

# The Heart from Auschwitz



Musée Holcauste Montréal  
Montreal Holocaust Museum

**TEACHING GUIDE**



Musée Holocauste Montréal  
Montreal Holocaust Museum

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Source: Montreal Holocaust Museum

# 1. About the Montreal Holocaust Museum

The Montreal Holocaust Museum educates people of all ages and backgrounds about the Holocaust, while sensitizing the public to the universal perils of antisemitism, racism, hate and indifference. Through its Museum, commemorative programs and educational initiatives, the MHM promotes respect for diversity and the sanctity of human life. The museum's collection is unique in Canada. It holds more than 12,900 items to date, many of which are historic documents, photographs and objects that belonged to Jewish families from Europe. The Museum acquires new objects that document the life of Jewish communities before the war and the Holocaust. The Montreal Holocaust Museum tells the story of the Holocaust from the unique perspective of Montreal survivors. The Museum brings to life the human story of the Holocaust through survivor testimony, artefacts and historical archival material. Visitors learn the history of the Holocaust, and gain an understanding of events in Quebec, Canada and the world during that time. They are encouraged to consider the implications of prejudice, racism and anti-Semitism. The exhibition tells the story of Jewish communities before, during and after the Holocaust. It explores the terrible tragedy in which so many lives were lost, and the horrors that were witnessed by the few who survived. Montreal became home to a large survivor population after the Second World War. As of 2018, approximately 4,000 survivors resided in the Montreal area.



## 2. Tool Overview

## 2.1 Introduction

This pedagogical tool is based on the artefact *The Heart from Auschwitz* found in the Montreal Holocaust Museum's (MHM) permanent collection. The two activities in this tool are geared towards teachers and their students in grades 6 and up, and help build skills in analysing historical objects related to the Holocaust. Both activities can be done in 4 to 5 hours.

This tool has been designed to allow you to study the Holocaust in the classroom, adopting a reflective approach centred on the themes of living in society and engaging in dialogue. It is intended to conclude the study of the Holocaust that began, for several of your students, with the pedagogical activity *Hana's Suitcase*. This activity was followed by a visit to the MHM and either listening to a survivor's life story or participating in a pedagogical workshop. For those who cannot visit the MHM, you are encouraged to download the app for smartphones (*MTL Holocaust Museum*) and tablets (*Montreal Holocaust Museum*) free of charge. Learn about the stories behind the MHM's artefacts by following these three tours: *Life Stories: Holocaust Survivors in Montreal*, *Children and Teenagers During the Holocaust*, and *Deconstructing Genocide*.

## How to use this tool

This tool is divided into four sections: Activity 1: Transmitting the history and message of the *Heart*, Activity 2: Constructing one's own *Heart*, Evaluation, and the Annexes.

Source: Montreal Holocaust Museum

## **Activity 1: Transmitting the history and message of the *Heart***

With the help of photos, students will recall the artefacts and survivors' testimonies they encountered during their visit to the MHM, or during a virtual tour via the MHM's app for smartphones (*MTL Holocaust Museum*) and tablets (*Montreal Holocaust Museum*). Teachers will draw their attention to a specific artefact on display in the Museum, the *Heart from Auschwitz* (stop 111 in the app). Students will analyse the *Heart* using the Artefact analysis sheet. Teachers will then distribute the story of the *Heart* and watch a video clip of a testimony.



### Activity 2: Constructing one's own *Heart*

This activity leads the students to the action phase: they now carry on the message of empathy that the *Heart from Auschwitz* conveys. Students will construct a heart, write their messages in it, and, if they so decide, offer it to the Holocaust survivor whose testimony they heard or to any other individual of their choosing.

#### Evaluation:

This section will help teachers assess their students' work.

#### Annexes:

The annexes provide teachers with pertinent web-based resources produced by the MHM, other project ideas, and the full bibliographic information of secondary sources mentioned in this pedagogical tool.

## 2.2 Quebec Education Program

### Connections with the Québec Education Program (QEP)

#### EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE in connection with the **Geography, History, and Citizenship Education** program

Enable students to:

- Reflect on art as a form of human expression and on its transformative power
- Connect the past and the present, with particular reference to the Holocaust
- Adopt a reflective approach to the issues of human rights and human dignity
- To become aware of their ability to connect the past and the present, with particular reference to the Holocaust
- To understand the effects of their actions on the unity of mankind

## EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE, in connection with the **Ethics and Religious Culture** program

Enable students to:

- Engage in dialogue with one another, with the past, with diversity
- Practice dialogue through writing and acts of empathy (offering their heart)
- Reflect on the moral choices one might have to make in life

Look on the value of human experiences, specifically the meaning of empathy within the Auschwitz context (“an understanding of how all individuals are equal in terms of right and dignity”), and the significance that can be attributed to it.

Reflect on their own values and on the strength of the human spirit.

### 2.3 Pedagogical objective

This activity will enable students to acquire the following competencies:

#### CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES

- Intellectual : to use information
- Intellectual : to bring one's creativity into play
- Personal and social: to cooperate with others
- Methodological: to adopt effective work methods
- Communication-related: to communicate appropriately

#### SUBJECT-SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES

- English Language Arts : to read a variety of genres
- English Language Arts : to produce a variety of genres
- English Language Arts: to communicate orally
- Arts Education: to produce artistic and media works

# Activity 1



Source: Montreal Holocaust Museum



For Quebec-based teachers:

You can book an educational package including a replica of the Heart by filling out this form: <http://museeholocauste.ca/en/reserve-a-pedagogical-activity/>. The package must be returned to the Montreal Holocaust Museum at the end of the project.

## 3. Transmitting the history and message of the *Heart*

### 3.1 Overview

In the initial activity students reflect on the strength of the human spirit by studying the *Heart from Auschwitz*. Students learn about the context in which the *Heart* was produced which helps them understand its inherent significance, as a rare example of humanity in such a place as the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and death camp. They then investigate and analyse the artefact to understand its meaning and message.

### 3.2 Teaching Materials

Computer, projector and projector screen

All of the following material is available on this webpage:

<http://museeholocauste.ca/en/primary-education/heart-auschwitz/>

- The story of the *Heart from Auschwitz* (Annex D, also available as a PowerPoint or PDF online)
- 5 photos of the *Heart* in the museum
- 12 detailed photos of the *Heart*
  - Video clip *Discover the Heart from Auschwitz* (YouTube link) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wnloy297LVI&feature=youtu.be>
  - Video clip *Bricoler un cœur – Constructing a Heart* (YouTube link) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SySpOOE43o&feature=youtu.be>
  - Video testimony by Zlatka Pitluk, who explains how the artefact was made in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp (in Yiddish, with English and French sub-titles, 5 min. 10 sec.) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2WXBCLicTw>
- Translations of the *Heart* (PowerPoint and PDF)
- *Artefact analysis sheet* (Annex B, also available as a PDF online)
- 3 photos of artefacts on display at the MHM and showcased in our app: Yellow and red star prisoner's badge worn in concentration camp to identify a Jewish political opponent (Germany, 1939), Prisoner uniform worn by Sonia Aronowicz (Poland, 1943-1945), Sewing kit kept in concentration camp by Rosa Pliskin (Poland, circa 1942)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For teachers and students who cannot visit the museum

### 3.3. Discussion about the Montreal Holocaust Museum tour (in-person or virtual)

## Activity 1

Have your students remember and discuss their visit to the museum. If your students cannot visit the museum in person, they can download the museum app, free of charge, on their smartphone (MTL Holocaust Museum) or tablet (Montreal Holocaust Museum), and discuss their interactive tour in class. For more information about the app, see the following link: <http://museeholocauste.ca/en/app/>

#### Questions for students who visited the MHM:

- How did you feel during your visit to the Museum?
- What did you see in the Museum?
- Do you remember anything in particular: a photo, a video clip, an artefact?
- Why did we visit this Museum?

#### Questions for students who cannot visit the MHM:

Ask students to find and discuss the three Museum photos listed in section 3.2, located in the app and on the *Heart of Auschwitz* webpage.

- Where do these artefacts come from?
- What do they tell us about life in a concentration camp?
- How do these artefacts make you feel?

These artefacts and questions are a good segue into the next section.

Source: Montreal Holocaust Museum





Source: Montreal Holocaust Museum

### 3.4. Learning about the artefact

For this section, you can have students use a K-W-L chart (what I **know**, what I **want** to know, what I **learned**) and lead a discussion about their progress after each step of the activity. The K-W-L chart is designed to help guide your students through a text, or in this case, an encounter with an artefact. The KWL chart can be found in Annex C.

- Without providing students with the full story yet, distribute the *Artefact analysis sheet* and ask them to answer the questions by either looking at the replica or pictures of the *Heart*. Teachers can choose the questions based on grade level. Students then share their answers. The replicas are available only in Quebec and Ontario; remember to tell students to handle the replica carefully, as it is fragile.
- Project the “Translations of the *Heart*” PowerPoint or PDF file onto the screen, note the students’ reactions, and ask them what kinds of messages are in the *Heart*. Which feelings do they convey?
- Distribute the story to your students (found in Annex D and on the MHM website) and allow reading time. Now that your students know more about the context of this object’s creation – an object made in a concentration camp – ask them the following questions (for students who did not visit the MHM, be sure to show them photos of the *Heart* in the Museum):
  - Why is this artefact displayed by itself in a glass case in the Museum?
  - Why is this artefact named the *Heart from Auschwitz*?
  - Who is Fania?
  - Can you imagine how Fania might have felt when the women gave her the *Heart*?
  - What do you think writing in the *Heart* meant to these women?
  - Why do you think the women wrote these messages?
  - How was signing their names an act of courage?

### 3.5. Show the video clip of Zlatka Pitluk.

Ask the students to collect as much information as possible on the *Heart*. In particular, the students should try to understand:

- the manner in which the artefact was made in 1944;
- the context in which the women found themselves;
- the difficulty involved in finding the necessary materials (scissors, fabric, pens);
- the risks involved in making the *Heart*.

After watching the video clip, discuss the following quote with your students. “The only thing not forbidden was thinking.”



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2WXBCLicTw>

### 3.6. Conclusion

Discuss the story of the *Heart from Auschwitz* with your students. Remind them of the key facts that have come out of the discussion, viewing the video clip, and reading the story of the *Heart*.

Here are some questions you can ask them:

- What has the Museum visit (in-person or via the app) taught you about the *Heart from Auschwitz*?
- What did you learn today about this artefact?
- What does this artefact mean to you?

## Activity 2

# 4. Constructing one's own *Heart*

### 4.1 Overview

The activity actively engages students through the creation of a heart inspired by the artefact on display in the Museum. This artistic activity is a way of transmitting a message about community living and engaging in dialogue, through an object which symbolizes empathy.

#### **Teaching Material:**

Computer and projection screen.

#### **Student Materials:**

The students themselves will determine what materials they will need to make the heart.

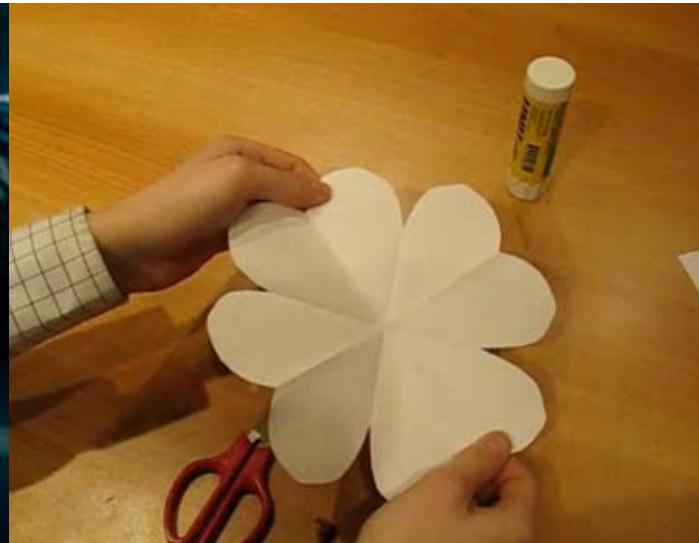
### 4.2 Initial Stage

Propose a challenge and explain to your students that they are going to make a heart modelled on the Heart that they saw in the Museum, on the app, or on the Museum's website. Your students will write their own messages inside it and choose someone to give it to. If your class has heard a Holocaust survivor's testimony, you might suggest that they offer the heart to that individual, along with a copy of the story of the *Heart*.

We recommend that the class be divided into groups of 4 and that each group creates one layer of the heart.

Set up group discussions to answer the following questions:

- What words do I want to write in the heart?
- What is the main message that we want to convey?
- What expressions include the word heart? What do they mean? (ex. open- hearted, from the bottom of one's heart, heart-to-heart)



- What should we do with the heart? To whom should we give it, and why?
- What will be the significance of our action?

## Activity 2

### 4.3. Discussion about the Montreal Holocaust Museum tour (in-person or virtual)

Start a discussion on how to make the heart. First show students the reproduction or photos of the *Heart* and ask them to brainstorm how to make it. Then continue the process with the help of the following questions:

- What are the necessary stages involved in making our own heart?
- What materials do we need?
- How can we ensure that each group makes a layer of the heart that is the same size?
- How will we make the shape?

If necessary, show the video clip about making the *Heart* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SySpOO-E43o&feature=youtu.be>.

### 4.3 The students create their own heart and write their messages.

Focusing on the heart(s) created by the class and on the reproduction of the *Heart from Auschwitz*, remind students of the initial activity (Activity 1) and discuss the following:

- What do you think of your heart?
- What have you learned by making a heart?
- What have you learned by studying the *Heart from Auschwitz* and Fania's story?
- What have you learned about the Holocaust and Auschwitz?
- What kind(s) of message(s) did you want to convey in your heart?
- What has today's activity brought to you personally?
- What has today's activity brought to the class?
- How will you use what you have learned today?
- Who will you give your heart to? How do you think this person will feel when opening it? What might your messages mean to this person?
- Do you want to show your heart to others?
- How do you think that the main message contained in your heart could be inspiring to others?

## Activity 2

### 4.4 Summarising the activity:

- To study the story of the *Heart from Auschwitz* is to understand the events of the Holocaust and to recognize Auschwitz as the ultimate symbol of the Nazi brutality (see Annex A).
- To learn more about this artefact, we closely examined its reproduction and saw the videotaped interview of a woman (Zlatka Pitluk) who participated in its making in 1944 in Auschwitz.
- Each Museum artefact helps us to learn more about the Holocaust. Similarly, the oral or written life stories of Holocaust survivors are important so that we can better understand the course of events during the genocide.
- The women took risks to make and give the *Heart* to Fania for her birthday in 1944. They made both a personal choice (each individual woman who signed the heart) and a collective choice (all the messages are gathered in a single object). Their act can be said to be an affirmation of their existence.
- The Nazi project consisted in dehumanizing the people they targeted. *The Heart from Auschwitz* was proof that these women remained profoundly human, despite their circumstances.
- To construct a heart is to commit to action through writing and creating.
- To write is to take a stand. To think of a message is to put oneself in the place of the person who will read it.
- To offer a heart is to offer kindness. It is an act of empathy, of dialogue, of humanity.

***“To suffer Auschwitz,  
at every level of this  
endless experience,  
meant suffering the  
fate that Primo Levi called simply  
the ‘demolition of a man’ [...]  
the ‘demolished’ man was first of all  
a man rendered apathetic to the world  
and to himself, i.e. incapable  
of empathy”***

Excerpt from Georges-Didi Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008: p. 42.

## 5. Evaluation

Use your own judgment in assessing the following aspects or any other points that you deem essential:

- How students progressed through the questions on ethics
- How students progressed through the questions pertaining to living in society
- Student self-assessment of the heart they made
- Student involvement in the heart-making project
- Writing in the heart
- Reading the story of the Heart
- Oral communication
- Students' artistic process
- Students' interaction with each other
- Students' understanding of the significance of this activity
- Student's response to the activity in its entirety.



## Examples



## Annex A: MHM resources: website and virtual exhibitions

### Testimonies and artefacts

- Learn about other survivors' life stories by visiting <http://museeholocauste.ca/en/survivors-stories/>. The journeys of survivors from before, during, and after the Holocaust can also be found on the Museum's two virtual exhibitions, *Building New Lives* ([refairesavie.museeholocauste.ca/eng](http://refairesavie.museeholocauste.ca/eng)) and *Holocaust Life Stories* ([holocaustlifestories.ca](http://holocaustlifestories.ca)).
- Access more information about the Museum's artefacts by visiting <http://museeholocauste.ca/en/objects-of-interest/>. Learn about more than 100 artefacts from the Museum's collections that touch on themes of resistance (as well as other themes like camps, ghettos, and hiding), including the *Heart of Auschwitz*.

### Educational resources

- Primary education: <http://museeholocauste.ca/en/primary-education/>
- Secondary education: <http://museeholocauste.ca/en/secondary-education/>
- Resources and training: <http://museeholocauste.ca/en/resources-training/>

Source : Montreal Holocaust Museum



## Annex B: Artefact analysis sheet

Observe the artefact and try to answer the following questions.  
Explain your answers below:

**1. Describe the object (type, shape, material, colour, etc.):**

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**2. What condition is it in?**

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**3. How old is it?**

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**4. Is it a written document? If so, read the following document about primary sources: <http://museeholocauste.ca/app/uploads/2017/01/teaching-history-primary-sources.pdf>**

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**5. Is there anything written on it? In what language(s)?**

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## Annex B: Artefact analysis sheet

**6. What can be said about the object's owner?**

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**7. What does the object teach us about the people who used it or who could have been affected by it?**

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**8. How big do you think this object is?**

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**9. Who do you think made this object?**

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**10. Where do you think this object came from? Where was it used?**

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## Annex B: Artefact analysis sheet

**11. What do you think this object was used for?**

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**12. What does this artefact teach us about the Holocaust? About the Second World War?**

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**13. Do objects like this exist today?**

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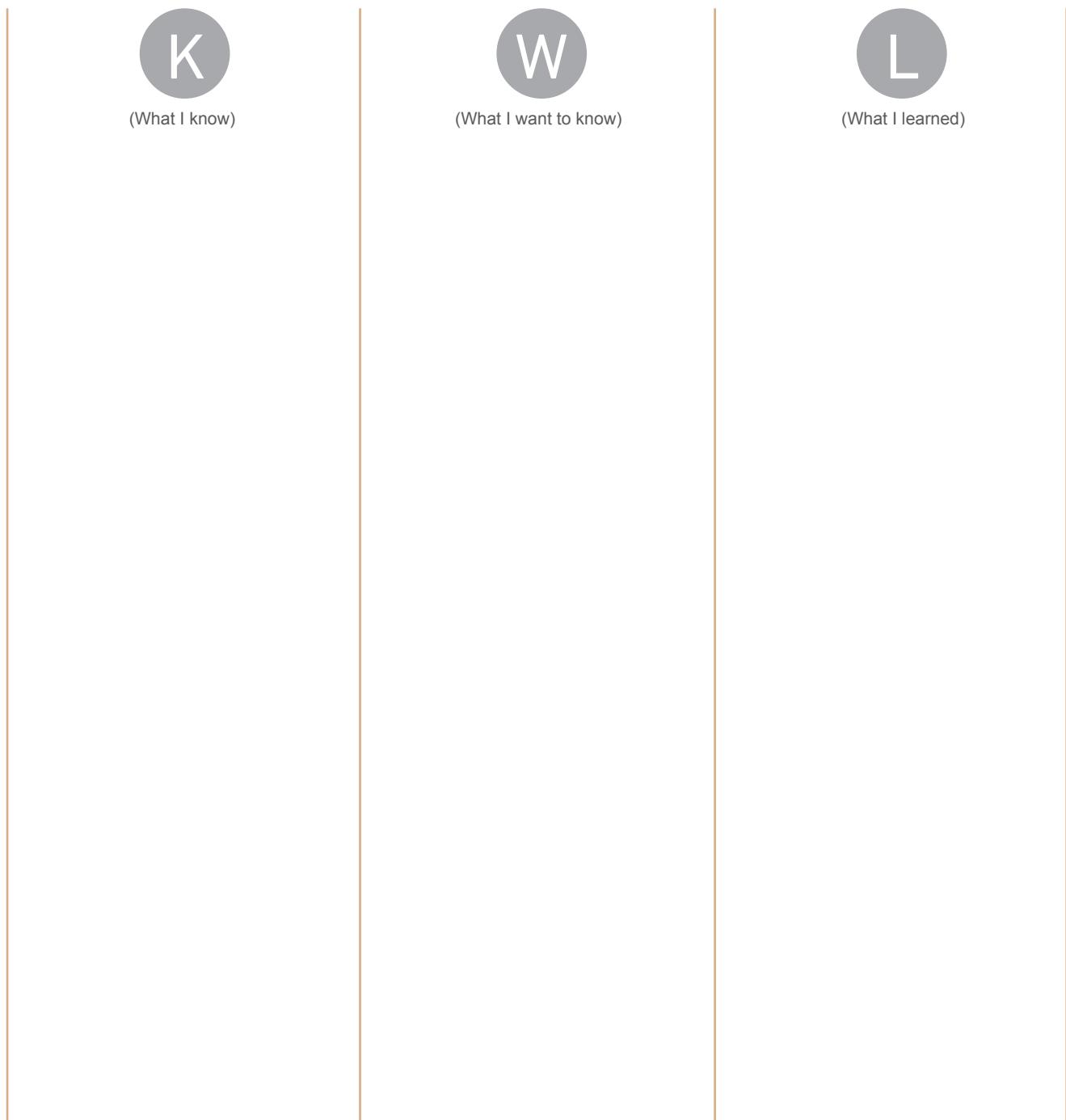
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## Annex C: K-W-L chart (what I know, what I want to know, what I learned)

The K-W-L chart is designed to guide students through a text, or in this case, an encounter with an artefact.



## Annex D: The story of *The Heart from Auschwitz*

Her name is Fania. The F on the cover of the heart is the first letter of her name.

During the war, Fania is in Poland. She is a prisoner in Auschwitz camp. She is forced to work in a munitions factory.

December 12, 1944, is Fania's birthday. She is 20 years old. In the munitions factory, Fania has a friend called Zlatka.

Zlatka wants to give Fania a gift for her birthday. She decides to make a heart which will contain the signatures of many women who work in the munitions factory.

Zlatka makes the heart. It is very difficult to find the things she needs to make it. Scissors, paper, material and pencils are very rare, forbidden objects.

Once the heart is made, she puts a note in the heart and then gets about 20 women to sign it. These women, all prisoners in Auschwitz, come from different countries. They write in the heart in Polish, German, French and Hebrew. The heart is filled with messages of friendship, words of hope, birthday wishes and signatures. Then they give the heart to Fania.

In January 1945, Auschwitz is evacuated. Fania and her comrades are forced to walk towards Germany. This event is called the "Death March." Fania manages to keep the heart hidden under her arm for the entire journey.

After walking for three days, Fania and some of the other workers from the munitions factory are deported by train to Ravensbrück, which is a concentration camp for women. The last message is written in the heart by a young woman on January 26, 1945, at Ravensbrück.

Fania and Zlatka are both survivors of the Holocaust. Fania's favourite inscription in the heart is "Freedom, Freedom, Freedom". Fania donated the heart to the Montreal Holocaust Museum in 1988. It is an exceptional object in the museum as it is one of the rare objects known to have been created by prisoners in Auschwitz. Like many other Holocaust survivors, Zlatka recorded her testimony. In this recording, she describes how she came up with the idea to make the heart and how she proceeded to make it. She says: "We were 20 (women); that's why I imagined 20 layers." In reality, there are 19 signatures in the heart.



Source : Montreal Holocaust Museum

## Annex D: The story of *The Heart from Auschwitz*

The story of the *heart* continues. In 2008, a documentary was made about the heart. The directors Luc Cyr and Carl Leblanc travelled all over the world to find the women who had signed the heart. While the documentary was made, Fania visited *The Heart from Auschwitz* at the Montreal Holocaust Museum. On this occasion, students from Lambert-Closse School in Montreal, who had done the *Heart from Auschwitz* activity, gave her a heart for her 84th birthday.

Fania now lives in Toronto. She was born on December 12, 1924. Zlatka lives in Buenos Aires. She was born on September 24, 1924.

Zlatka Pitluk recorded her life story and her experience of the Holocaust in Yiddish on September 16, 1998 in Montreal. Many survivors feel an obligation to transmit their testimony to future generations.



Fania Fainer at the Montreal Holocaust Museum. She is in front of the glass case in which the Heart from Auschwitz is displayed. December 10, 2008.

Source : Montreal Holocaust Museum

## Annex E: Other project ideas

- Have students produce a brief synopsis of *The Heart from Auschwitz* story.
- Create a timeline based on *The Heart from Auschwitz* story in Annex B or the children's book *Fania's Heart* by Anne Renaud.
- Go on a virtual tour of Auschwitz-Birkenau. This will help students visualize the scope of the concentration camp as well its role in the larger history of the Holocaust. "Auschwitz-Birkenau Virtual Tour," The Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau. <http://panorama.auschwitz.org/> (for older students only)
- Watch other life stories of Holocaust survivors at [www.museeholocauste.ca/en](http://www.museeholocauste.ca/en) in order to understand the importance of witnesses' stories (see Annex A);
- Read, watch, or listen to other life stories of human rights violations on the Montreal Holocaust Museum's virtual exhibit *United Against Genocide: Understand, Question, Prevent*. <http://genocide.mhmc.ca/en/> in order to understand the importance of witnesses' stories from before, during, and after the Holocaust (for older students only);
- Make a PowerPoint, Prezi, or Keynote presentation in which the students talk about the process of making the heart, their impressions following the visit to the Museum, and what they have learned about themselves through the activity.
- Make a video report in which the students carry out their own interview with a person who has experienced human rights violations.

## Annex F: Further reading

### Books

Huberman, Georges-Didi. *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Leblanc, Carl. *Artéfact*. Montréal: Les Éditions XYZ, 2012. (in French only).

Levi, Primo. *Survival in Auschwitz*. New York: Touchstone, 1995.

Levine, Karen. *Hana's Suitcase*. Toronto: Second Story Press, 2002.

Renaud, Anne (author), and Richard Rudnicki (illustrator). *Fania's Heart*. Toronto: Second Story Press, 2018.

### Films and radio

Brady, George and Fumiko Ishioka. "The story of Hana's Suitcase." Produced by Karen Levine. *CBC Digital Archives*, 2001. <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/hanas-suitcase>

Leblanc, Carl. *The Heart from Auschwitz*. TVA, August 2, 2011.



# BUILD BETTER CITIZENS



From guided tours of our exhibitions to the study of a survivor's story or artefacts, our educational programs focus on the **human experience**.

School curricula across Canada prepare students to become educated, responsible and engaged citizens. Using our tools, invite your students to reflect on citizens' and governments' roles in the face of human rights violations.

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by visiting the **Education** tab at

**museeholocauste.ca**



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