were persecuted harshly by the Nazis. Many Roma and Sinti were killed in the concentration camps and death camps.

**Socialism**
A system of social organization that promotes a classless society in which all members have an equal share in the economy.

**Swastika**
An ancient symbol resembling a cross with four equal arms that bend at right angles. The name is derived from a Sanskrit word for “good fortune” or “well-being.” Also known as the “hooked cross” (hakenkreuz in German), the swastika has been used as an auspicious symbol and decorative motif by numerous cultures from the Far East to Europe and the Americas. The Nazi Party adopted the swastika as its official emblem in 1920.

**Terezin Ghetto**
A town in Czechoslovakia, Terezin (Theresienstadt in German) served as a ghetto between 1941 and 1945. More than 140,000 Jews were deported there by the Nazis. The deportees were mainly Czech Jews and also German Jews who were prominent figures, married to non-Jews, elderly, or decorated or disabled World War I veterans. Since the deportees included many artists and writers who struggled to maintain a vibrant cultural life in the ghetto, the Nazis decided to exploit their talents by showing off Theresienstadt as a “model settlement.” The Nazis planned to gradually transfer the inhabitants of the ghetto to death camps, thus concealing the decimation of European Jewry from the free world. More than 120,000 Jews died in the ghetto or at Auschwitz and other extermination camps.

**Treaty of Versailles**
The peace treaty signed by Germany and the Allies in 1919 that officially ended World War I. Among other things, the treaty required the German government to pay massive reparations, cede territory to other European nations, and limit its military forces.

**Wannsee Conference**
A meeting held in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee on January 20, 1942, at which high-ranking Nazi officials discussed the implementation of the Final Solution—the systematic murder of Europe’s Jews.

**Warsaw Ghetto**
The Polish city of Warsaw housed the largest of the Nazi ghettos during World War II. Established in November 1940, the Warsaw Ghetto held nearly half a million Jews in overcrowded, unsanitary, disease-ridden conditions. During 1942, most of the ghetto’s residents were deported to the Treblinka death camp. In April 1943, the Germans tried to raze the ghetto and deport its remaining inhabitants, but the Jews staged a revolt under the leadership of a young man named Mordecai Anielewicz. Although the Nazis eventually crushed the rebellion, the Jewish fighters held out for almost a month against the powerful German forces. The Warsaw Ghetto uprising, as it has become known, remains a powerful symbol of Jewish armed resistance during the Holocaust. Visit the United States Holocaust Memorial’s website to learn more about the Warsaw Ghetto and the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

**Yahrzeit**
Yiddish for “year’s time”; in the Jewish tradition, the anniversary of the death of a loved one according to the Hebrew calendar.

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**Sources:**
- Artlex Art Dictionary
- Tate Collection Glossary
- US Holocaust Memorial Museum
- Holocaust Encyclopedia
- Museum of Jewish Heritage, Meeting Hate with Humanity
- A Teacher’s Guide to the Holocaust
- Museum of Tolerance Online Multimedia Learning Center

**Zionism**
A political movement that began in the late nineteenth century, advocating the establishment and support of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel.
Activities

Objects Tell Stories

**Aim:** To reflect on the personal, emotional, or cultural significance of objects.

**Grades:** 6–8, 9–12

**Themes:** Memory, Contemporary Perspectives, Identity

**Artworks:** Wedding Sofa, North Germany, 1838; Memorial Plaque of the Great Synagogue of Danzig, c. 1918

**Discipline:** Visual Art, Jewish Studies, Social Studies, English Language Arts

**Materials:** Paper and pencils, student objects from home (or pictures of them)

**Procedure:**

1. Have students examine and discuss the objects below, which were saved by members of the Danzig Jewish community:

2. Discuss:
   - Why do you think these objects were saved?
   - What do you think these objects meant to the people who owned or used them?
   - What do they mean to you? How important is context to the meaning of an object?
   - What makes an object valuable? What does it mean to say something is valuable?

3. Ask each student to think of an object that has personal value or significance.

4. Have students bring in their objects (or pictures of them) and write short narratives explaining their significance. Students can take a creative approach to the assignment, for example, writing from the point of view of the object itself or imagining a future or past life of the object.

5. Encourage students to share their work with the rest of the class.

Wearing the Badge

**Aim:** To examine and respond in writing to an historical document from the Holocaust.

**Grades:** 6–8, 9–12

**Themes:** Memory

**Artworks:** David: Warsaw, 1980

**Discipline:** Visual Art, Jewish Studies, English Language Arts

**Materials:** Paper and pencils

**Procedure:**

1. When the Nazis occupied a new area, they frequently issued orders requiring every Jewish inhabitant to wear a Jewish star on his or her clothing. Have students read the following order issued in Salonika, Greece, in 1943, which states, “The sign shall be worn by every Jew aged five years and over.”

2. Ask students to respond in writing to the following:
   - When, where, by whom, and to whom was this document issued?
   - What was the purpose of this document?
   - What does this document tell you about the Nazis’ methods and procedures?
   - What does it tell you about how the Nazis defined the term “Jew”?
   - Imagine you are a Jew living in Salonika in 1943. Write a letter to your cousin in America explaining how you feel about the order to wear the Jewish Star.
My Community

**Aim:** To consider the communicative power of objects through the creation of an exhibition about the students’ own community or communities.

**Grades:** 6–8, 9–12

**Themes:** Community, Memory

**Artworks:** Wedding Sofa, North Germany, 1838; Memorial Plaque of the Great Synagogue of Danzig, c. 1918

**Discipline:** Visual Art, Jewish Studies, Social Studies, English Language Arts

**Materials:** Objects or images for display, paper and pencils, computer and printer for printing labels, tape or tacks for hanging labels

**Procedure:**

1. The Danzig wedding sofa is a remnant of a community that no longer exists. We can learn a great deal about the Jewish community of Danzig by studying the sofa and other objects in the Danzig Collection (About the Danzig Collection). Have students examine these objects.

2. Discuss:
   - What do these objects tell us about the Jewish community that lived in Danzig before World War II? What don’t they tell us?
   - Do you think we perceive these objects in the same way they were perceived by their original owners?
   - What or who makes up your primary community? Is it your class? Your school? Your neighborhood? Your religious affiliation?
   - Are you part of more than one community?
   - What defines a community? What do you receive from your community? What do you contribute to it?
   - What are the most important aspects of your community? If someone in the future were to study your community, what would you want that person to know about it?

3. Have students create an exhibition about their school community. Because the exhibition space is limited to the size of your classroom, they will only have room for those objects or images that represent the key aspects of the community. Have students write labels for any objects or pictures and compose additional text as necessary in order to communicate the messages of the exhibition.

Constructing a Memorial

**Aim:** To design an original work of art that memorializes an individual.

**Grades:** 6–8, 9–12

**Themes:** Community, Memory

**Artworks:** Albers: Six Prayers, 1965–66; Boltanski: Monument (Odessa), 1989–2003; Segal: The Holocaust, 1982; Spero: Masha Bruskina, 1995

**Discipline:** Visual Art, Social Studies

**Materials:** Paper and pencils

**Procedure:**

1. Show students images of the following works of art below. Each of these works is a memorial, but each takes a different approach. While Segal’s work is overtly figurative, Albers’s is abstract. Spero uses image and text to focus on a single individual. Boltanski also focuses on individuals but in doing so raises broader issues about the nature of memory and reflection.

   Discuss memorials that your students may have visited, such as Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

   Have students compare and contrast the artists’ different approaches. Which do they find most compelling? What elements of each are most effective? What feelings do the works of art evoke?

2. Divide students into small groups and ask each group to choose an event or individual to memorialize.

3. Ask students to consider what conceptual approach they will take and what materials and images they would use in their memorials. Encourage them to create works that are original and thought provoking and that evoke emotion rather than provide literal descriptions of people or events.

4. Have each group design a memorial and present it to the class using a drawing or series of drawings.
A Limited Palette

**Aim:** To explore the expressive possibilities of a monochromatic palette by creating an artwork using only black, white, beige, and grey.

**Grades:** 6-8, 9-12

**Themes:** Memory


**Discipline:** Visual Art

**Materials:** White paper; black, white, beige, and grey construction paper; pencils; scissors; glue

**Procedure:**

1. In each of the following works, the artist has used a very limited palette—only black, white, silver, beige, and shades of grey, green, or brown.

2. Have students examine these works and discuss:
   - What colors do you see in these works?
   - What is the effect of using a limited palette?
   - Why do you think these artists did not use other colors?

3. How do you think the effects of the works would be different had the artists used broader palettes?

4. Have each student create a paper collage using a limited palette. You might ask students to create works that relate specifically to the Holocaust or give them more freedom in their subject matter. Either way, they should focus on creating an emotional impact using just the colors available.

5. Distribute paper, construction paper, scissors, glue, and pencils. Students can either cut or rip the construction paper to create their collages. You might give them the option of using (black) pencil in their finished work as well or ask them to use only collage.

6. Share and discuss:
   - What emotional effect are you trying to produce in your work?
   - Do you think your effort was successful? Did the final product come out as you expected?
   - How does it feel to work with such a limited palette? Does it feel restrictive or liberating?
The Sound of Art

Aim: To explore the connection between music and visual art by creating a soundtrack for a painting. **Grades: 6-8, 9-12**

**Themes:** Propaganda, Resistance

**Artworks:** Bloch: *March of the Clowns*, 1941; Nussbaum: *Study of Skeleton Playing a Clarinet for...*, c. 1944

**Discipline:** Music, Visual Art, English Language Arts

**Materials:** Computers, ipods, tape recorders, or other devices for recording and playing music

**Procedure:**

1. Albert Bloch’s wife once wrote in a letter to The Jewish Museum, “I never look at *March of the Clowns* without hearing the final variation of Brahms’s *Variations on a Theme by Haydn*, a huge, glorious and victorious march ending the piece.” Have students examine the following Artworks listed above.

2. Discuss:
   - What do you hear when you view these works?
   - Why do you think the artists included musical instruments in their paintings and drawings? How do they add to the effect of the works?
   - If you wanted to express an emotion, would you use music, drawing, painting, dance, poetry, movement, or another medium? Why?

3. Have students work in small groups to create a soundtrack for either Nussbaum’s drawing or Bloch’s painting (or another work of their choice). Students can download music on their MP3 players or use an old-fashioned tape recorder. Soundtracks can include recorded music, student voices, student-played instruments, the spoken word, sound effects, or any combination thereof.

4. Ask each group to submit a short description of the soundtrack, explaining their choices and any symbolism involved.

Profile of a Resister

Aim: To learn the stories of individual resisters by creating resister profiles inspired by Nancy Spero’s *Masha Bruskina*.

**Grades:** 6-8, 9-12

**Themes:** Propaganda, Resistance

**Artworks:** Nussbaum: *Study of Skeleton Playing a Clarinet for...*, c. 1944; Spero: *Masha Bruskina*, 1995

**Discipline:** Visual Art, Social Studies, English Language Arts

**Materials:** Research materials; paper and paints as needed for student projects

**Procedure:**

1. By continuing to express his creativity and documenting his experiences through painting and drawing, Felix Nussbaum resisted the Nazis through his art. Masha Bruskina, the subject of Nancy Spero’s work of the same name, also resisted the Nazis. She defied Nazi regulations and helped innocent people escape Nazi persecution. Share the stories of Masha Bruskina and Felix Nussbaum. Discuss the idea of resistance in general. How are the actions of Felix Nussbaum and Masha Bruskina similar? How are they different? How can they both be considered resistance? Why did relatively few people resist the Nazis? What do you think motivated the people who did resist? Have you ever been in a situation where you went along with the group even though you knew that what the group was doing was wrong? Or did you go against the group? What factors influenced you in those situations?

2. Have each student conduct research to learn about an individual who resisted the Nazis—a victim who engaged in spiritual resistance, a bystander who took action, a partisan who took up arms, or anyone else who defied the Nazis.

3. Show students Nancy Spero’s *Masha Bruskina* below. Discuss:
   - How does Spero tell Bruskina’s story?
   - How does she combine text and image?
   - Which aspects of the story does she emphasize? What does she leave out?
   - What is the overall effect of the choices that she has made in the work?
   - Have each student create a display about the person he or she has researched. Students should include both text and images in their displays and should carefully consider how to structure the work, what to emphasize, what to leave out, and how to layer the information.
Memory Collage

Aim: To explore the power of images to evoke memories by creating personal memory collages.

Grades: 9–12

Themes: Community, Memory

Artworks: Boltanski: Monument (Odessa), 1989–2003

Discipline: Visual Art, Social Studies

Materials: Magazines and/or copies of personal photos for collage, paper, colored pencils, scissors, glue

Procedure:

1. In Monument (Odessa), Christian Boltanski uses pieces of photographs and found materials to explore the theme of memory. Have students take a close look at the work of art below.

2. Discuss: What materials does Boltanski use in this piece? What does this work make you think of? This work is a kind of memorial, a reminder of something from the past. What objects, images, places, people, tastes, and smells serve as reminders of your own past? What important people or events do you associate with these reminders?

3. Have each student decide on a person or event from his or her own past to memorialize. Have them select images from magazines, personal photos, and/or their own drawings to create a memory collage. Students should think carefully about what images, colors, symbols, or motifs will best evoke their memories.

4. Afterward, have students share their work. Discuss: How does it feel to create a collage of your memories? Can the act of creating be considered a form of memorial? Does the collage help you re-experience the event or person? Or does it merely remind you that the person/event is gone? What kinds of emotions does it bring up for you?

5. Christian Boltanski’s art is suggestive of religious rites that memorialize the dead. You might consider having your students research the memorial rites of different cultures. What do they have in common? What purposes do they serve?

Friedl Dicker-Brandeis

Aim: To learn the story of another individual who engaged in spiritual resistance during the Holocaust.

Grades: 6–8, 9–12

Themes: Propaganda, Resistance

Artworks: Nussbaum: Study of Skeleton Playing a Clarinet for..., c. 1944

Discipline: Theater, Music, Visual Art, Social Studies, English Language Arts

Materials: Internet access

Procedure:

1. Friedl Dicker-Brandeis was, like Felix Nussbaum, one of many individuals who engaged in spiritual resistance during the Holocaust. Share her story with your students:

   Friedl Dicker was born to a Jewish family in Vienna, Austria, in 1898. After completing her art studies at the Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany, in 1923, she spent a year in Berlin and then returned to Vienna. Dicker spent ten years in Vienna working as an artist, designer, and art teacher. In her educational work, Dicker combined her boundless artistic creativity with the lessons about making art that she had learned from her teachers.

   In Vienna, Dicker became active in the anti-Fascist movement. She was arrested in 1934 and spent time in prison. After her release, she fled to Prague, Czechoslovakia, where she worked with the children of political refugees. Her lessons not only taught the students how to make art; they also served as a form of art therapy. While in Prague, Dicker also made contact with relatives in the city, including her cousin Pavel Brandeis, whom she married in 1936.

   Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and Pavel Brandeis moved to the Czech town of Hronov in 1938. The political situation worsened. In 1939, they lost their jobs at the local textile factory. They were forced to move into smaller and smaller apartments. But Dicker-Brandeis found refuge in her art.

   On December 17, 1942, Dicker-Brandeis and her husband were deported to the Terezin Ghetto. Dicker-Brandeis packed paper, pencils, and other art supplies for the children she knew she would meet there. At Terezin, she gave art lessons to children in the crowded barracks, using whatever supplies she could find or have sent to her. Dicker-Brandeis did not set out to make artists out of her students. She mainly wanted to help them develop independence, imagination, self-esteem, and an appreciation for beauty.
She provided an important emotional and creative outlet for them; they, in return, were her source of strength.
Pavel Brandeis was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau on September 28, 1944. He survived the war. Friedl Dicker-Brandeis was taken to Auschwitz on October 6, 1944, and murdered three days later. Two suitcases she left behind at Terezin were filled with more than five thousand artworks by the children of the ghetto.

2. Have students visit the online exhibition about Friedl Dicker-Brandeis here to learn more about her life and to view works by her and her students.

3. Discuss:
While in Terezin, Friedl Dicker-Brandeis painted landscapes, still lifes, portraits, and abstract compositions. She did not depict the horrors going on around her. Why do you think she did that?
The children whom Dicker-Brandeis taught were often hungry, cold, and scared. How do you think art could help them in this situation?
Look at the children’s artwork. What details do you notice in the children’s drawings? What do they tell you about life in Terezin? What don’t they tell you? What questions do they raise for you?
Dicker-Brandeis was a mentor (a teacher or guide) for many children. Have you ever had a mentor or a role model? How did this person help you?

4. Friedl Dicker-Brandeis led her students in exercises to help them release their inner creativity, reconnect with the world outside, and express their individual identities. For example, she showed her students copies of artwork by the world’s great masters. She then encouraged students to use different media to create their own works based on these examples. The goal was not simply for the students to copy great art but to explore the artist’s inner world and begin to see reality through new eyes.

You can try this with your students. Find an image of a well-known artwork and have students create their own works “after” it, using collage, pastels, watercolors, or another medium. Encourage students not just to recreate the lines and colors of the original but also to try to capture the vision of the original artist.

5. In addition to art, many of the children at Terezin studied and wrote poetry. They expressed their hopes, fears, and experiences eloquently through that medium, and some of their works have been published in the book, *I Never Saw Another Butterfly: Children’s Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp, 1942–1944*, by Hana Volavkova. This compilation also includes artwork by the children, many of whom were Dicker-Brandeis’s students. Ask your students to read and respond to some of the poetry in the book or create their own poetry as a response to their study of the Holocaust.

6. Terezin was also the site of the original production of the children’s opera, *Brundibar*. Written by Czech-Jewish composer Hans Krása, Brundibar tells the story of Pepicek and Aninku, who, alone and without money, set out to procure milk for their mother who has fallen ill. At the town square, they encounter Brundibar, a teenage bully who makes plenty of coins by playing his hurdy-gurdy. When the brother and sister attempt to earn some money by singing, they are chased away by Brundibar. With the help of some friendly animals, they return with three hundred schoolchildren and sing a beautiful lullaby, making enough money to buy milk for their mother, who, at the end of the story, is restored to health. A political allegory, Brundibar became a symbol of resistance for the inmates of the concentration camp in Terezin, where the opera was originally performed by young Jewish prisoners. You might want to share the story of *Brundibar* with students or view a production of the opera.
Life in the Camps

**Aim:** To compare visual depictions of the concentration camps and to consider the influence of the medium, choice of image, and artist’s experience.

**Grades:** 6–8, 9–12

**Themes:** Community, Memory

**Artworks:** Bourke-White: *Liberated Prisoners at Buchenwald*, Germany, 1945; Nussbaum: *Study of Skeleton Playing a Clarinet for..., c. 1944*; Segal: *The Holocaust*, 1982

**Discipline:** Visual Art, Social Studies, English Language Arts

**Materials:** Internet or library access

**Procedure:**

1. Margaret Bourke-White’s photographs of Buchenwald offer a glimpse into the unfathomable realities of life in the concentration camp. Felix Nussbaum’s and George Segal’s works also relate to life in the camps. Have students look at and discuss all three works of art below.

   Discuss:
   - What does Bourke-White’s photograph tell you about life in the camp? What doesn’t it tell you?
   - Does Nussbaum’s or Segal’s work give you any insight into life in the camps that is not provided by Bourke-White’s photograph?
   - Which of the three works seems most “realistic” to you? Which do you find most powerful?
   - Although all three works relate to life in the camps, each takes a different approach. How would you describe each approach? How does the medium, the artist’s personal circumstances, or the time in which the work was created influence the work?
   - What questions do these works raise for you about the camps? What would you still like to know? How might you go about finding the answers?

2. Have students conduct research to answer their questions and learn more about conditions in the concentration camps. Were conditions the same in every camp? Were the experiences the same for each individual?

3. Nobel Prize–winning author Elie Wiesel was interned at the Buchenwald camp toward the end of the war. He was there when the camp was liberated in 1945 and when Margaret Bourke-White took her photographs. You might have students read Elie Wiesel’s 1960 memoir, *Night* and discuss his experiences in Auschwitz–Birkenau and Buchenwald in relation to Bourke-White’s photograph and the works of Nussbaum and Segal.

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American Response to the Holocaust

**Aim:** To examine United States policy during World War II and to create protest posters advocating action.

**Grades:** 9-12

**Themes:** Propaganda, Resistance

**Artworks:** Bloch: *March of the Clowns*, 1941; Gropper: *Untitled*, 1942

**Discipline:** Visual Art, Social Studies, English Language Arts

**Materials:** Internet or library access, poster board and markers

**Procedure:**

1. In his work, William Gropper comments explicitly on American policies during World War II. Albert Bloch relates to the topic as well, although more indirectly. Have students view these two works and discuss the artists’ points of view.

2. Consider the role the United States played in relation to the Holocaust and the refugee situation. By 1942, many Americans had become increasingly concerned about the predicament faced by European Jewry. Jewish groups encouraged the United States to take action in response to the Holocaust (*American Response to the Holocaust*, p. 21). Some held rallies and protests.

   Have students research American policies during the Holocaust. Discuss:
   - What did the United States do to help those suffering at the hands of the Nazis?
   - What did they not do that they could have or should have?
   - What do you think the responsibility of the United States was?

3. Have students break into small groups to discuss the various courses of action that the United States government could have taken. Ask each group to create a protest poster advocating a specific course of action.
Plaster Casting

**Aim:** To use plaster casting as a way to express emotion through gesture and pose.

**Grades:** 6–8, 9–12

**Themes:** Community, Memory

**Artworks:** Segal: *The Holocaust*, 1982

**Discipline:** Visual Art

**Materials:** Plaster gauze strips, plastic wrap, paint and brushes (if desired)

**Procedure:**

1. In *The Holocaust*, George Segal poses his models very deliberately, casts them in plaster, and puts the casts together to create a moving tableau that communicates almost entirely through the human form. Have students look closely at Segal’s work of art below.

2. Discuss:
   - What emotions does this work evoke in you?
   - How do the poses of the figures contribute to the mood of the piece?
   - Try out some of the poses you see. How does it feel to pose that way?


4. Besides our faces, our hands are among the most expressive parts of our bodies. Have students work in pairs to create expressive casts of their own hands. Students should first cover their hands in plastic wrap and then apply damp plaster gauze strips in layers until the hand is fully covered. Encourage students to think carefully about the poses they take and make sure to hold the pose while the plaster is setting. Once the plaster has begun to harden, students can remove the casts and set them aside to dry.

5. Once the casts have dried completely (at least overnight), have students paint them to complete the effect.

The Power of Symbols

**Aim:** To explore the significance of cultural symbols and create art using personally relevant symbols.

**Grades:** 6–8, 9–12

**Themes:** Propaganda, Resistance, Memory

**Artworks:** Bloch: *March of the Clowns*, 1941; Gropper: *Untitled*, 1942; David: *Warsaw*, 1980

**Discipline:** Visual Art, Social Studies

**Materials:** Paper and pencils, clay or Sculpey, paints and brushes

**Procedure:**

1. In *Warsaw*, Michael David explores the evocative power of a cultural symbol (the Jewish Star) and raises questions about its meaning. William Gropper and Albert Bloch also make use of symbols that are laden with significance and associations. Have students examine the works of art below.

2. Discuss:
   - What cultural symbols appear in these works?
   - What kinds of associations (if any) do you have with the Jewish Star, the swastika, the cross, the crescent and star? Where do these associations come from?
   - Why do people use such symbols, or symbols in general? Why are they so powerful? Where does their power come from?
   - What are some of the cultural, personal, and corporate symbols we encounter in our lives? What symbols are especially meaningful to you?

3. Have each student create a three-dimensional symbol from clay or Sculpey, along the lines of Michael David’s *Warsaw*. Ask each student to first decide on an aspect of his or her identity to express. Then, have them use traditional symbols or design new, personally relevant symbols to express these ideas. After they sketch their work with paper and pencil, have them mold their symbols with clay or Sculpey. When their sculptures have dried, have students paint them, taking into account the significance and emotional power of different colors.

4. You might consider asking students to research the history of some common symbols, including the symbols that appear in the artworks above. Many people, for example, are unaware of the long history of the swastika and its meaning in various cultures around the world.
Photography for Social Change

Aim: To examine the use of social-change photography by creating photo essays about issues that are important to students.

Grades: 9-12

Themes: Propaganda, Memory

Artworks: Bourke-White: Liberated Prisoners at Buchenwald, Germany, 1945

Discipline: Visual Art, Social Studies, English Language Arts

Materials: Internet access, cameras, paper and pencils

Procedure:

1. Margaret Bourke-White used her camera not only to create interesting compositions but also to call people’s attention to the human suffering around them and to inspire action. Her photographs of the Buchenwald concentration camp revealed to many for the first time the extent of the suffering during the Holocaust. Margaret Bourke-White was part of a long tradition of using the medium of photography to effect social change. The history of using photography in this way is almost as old as photography itself. Have students explore this kind of photography by visiting some of these websites and writing about one or more of the photographs they see:
   
   Collective Lens  
   Fifty Crows  
   PBS  
   Blue Earth  
   Kay Davis, Photography and Social Reform

2. Then ask each student to take a series of photographs, documenting homelessness, pollution, economic inequality, or any other social ill he or she would like to change.

3. Have students edit their photographs into photo essays and write text that explains their photos and the issues they address.