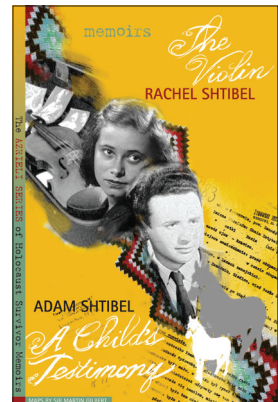
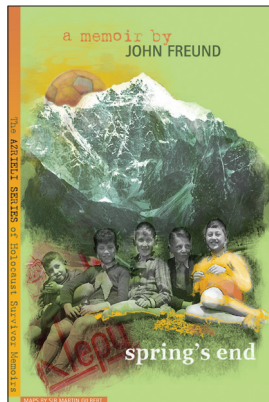
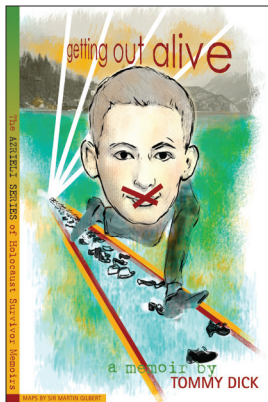


# The Azrieli Series of Holocaust Survivor Memoirs



OVERVIEW GUIDE • SERIES



# Azrieli Series of Holocaust Survivor Memoirs

## Resource Guides to Series 1

### Section 1: Overview

The Azrieli Series of Holocaust Survivor Memoirs is an excellent resource for a wide variety of courses, including history, civics and social responsibility, language arts, and world religions. This collection of memoirs provides a starting point for a discussion with students about the diverse experiences of people who survived the Holocaust and later rebuilt their lives in Canada. As you and your students read these memoirs, it is important to recognize that each unique story of survival is the exception rather than the rule. More than six million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust – there are countless memoirs that will never be written and stories that will never be shared.

Each book in the Azrieli Series includes several resources that help readers engage deeply with the content of the memoir:

- An introduction that provides historical context to the memoirs themselves.
- A glossary that defines words and terms that students may not be familiar with, along with additional information on people, places and events of relevance to the story.
- Photographs of the author and his or her family (where they still exist)
- Maps created by Sir Martin Gilbert specifically for the memoirs.

All the books in the Azrieli Series have been thoroughly fact-checked to ensure historical accuracy.

Each survivor of the Holocaust has a remarkable story to tell, and their stories have an important role to play in education about tolerance and diversity. By preserving them, we sustain the memory of all those who perished at the hands of hatred, abetted by indifference and apathy. These personal accounts of those who survived against all odds are as different as the people who wrote them, but all demonstrate the courage, strength, wit and luck that it took to face and outlive terrible adversity. More than half a century later, the diversity of stories allows readers to put a face on what was lost.

*In telling these stories, the writers have liberated themselves. For so many years we did not speak about it, even when we became free people living in a free society. Now, when at last we are writing about what happened to us in this dark period of history, knowing that our stories will be read and live on allows us to feel truly free. These unique historical documents put a face on what was lost, and allow readers to grasp the enormity of what happened to six million Jews – one story at a time.*

David J. Azrieli, C.M., C.Q.,  
M.Arch., Holocaust survivor  
and philanthropist

These resource guides have been written to accompany the Azrieli Series of Holocaust Survivor Memoirs – Series 1 and support educators who wish to use the Azrieli memoirs in a classroom or reading-group setting. This first section of the guide is an overview that has been designed to introduce all of the memoirs. The activities offer an approach to integrating memoir study into your teaching and help your students develop critical thinking skills. The sections that follow have been written to accompany specific memoirs.

Each section of the guide is organized as follows:

1. **Pre-reading activities:** Ideas for use prior to beginning reading the memoirs.
2. **Concurrent reading activities:** Ideas for activities that students can work on while reading.
3. **Post-reading activities:** Ideas for activities that can be completed after students have finished reading the selected memoir.
4. **A timeline:** Each survivor's personal journey is set in the historical and cultural context of major events of the Holocaust as well as specific events that took place in the author's home country. The timelines provide both a resource for teachers and a reference to assist students in creating their own timelines for the memoirs.
5. **Supplementary Resources:** A selected list of web sites, books and films that will be useful in expanding on material in the memoirs.

NOTE: The sources in this guide have been carefully vetted. If you ask your students to do any web research, ask for sources and be alert to material from Holocaust deniers and other misinformation.

You may choose to have students read different memoirs from the series and create reading circles of small groups or pairs who have chosen the same book or have the entire class read the same memoir. If students are reading different books, then you may choose to have students share their projects, journals and related research with their classmates to expand their knowledge of the diversity of experiences of the survivors.

## Memoirs and Diaries

Diaries by victims of the Holocaust and memoirs by survivors are both primary-source documents. Narrated in the first person, they speak from the perspectives of people who were the targets of genocide, subject to persecution, humiliation, physical and psychological torment, loss and bereavement. While diaries and memoirs are forms of what we now term “lifewriting,” they are different genres with different characteristics. Both are vehicles for documenting and reflecting upon their authors’ circumstances, experiences and inner lives. However, diary writers are living through the events they describe and do not know how things will end up, while memoirists look backward and know where their choices and outer forces have led. While both genres are impelled by a commitment to record truthfully, the circumstances of each may lead to a different emphasis, interpretation or choice of what to include.

In documenting the Holocaust, diaries offer a day-to-day record of ongoing events. They capture the fears and hopes of the people who wrote them as they struggle to understand what is happening and put forth their best effort to protect their loved ones and survive. Under intolerable conditions and with meagre resources, diaries documented the daily details of the Holocaust. Reading them plunges readers into the immediacy of life and death, confusion, despair and hope. Often, these words survived their authors. Memoirs, on the other hand, are written by survivors after the war and look back at the writers’ horrific experiences and incalculable losses. Memoir authors write from a greater certainty than diarists. They know, after all, how things turned out. Looking back, they understand the full extent of the Nazi plan to annihilate the Jews. While their wartime hopes for survival have been realized, many survivors emerged from the war bereft of loved ones, torn from communities that have been destroyed. Homeless, stateless and with few resources at their disposal, their writing memorializes the lost past and charts their commitment to begin life anew. The French filmmaker Claude Lanzman has referred to survivors as “living documents.” Their memories offer a unique and invaluable window onto the past. (From Sara R. Horowitz, “Voices from the

### Last Letters

Jews living through the horrors of the Holocaust also managed to write letters to their families and loved ones that documented their experiences. They sent heavily censored letters from the camps, hid letters in the ghettos and death camps, and even threw hastily scribbled letters from deportation trains. Many of these letters were written not long before the authors’ deaths and many were written as conscious acts of commemoration by people who were afraid that there would be no witnesses left to tell what happened to them.

Some of these last letters can be found on the web sites of both Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority ([www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)) and the US Holocaust Memorial Museum ([www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)).

*I decided to devote my life to telling the story because I felt that having survived I owe something to the dead, and anyone who does not remember betrays them again.*

Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor, author and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

Killing Grounds” in *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1997.)

## Pre-reading Activities

1. As you begin a memoir study with your students, ask them to discuss the value of memoirs as historical records and primary sources. What other sources would they want to find to learn more about a past event?
2. Ask students to research the hometown of the memoir author. What was Jewish life like in his or her community during the interwar period? Find out about the community, culture, language, economy and other interesting facts.
3. Provide a background on the history of antisemitism in Europe. The first section of the film *The Longest Hatred* provides a comprehensive overview.
4. Have students create a K-W-L- chart, identify things they Know, Want to know and later, what they Learned about the Holocaust or the specific writer.

A template for a K - W - L - chart is available here:

[www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/pdf/kwl.pdf](http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/pdf/kwl.pdf)

This will allow you to gauge your students’ knowledge about the Holocaust, address misinformation and focus on areas that require further explanation.

See the resource list for sources for student research and film information.

## Concurrent Reading Activities

1. **Journaling:** Asking students to keep a journal while reading the memoir is a particularly effective way for them to process what they are learning and for you to see how their comprehension of the Holocaust progresses. Teachers can provide journal prompts and/or encourage students to free write their responses to the memoirs. The Holocaust is a challenging topic for students and the many horrific stories can often overwhelm them. Writing their thoughts and feelings down and being able to share them with others if they choose can be an important stage of the learning process. You might recommend that your students keep a triple-entry journal to record their thoughts before, during and after reading the memoirs. This way they can revisit their original comments about a particular event once they have completed the entire unit.

The following journal prompts can be used with any of the memoirs in this series. For prompts specific to each memoir, please see the accompanying study guide.

- Where did people find the strength to prevail in the face of such terrible adversity?
- Ask students to select a moment in one of the memoirs that strikes them as powerful, important or disturbing, and to rewrite it as a diary entry or set of entries. Alternatively, some students may prefer to record their initial reactions to this situation – how it made them feel, what it reminded them of, or what it was about the event that made them empathize with the author.
- Do you think kindness can still surface in such adverse conditions? Provide examples from the memoir.
- How does the author reflect in his/her writing the human will to live?
- There are examples of resistance in each memoir. Ask students to provide illustrations of how people tried to resist the Nazis and encourage them to define this as broadly as possible to include physical, psychological, spiritual, cultural and emotional resistance. Which are examples of active resistance and which demonstrate unarmed resistance?

### Jewish Resistance

Throughout the years of Nazi tyranny, European Jews found numerous ways to show resistance. Many of them actively resisted the Nazis both inside and outside the ghettos and the camps even though conditions were extremely difficult and Nazi retaliation for any act of real or perceived resistance was brutal, ruthless and swift.

Acts of armed resistance included the sabotage of Nazi plans using weapons, such as the bombing of a bunker, camp, office or train, organizing an armed uprising or revolt and joining a partisan group. For most Jews, however, cultural, psychological or spiritual resistance – refusing to accept the Nazi definition of Jews and using cultural and/or spiritual traditions to both undermine the Nazis and nurture hope – represented their only possible means of opposing Nazi oppression. They created schools in the ghettos; maintained religious customs; wrote diaries, poems and songs; performed concerts or plays; drew, painted or secretly photographed events; and kept hidden records of ghetto or camp life.

(Adapted from *Echoes and Reflections* – see Supplementary Resources )



### Rescuers and the Righteous Among the Nations

Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority created by the Israeli parliament in 1952, first coined the term "Righteous Among the Nations" when it bestowed the inaugural awards in 1963:

*Attitudes toward the Jews during the Holocaust mostly ranged from indifference to hostility. The mainstream watched as their former neighbors were rounded up and killed; some collaborated with the perpetrators; many benefited from the expropriation of the Jews property. In a world of total moral collapse there was a small minority who mustered extraordinary courage to uphold human values. These were the Righteous Among the Nations. They stand in stark contrast to the mainstream of indifference and hostility that prevailed during the Holocaust. Contrary to the general trend, these rescuers regarded the Jews as fellow human beings who came within the bounds of their universe of obligation.*

(From [www1.yadvashem.org/righteous\\_new/about\\_the\\_righteous.html](http://www1.yadvashem.org/righteous_new/about_the_righteous.html))

- Discuss the challenges and risks of rescue during World War II. Ask students to discuss what they think the criteria for being declared Righteous might be, then ask them to look up Yad Vashem's criteria and discuss them.
- As the Yad Vashem description of the Righteous notes, rescuers during the Holocaust were from all walks of life. What characteristics do you think such individuals displayed when they came to the aid of persecuted Jews? Tip: Visit the web site of the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous at [www.jfr.org/site/PageServer?pagename=edu\\_education\\_main](http://www.jfr.org/site/PageServer?pagename=edu_education_main) for additional information. Here you can learn about individuals who rescued Jews during the Holocaust and the traits that characterize them.

*Let us remember: What hurts the victim most is not the cruelty of the oppressor, but the silence of the bystander.*

*Elie Wiesel*, Holocaust survivor, author and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

- Why does Elie Wiesel place such emphasis on the role of the bystander in the pain suffered by the victims of the Holocaust? Who are the bystanders in the memoirs? How might they have acted differently? Ask students if they think these bystanders are as much to blame for what happened to the authors as the Nazi perpetrators and their collaborators?
- **Extended learning option 1:** Consider how the role of the bystander was different in an occupied country such as Poland, Denmark or the former Czechoslovakia than it was in Nazi Germany and its allies such as Hungary or Italy. What conditions might have affected how individuals responded?
- **Extended learning option 2:** Consider how the category of "bystander" encompasses a wide range of individuals that included those who knew what was happening and remained silent, those who knew that "something" was happening and remained silent, and those who did not know or looked away, pretending that they didn't know what was happening. Scholars

sometimes describe individuals who knew what was happening but looked away as “semi-active participants.” Do you think the delegates of the Evian Conference were bystanders or semi-active participants? They knew about the persecution of Jews but chose not to intercede or offer sanctuary. Ask your students to give reasons to justify their responses.

- Ask students to discuss the fact that various authors give so much importance to the themes of rebuilding and continuity – almost all talk about having children as a significant part of rebuilding their lives. What made having children especially significant for Holocaust survivors?

## GENOCIDE

The term “genocide” was created specifically to describe and define the horrific events of the Holocaust and bring its perpetrators to justice. First coined by Polish-Jewish legal scholar Raphael Lemkin in 1944, the first session of the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution that “affirmed” that genocide was a crime under international law in 1946. In 1948, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide that legally defined the crime of genocide for the first time.

[www.hrweb.org/legal/genocide.html](http://www.hrweb.org/legal/genocide.html)

2. Have students identify the stages of genocide experienced by the author, with specific examples.
3. **Timeline:** Create a personal timeline of significant events for the author and contrast it with a timeline of historical events (e.g., the liberation of camps, D-day, etc.) The teachers’ guide for each individual memoir contains a personalized timeline that can be used as a reference or can be provided to students as an example.
4. **Collection of Significant Phrases:** Have students keep a list of significant or meaningful lines, words or sentences from the memoir. Have students create a word wall in the class with selections of these phrases. These words and phrases can be combined to create a poem as a post-reading activity. See Post-reading Activities for more details.

## Evian Conference

The Evian conference was a gathering of thirty-two countries convened by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt in July 1938 in Evian-les-Bains, France to discuss what to do about the growing number of Jewish refugees who were fleeing Nazi persecution. Very little was accomplished, however, because most Western countries were unwilling to accept the refugees. This lack of action convinced Hitler that he could proceed with his assault on European Jewry with impunity. Indeed, a number of historians have referred to the Evian Conference as “Hitler’s green light for genocide.”

## The Eight Stages of Genocide

In 1996, Gregory H. Stanton, president of Genocide Watch, presented a briefing paper to the US State Department that identified the components that lead to genocide. “Genocide,” he wrote, “is a process that develops in eight stages that are predictable but not inexorable. At each stage, preventive measures can stop it. The process is not linear. Logically, later stages must be preceded by earlier stages. But all stages continue to operate throughout the process.” The eight stages that he identified in his paper are: classification, symbolization, dehumanization, organization, polarization, preparation, extermination and denial.

[www.genocidewatch.org/aboutgenocide/8stagesofgenocide.html](http://www.genocidewatch.org/aboutgenocide/8stagesofgenocide.html)



### The Voyage of the SS *St. Louis*

The German transatlantic liner *St. Louis* sailed from Hamburg, Germany, on May 13, 1939, heading for Havana, Cuba. Almost all the 938 passengers – most were German citizens – were Jews fleeing from the Third Reich. The majority had applied for US visas and had planned to stay in Cuba only until they could enter the United States. When the *St. Louis* arrived in Cuba, however, the passengers were prevented from landing there. Denied entry to both the US and Canada, most were compelled to return to Europe. Jewish organizations managed to secure entry visas to Great Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium and France, but 532 *St. Louis* passengers were trapped when Germany conquered Western Europe. Just over half of them survived the Holocaust.

[www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?ModuleId=10005267](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?ModuleId=10005267)

## Post-reading Activities

1. Have students discuss their reactions to the memoirs and ask them to develop a set of questions they would ask the author or another Holocaust survivor. This activity might be done as a whole-class activity or in partners/small groups. Contact your local synagogue(s) or Holocaust Education Centre or the Azrieli Foundation to find out if they can put you in touch with Holocaust survivors who are willing to speak to the class. If a Holocaust survivor is able to speak to your class or school, have students ask the questions they prepared before the visit. If there is a local Holocaust Memorial or Education Centre in your area, organize a trip for your class.
2. Have students create a web page using information from the memoir to share with other students in the class; include photos, timelines, found poetry, artwork and other pieces that you think are important to tell the story.
3. Create a graphic novel to illustrate the key themes and events for the memoirist.
4. Several memoirs in the series discuss lingering antisemitism in the post-war period. Ask students to research specific instances that occur in the memoir that they read.
5. What were some of the challenges to emigration for Jewish families who wished to leave countries under Nazi domination? Students can research the difficulty in obtaining entrance and exit visas and, in particular, the Canadian immigration policies prior to and during the war, as well as Canada's involvement with the voyage of the *St. Louis* and the Evian Conference.
6. Write a letter to the author of the memoir. Some sample letter prompts are:
  - Thank them for sharing their stories.
  - Ask questions of the author or their families.
  - Students can identify sections or passages that were especially meaningful to them.
  - Students can relate their own new immigrant experiences to the author.
  - Letters can be sent to the Azrieli Foundation: the survivors and their families find them very meaningful and will often respond to questions.

7. Write a series of poems or songs that deal with the main themes or ideas suggested by the memoir. You may want to have students use the meaningful lines and words that they collected while they read the memoir. By reorganizing these words and phrases, construct a poem.
8. Portray key scenes and figures through original artwork.
9. Design and create a poster and an original cover for the memoir.
10. Invite students to interview family members or friends about stories of immigration. Find out why they chose to come to Canada. What experiences did they share in common with the survivor's immigrant experience? What challenges did they face and what were some of the successes they experienced?
11. Memory book/box: Have students create and explain five artifacts that would have significance to the author. These items can be collected to create a memory box or scrapbook.
12. After reading their memoir, ask students to create a memorial to the Holocaust, or create a piece of artwork, poem, song or literary piece inspired by their reading. Have students consider the concept of memorials. Whom or what might a memorial be designed to honour? Why do we create memorials? As students design their memorial, encourage them to think of their audience, whom or what they would choose to memorialize and where they would locate their memorial. Students may choose to draw pictures or create a model of their memorial to share with their classmates.
13. Invite students to share their finished projects with members of their school community. This may be well suited for Yom HaShoah – Holocaust Remembrance Day – in the spring, or the UN-declared International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27, a date that marks the day the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp was liberated.

# The Azrieli Series of Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Supplementary Resources

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Azrieli Foundation, Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Program web site  
[www.azrielifoundation.org/memoirs](http://www.azrielifoundation.org/memoirs)

Azrieli Memoirs Facebook site  
Azrieli Memoirs (reading, writing, books)

Diaries vs. Memoirs – Thoughts to ponder...  
[www.fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/ACTIVITY/68plan/Diaries2.htm](http://www.fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/ACTIVITY/68plan/Diaries2.htm)

The Eight Stages of Genocide  
[www.genocidewatch.org/8stages.htm](http://www.genocidewatch.org/8stages.htm)

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

Jewish Foundation for the Righteous  
[www.jfr.org](http://www.jfr.org)

Jewish Partisans Educational Foundation  
[www.jewishpartisans.org](http://www.jewishpartisans.org)

*The Longest Hatred*. Public Broadcasting Service, 1993. 150 mins.  
A compelling examination of the history of Jewish persecution.  
[www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org)

Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre  
[www.mhmc.ca](http://www.mhmc.ca)

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum  
[www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)

Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre  
[www.vhec.org/teaching.html](http://www.vhec.org/teaching.html)

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

**PRINT RESOURCES**

*Echoes and Reflections: A Multimedia Curriculum on the Holocaust.* Anti-Defamation League, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, Yad Vashem, The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority.

[www.echoesandreflections.org](http://www.echoesandreflections.org)

Gilbert, Sir Martin. *Atlas of the Holocaust.* New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993.

Rozett, Robert and Shmuel Spector, eds. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust.* Jerusalem: Yad Vashem and The Jerusalem Publishing House, 2000.

Spector, Shmuel, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Life Before and During the Holocaust.* New York: New York University Press, 2001.

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