



ILLINOIS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM
& EDUCATION CENTER



Stories of Survival

OBJECT • IMAGE • MEMORY



Student Guide
PRE AND POST VISIT PACKET
6th - 12th Grades

ABOUT THE MUSEUM

Built with the leadership of local Holocaust Survivors, Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center is the largest facility in the Midwest (and the third largest in the world) dedicated to preserving the memories of those lost in the Holocaust and to teaching current generations to fight hatred, prejudice, indifference, and genocide in today's world.

Through world-class exhibitions and programs, the Museum inspires individuals and organizations and provides a universal call to action: Take history to heart. Take a stand for humanity.

Stories of Survival: Object. Image. Memory. is a project of the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center and photographer Jim Lommasson.

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Object. Image. Memory.

Object

The objects in this exhibition reflect the lives of their one-time owners: childhood, home, culture, and religious practice, but also the impact of war, trauma, displacement, exile, and migration. They have survived the Holocaust, genocides, and conflicts in Armenia, Bosnia, Cambodia, Iraq, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Syria. A snap decision or a stroke of luck resulted in what remains from a lost world.



Letter, written by Mikhail Mirkin, Chereya, Soviet Union, 1944.

Documents, a prayer book, a doll, a recipe book, or keys to your home—dislodged from their original surroundings, these seemingly ordinary objects are now storytellers. They represent futures that were forever altered.



(2014.39.2)

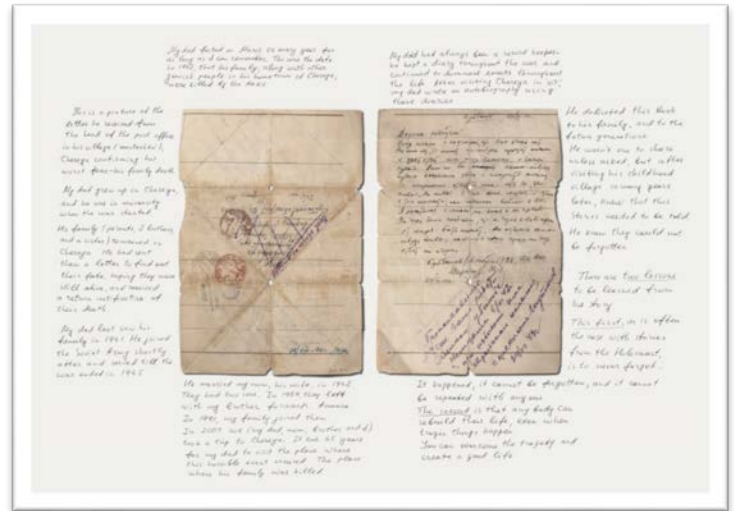
Mikhail, 1940, Soviet Union

Mikhail left the *shtetl* (village) of Chereya to study at the Belarussian State University, until he volunteered to fight the Nazis for the Soviet Army. His entire family was massacred by Nazis and local collaborators on March 6, 1942 in their hometown ghetto. He immigrated to the United States in 1983.

Image

The images in this exhibition were taken by photographer Jim Lomasson. Nearly a decade ago, Lomasson began working on a collaborative photographic and writing project with Iraqi and Syrian refugees to the US, based on the objects they brought with them to this country. In this exhibition, multiple victim and survivor groups, and their descendants, were asked to participate.

Lommasson photographed these items on a plain, white background. Alone in this open space, the object becomes elevated from the everyday to the iconic. The participants were then asked to engage with the photographs and express themselves however they felt comfortable, directly on the print.



Memory

Writings and creative expressions on the images attach memories to the objects. Autobiographical narratives become collective history. These stories of survival resulting from incomprehensible inhumanity represent shared experiences despite differences of time and place: experiences of resilience, courage, the fragility of life, family history, and hope for the future. In some ways, these are experiences shared by all of us.

(Upper Right, Reading from Left to Right)

Reflections by Dmitry Mirkin, Son of Mikhail Mirkin.

My dad fasted on March 06 every year for as long as I can remember. This was the date in 1942, that his family, along with other Jewish people in his hometown of Chereya were killed by the Nazis.

This is a picture of the letter he received from the head of the post office in his village ("Mestechko"), Chereya confirming his worst fear – his family death. My dad grew up in Chereya, and he was in university when the war started. His family (parents, 2 brothers, and a sister) remained in Chereya. He had sent them a letter to find out their fate, hoping they were still alive, and received a return notification of their death. My dad last saw his family in 1941. He joined the Soviet Army shortly after and served till the war ended in 1945.

He married my mom, his wife, in 1948. They had two sons. In 1989, they left with my brother towards America. In 1991, my family joined them. In 2007 we (my dad, mom, brother, and I) took a trip to Chereya. It took 65 years for my dad to visit the place where this horrible event occurred. The place where his family was killed.

My dad had always been a record keeper – he kept a diary throughout the war and continued to document events throughout the life after visiting Chereya in '07. My dad wrote an autobiography using these diaries.

He dedicated this book to his family, and to the future generations. He wasn't one to share unless asked, but after visiting his childhood village so many years later, knew that these stories needed to be told. He knew they could not be forgotten. There are two lessons to be learned from his story. The first, as is often the case with stories from the Holocaust, is to never forget. It happened, it cannot be forgotten, and it cannot be repeated with anyone. The second is that anybody can rebuild their life, even when tragic things happen you can overcome the tragedy and create a good life.

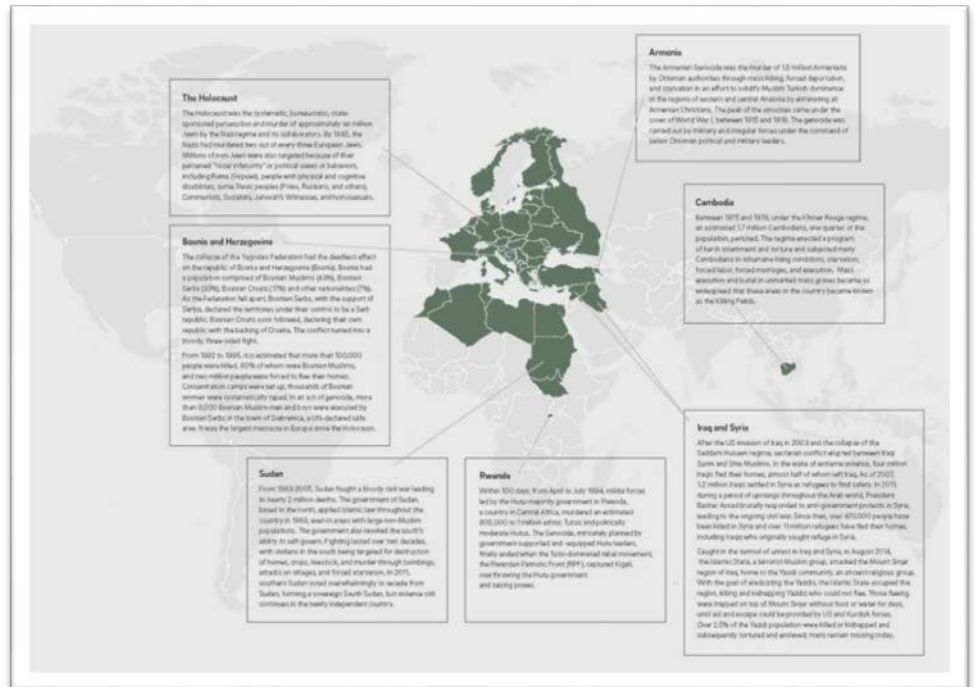
Where Do These Stories Come From?

The Holocaust

The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately 6 million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators.

By 1945, the Nazis had murdered two out of every three European

Jews. Millions of non-Jews were also targeted because of their perceived "racial inferiority" or political views or behaviors, including Roma (Gypsies), people with physical and cognitive disabilities, some Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians, and others), Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals.



Armenia

The Armenian Genocide was the murder of 1.5 million Armenians by Ottoman authorities through mass killing, forced deportation, and starvation in an effort to solidify Muslim Turkish dominance in the regions of eastern and central Anatolia by eliminating all Armenian Christians. The peak of the atrocities came under the cover of World War I, between 1915 and 1918. The genocide was carried out by military and irregular forces under the command of senior Ottoman political and military leaders.

Cambodia

Between 1975 and 1979, under the Khmer Rouge regime, an estimated 1.7 million Cambodians, one quarter of the population, perished. The regime enacted a program of harsh internment and torture and subjected many Cambodians to inhumane living conditions, starvation, forced labor, forced marriages, and execution. Mass execution and burial in unmarked mass graves became so widespread that these areas in the country became known as the Killing Fields.

Rwanda

Within 100 days, from April to July 1994, militia forces led by the Hutu-majority government in Rwanda, a country in Central Africa, murdered an estimated 800,000 to 1 million ethnic Tutsis and politically moderate Hutus. The Genocide, intricately planned by government-supported and -equipped Hutu leaders, finally ended when the Tutsi-dominated rebel movement, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), captured Kigali, overthrowing the Hutu government and seizing power.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The collapse of the Yugoslav Federation had the deadliest effect on the republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia). Bosnia had a population comprised of Bosnian Muslims (43%), Bosnian Serbs (33%), Bosnian Croats (17%) and other nationalities (7%). As the Federation fell apart, Bosnian Serbs, with the support of Serbia, declared the territories under their control to be a Serb republic. Bosnian Croats soon followed, declaring their own republic with the backing of Croatia. The conflict turned into a bloody, three-sided fight.

From 1992 to 1995, it is estimated that more than 100,000 people were killed, 80% of whom were Bosnian Muslims, and 2 million people were forced to flee their homes. Concentration camps were set up; thousands of Bosnian women were systematically raped. In an act of genocide, more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were executed by Bosnian Serbs in the town of Srebrenica, a UN-declared safe area. It was the largest massacre in Europe since the Holocaust.

Sudan

From 1983-2005, Sudan fought a bloody civil war leading to nearly 2 million deaths. The government of Sudan, based in the north, applied Islamic law throughout the country in 1983, even in areas with large non-Muslim populations. The government also revoked the south's ability to self-govern. Fighting lasted over two decades, with civilians in the south being targeted for destruction of homes, crops, livestock, and murder through bombings, attacks on villages, and forced starvation. In 2011, southern Sudan voted overwhelmingly to secede from Sudan, forming a sovereign South Sudan, but violence still continues in the newly independent country.

Iraq and Syria

After the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the collapse of the Saddam Hussein regime, sectarian conflict erupted between Iraqi Sunni and Shia Muslims. In the wake of extreme violence, four million Iraqis fled their homes, almost half of whom left Iraq. As of 2007, 1.2 million Iraqis settled in Syria as refugees to find safety. In 2011, during a period of uprisings throughout the Arab world, President Bashar Assad brutally responded to anti-government protests in Syria, leading to the ongoing civil war. Since then, over 470,000 people have been killed in Syria and over 11 million refugees have fled their homes, including Iraqis who originally sought refuge in Syria.

Caught in the turmoil of unrest in Iraq and Syria, in August 2014, the Islamic State, a terrorist Muslim group, attacked the Mount Sinjar region of Iraq, home to the Yazidi community, an ancient religious group. With the goal of eradicating the Yazidis, the Islamic State occupied the region, killing and kidnapping Yazidis who could not flee. Those fleeing were trapped on top of Mount Sinjar without food or water for days, until aid and escape could be provided by U.S. and Kurdish forces. Over 2.5% of the Yazidi population were killed or kidnapped and subsequently tortured and enslaved; many remain missing today.

Role of Objects and Assumptions

What is our relationship with objects? How do we understand and relate to the things, materials, and objects in our lives?¹ A few years ago, the Smithsonian Museum ran an exhibit called *History of the World in 1,000 Objects* which was inspired from a very successful radio series and book that the BBC and the British Museum collaborated on called *A History of the World in 100 Objects*. “The idea is to show there’s a value in stuff that’s not just monetary,” said Richard Kurin, editor of the Smithsonian’s “History of America in 101 Objects,” published in 2013. “It has a certain kind of worth, and not just because somebody paid a zillion dollars for it.” In a sense, an object can tell a story. Whether a family heirloom, an acceptance letter to college or one’s dining room table, objects have layers of meaning that could span generations.

Activity Overview

Before you embark on the exhibit, let’s reflect on the relationship to our “stuff”. Either intentionally or unintentionally, these stories are being written in our minds and forming the assumptions we make about the world around us.

In the first part of this lesson, we will learn about the assumptions we make and stories we weave based on objects, possessions, and one’s material valuables. You will view a variety of images, and provide your thoughts and assumptions of the images provided by your teacher.

The goal is for you to learn, communicate, and reflect upon the assumptions you make and stories you weave based on objects, possessions, and one’s material valuables.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/28/sunday-review/object-lessons-in-history.html>



As you view these images reflect upon the following questions:

- What assumptions would you make based on the objects in the pictures?
- What would you say about their financial status? Their level of happiness?
- What is your first reaction to the people you see in these pictures? What do you think you know about them? How have you arrived at these assumptions?
- Can you question those assumption or judgements? Can you come up with a different story to explain what you've observed in the picture?
- As you go through these pictures, try to identify what exactly in the picture influenced your answer.

Objects in My Life?

After completing and discussing the above activity, think of objects in your own life. These could be any objects- whether they have special significance or just something you enjoy using.

- Think about what assumptions/stories people make about you because of those objects.
- You can both draw the objects, to the best of your ability, and describe the assumptions that you or others would make about these objects.

Objects Tell a Story

An elderly Chinese woman had two large pots, each hung on the ends of a pole which she carried across her neck. One of the pots had a crack in it while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water.

At the end of the long walks from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily, the woman bringing home only one and a half pots of water. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it could only do half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be bitter failure, it spoke to the woman one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house." The old woman smiled, "Did you notice that there are flowers on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, so I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back, you water them. "For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to grace the house. Without your being the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace the house."



What is the Jewish approach to the objects in our lives?

For example, the Beit Hamikdash, the Holy Temple. This was among one of the most glorious structures ever built! Read below from the Sefer HaChinuch, a 13th century commentator who put together a list of all the 613 *Mitzvot*. For each Mitzvah, the Sefer Chinuch lists the Mitzvah, its reason, and to whom and where it applies. In these sources, the Sefer HaChinuch is discussing the role of the Beit Hamikdash which was created as a location for Hashem to rest His Shechinah (glory), **וְעָשׂוּ לִי, מִקְדָּשׁ** **וְאֶשְׁכְּנֶתִּי, בְּתוֹכָם** "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them (Shemot 25:8).



It is known that the purpose of the temple is to refine our bodies. **Bodies are refined by actions. The more good actions are performed and the more they become consistent, the thoughts of the heart become purified and cleansed.** And God desires the good of the creatures, as we have said. Therefore, He commanded us to fix a place that would be pure and completely clean to purify the thoughts of people there and to refine their [our] hearts towards Him in it.

הלא ידועים הדברים וברורים שהכל להכשר , גופותנו, כי הגופות יכשרו על ידי הפעלות וברבות הפעלות הטובות ורב התמדתן מחשבות הלב מטהרות מתלבנות מזדקקות, והשם חפץ בטובתן של בריות כמו שאמרנו. ועל כן צונו לקבע מקום שיהיה טהור ונקי בתכלית הנקיית לטהר שם מחשבות בני איש ולתקן לבבם [לבבנו] אליו בו



According to the Sefer HaChinuch, what was the purpose of having such a physically magnificent structure?

We find a similar theme with the *Kohanim*, priests, who wore specially ordained clothing. These clothes are noted for their “לכבוד ולתפארת” for their “beauty and splendor” (Shemot 28:2). Also, as you can read below, one should try and fulfill the commandments in the most beautiful way.

<p>Talmud, Shabbat 133b What is the source for the requirement of: “This is my God and I will glorify Him”? As it was taught in a baraita with regard to the verse: “This is my God and I will glorify Him [anveihu], the Lord of my father and I will raise Him up.” The Sages interpreted anveihu homiletically as linguistically related to noi, beauty, and interpreted the verse: Beautify yourself before Him in mitzvot. Even if one fulfills the mitzva by performing it simply, it is nonetheless proper to perform the mitzva as beautifully as possible. Make before Him a beautiful sukka, a beautiful lulav, a beautiful shofar, beautiful ritual fringes, beautiful parchment for a Torah scroll, and write in it in His name in beautiful ink, with a beautiful quill by an expert scribe, and wrap the scroll in beautiful silk fabric.</p>	<p>שבת קלג: דתניא זה אלי ואנוהו התנאה לפניו במצות עשה לפניו סוכה נאה ולולב נאה ושופר נאה וציצית נאה ספר תורה נאה וכתוב בו לשמו בדיו נאה בקולמוס נאה בלבלר אומן וכורכו בשיראין נאין.</p>
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Why do you think the Torah requires that the priestly garments be “new and beautiful”?

See below for some objects in Jewish religious life. Notice their beauty and splendor. These are just some examples where beauty and splendor are very important.



What objects in your home reflect this goal of fulfilling the commandments and Mitzvot in the most beautiful way?



The sources above seem to present an idealistic and positive outlook towards objects and materialism.

Compare those sources with the following sources.

Pirkei Avot, Chapter 6 Mishnah 4

This is the way [to toil in] Torah: eat bread with salt and drink a small amount of water and sleep on the ground and live a life [whose conditions will cause you] pain and in Torah you toil; if you do so (Psalms 128: 2) "happy shall you be, and it shall be well with you" - happy shall you be in this world, and it shall be well with you in the world to come.

פרקי אבות פרק ו' משנה ד'

כך היא דרכה של תורה, פת במלח תאכל, ומים במשורה תשתה, ועל הארץ תישן, וחי צער תחיה, ובתורה אתה עמל, אם אתה עשה כן, (תהלים קכח) אשריך וטוב לך. אשריך בעולם הזה וטוב לך לעולם הבא:

- (4) I multiplied my possessions. I built myself houses and I planted vineyards.
- (5) I laid out gardens and groves, in which I planted every kind of fruit tree.
- (6) I constructed pools of water, enough to irrigate a forest shooting up with trees.
- (7) I bought male and female slaves, and I acquired stewards. I also acquired more cattle, both herds and flocks, than all who were before me in Jerusalem.
- ... (11) Then my thoughts turned to all the fortune my hands had built up, to the wealth I had acquired and won—and oh, it was all futile and pursuit of wind; there was no real value under the sun!

Kohelet Chapter 2---

הקלות פרק ב
 (ד) הגדלת, מעשי: בנית לי בתים, נטעתי לי כרמים.
 (ה) עשיתי לי, גנות ופרדסים; ונטעתי בהם, עץ כל-פרי.
 (ו) עשיתי לי, ברכות מים--להשקות מהם, יער צומח עצים.
 (ז) קניתי עבדים ושפחות, ובני-בית היה לי; גם מקנה בקר וצאן הרבה היה לי, מכל שהיו לפני בירושלים.
 ... (יא) ופניתי אני, בכל-מעשי שעשו ידי, ובצעמל, שעמלתי לעשות; והנה הכל הקבל ורעות רוח, ואין יתרון תחת השמש.



How do you understand the previous two sources as compared with the first sources we saw? The first group of sources expressed a positive attitude towards beauty and the objects we have. The last two sources, however, seem to paint a more simplistic, even ascetic, approach. How might you be able to integrate and make sense of these seemingly opposing perspectives?





What do you think this statement means?



POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

Reflection Protocol

 “What were the 3 objects, images, or stories, that you felt a special connection to during your visit? Why?”

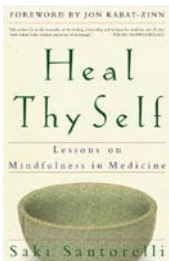
 What was the most powerful or inspiring thing you learned in the Stories of Survival exhibition? Why?”

Class Discussion

Share one thing your classmate/partner said that struck you most deeply or was surprising.

Heal Thy Self, Dr Saki Santorelli

Dr. Santorelli is the director of a Stress Reduction Clinic. His book uses stories of his work with patients to convey his teachings on life. Dr. Santorelli’s approach uses a rich blend of mindfulness, modern psychology, and Buddhist wisdom.



“Can you say something about what you mean by taking your life back?”

He asks her. “I want to be the way I was before all of this happened. I want to get back to who I used to be.” Dr. Santorelli tells her something profound:

“Do you think you *can* ever go back to who you were? I’m not sure that’s possible and I’m not sure you would want to, even if you could. I don’t mean -- you can’t get better or grow,” he explains, “just that you’ve changed. You’ve gone through something that’s altered you and if you place a memory of how you *were* over what you are *becoming* you might close out all sorts of possibilities.”

Rabbi Tzaddok HaKohen Rabinowitz of Lublin

(Reb Tzaddok, 1823-1900, was an important and unique Jewish thinker and Hassidic leader)

“We learn from the creation of the world that in everything the night must precede the day. For in everything the lack is before the presence. For all of life is mixed up of times of darkness and of light, and the shell always has to be removed to get to the fruit.”



Discussion

How is a survivor (for example, a Holocaust survivor, cancer survivor, recovering alcoholic, or individual who overcame depression) different after their experience than before? In what ways are they changed?

Feature Story

Part 1. You're a young reporter. The editor gives you your next assignment: write a feature article "interviewing" an object. The interview can either be with an object from the exhibition or an object in your own life.

Tips for writing story:

- Have a strong lead that grabs readers and makes them want to read on.
- Have a strong narrative. Highlight the object's story. Use quotes from that object. How do you think the object changed over the course of its life? How is it different after its survival then beforehand?
- Combine facts and opinion, with a focus on the human interest side of the story.
- Organize story in a variety of ways (i.e., chronologically, narrative fashion).

Part 2.

1. Pair up with a fellow classmate, share story, and receive feedback.
2. Help each other create a meaningful or memorable headline.

3. Help each other and photograph the object for your story. You can use one that already exists or take one of your own.
4. When you receive feedback, revise and rewrite your story till you reach the final stage of your story.

Part 3. Try to Get It Published!

- Hang with accompanying photographs on a classroom wall or on a school-wide bulletin board.
- Collect in a class publication.
- Submit to the high school or local newspaper.
- Share via social media on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter with IHMEC - @IHMEC #IHMEC #StoriesOfSurvival

Personal Survival

We hope that as you reflect on your *Stories of Survival* experience you found it not only enriching to your life but assists you in deepening the messages gleaned from the exhibit. You saw objects and images, and read stories about objects in the exhibition that have travelled the world, sometimes seeing great tragedy, having narrow escapes, and representing fragments of everyday life. At some point each of these objects tells the story of a challenge faced.



Reflect on one challenge you've had, currently have, or anticipate having in the future.

How might the objects and images you've learned from inform how you might approach this challenge?

Your Story, Our Story

The Illinois Holocaust Museum has partnered with the Tenement Museum on *Your Story, Our Story*. The project features objects that tell personal stories of American immigration and migration. Share your story with us!

- 1) Take A Photo at home or school of an object that carries meaning for your or your family.
- 2) Go to <https://yourstory.tenement.org/partners/ilholocaust> to view the project and get started on your story.
- 3) Click on “Add Your Story +” and you will be able to upload the object and story to be part of this national project.