



Centre commémoratif
de l'Holocauste à Montréal

Montreal Holocaust
Memorial Centre

Getting ready for the survivor testimony

Who is a Holocaust survivor?

The Jews who survived the Nazi persecution went through different experiences. Some of them;

- Lived in a ghetto, work camp, concentration and/or death camp
- Were in a forced labor battalion
- Were in hiding
- Passed him/herself off as a Christian with fake documents
- Lived and fought as a partisan (Jewish resistance)
- Fled or was deported to the Soviet Union
- Were a German or Austrian Jew who fled his or her country between 1933 and 1939

1. Talk to the survivor before

You can call or meet the survivor before s/he meets the students. Try to get to know his or her story (the main lines) and his or her expectations about the experience with the students. Note elements that could be helpful for students to have a better understanding of the story (main events of the survivor's life, the accent of the survivor, place of birth, countries involved, etc.)

2. Tell the survivor what are your expectations

Why do you want your students to listen to a testimony? You can ask the survivor to talk about his or her life before the war, about his or her experience during the Holocaust, and after. You can ask the survivor to speak specifically about how s/he survived, if non-Jews helped him/her and about the resilience needed to stay alive. You can ask them to share elements that students can relate more easily with. Glimpses into the survivor's teenage years or young adulthood can help bring him or her closer to the students, so maybe ask specifically for such experiences.

3. Tell the survivor what your students know about the Holocaust.

What projects have you done with them? What books have they read? What movies have they seen? In the framework of what class have they been prepared? In what aspects are they interested in?

4. Prepare your students for this experience

Explain to your students why they will be hearing a testimony.

Explain to them that a person's testimony is limited to the context of his or her experiences and certain variables such as his or her age, gender, and country of origin.



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Certain survivors were imprisoned at the beginning of the war, while others were imprisoned in later years. Some survived in hiding; others were in concentration camps, death camps, or in partisan or resistance groups. All survivors have a unique and complex story.

Ask students to pay attention to these different variables during the testimony and to understand that it is the personal experience of one individual.

You can also remind your students that, today, Holocaust survivors are growing old and dying. Your students are the last generation that will have the chance to listen to a Holocaust survivor's testimony in person.

Tell them about the story of the survivor they will meet and encourage them to prepare questions to the survivor. Present the main information about the survivor and his or her story.

5. Be sure that some rules of politeness will be followed

Respect for the person, proper listening and interaction (questions and comments).

Students might want to ask the survivor-speaker why s/he chooses to share his or her experiences with others. Many survivors want to express and tell people what happened to them during the Holocaust; others are motivated by the will to fight racism and others see their testimonials as a form of commemoration. Prepare some questions yourself; students might be encouraged to do the same once someone breaks the ice.

6. Giving students the opportunity to apply their knowledge following a testimony

After the visit to the Holocaust Museum, you may ask your students to write down their thoughts and feelings on what they heard and discussed with the Holocaust survivor.

You may ask what they learned from the testimony and what they hadn't known before. How did the meeting with the survivor affect their understanding of the Holocaust? What problems addressed by the survivor are still relevant today? In what way does a personal testimony help us to understand and discuss issues of prejudice, discrimination, social injustice and genocide? What subjects would your students like to know more about?

7. Writing to Holocaust survivors

Survivors are always glad to read the impressions of the students they met. Students can write to the survivors to share their thoughts and reactions to the testimony and to the new information they acquired thanks to the session.

All mail can be sent to the following address:

Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre,
5151 Cote-Sainte-Catherine Road (1 Cummings Square),
Montréal (Québec)
H3W 1M6.

We will forward your mail to the survivor who met your class.