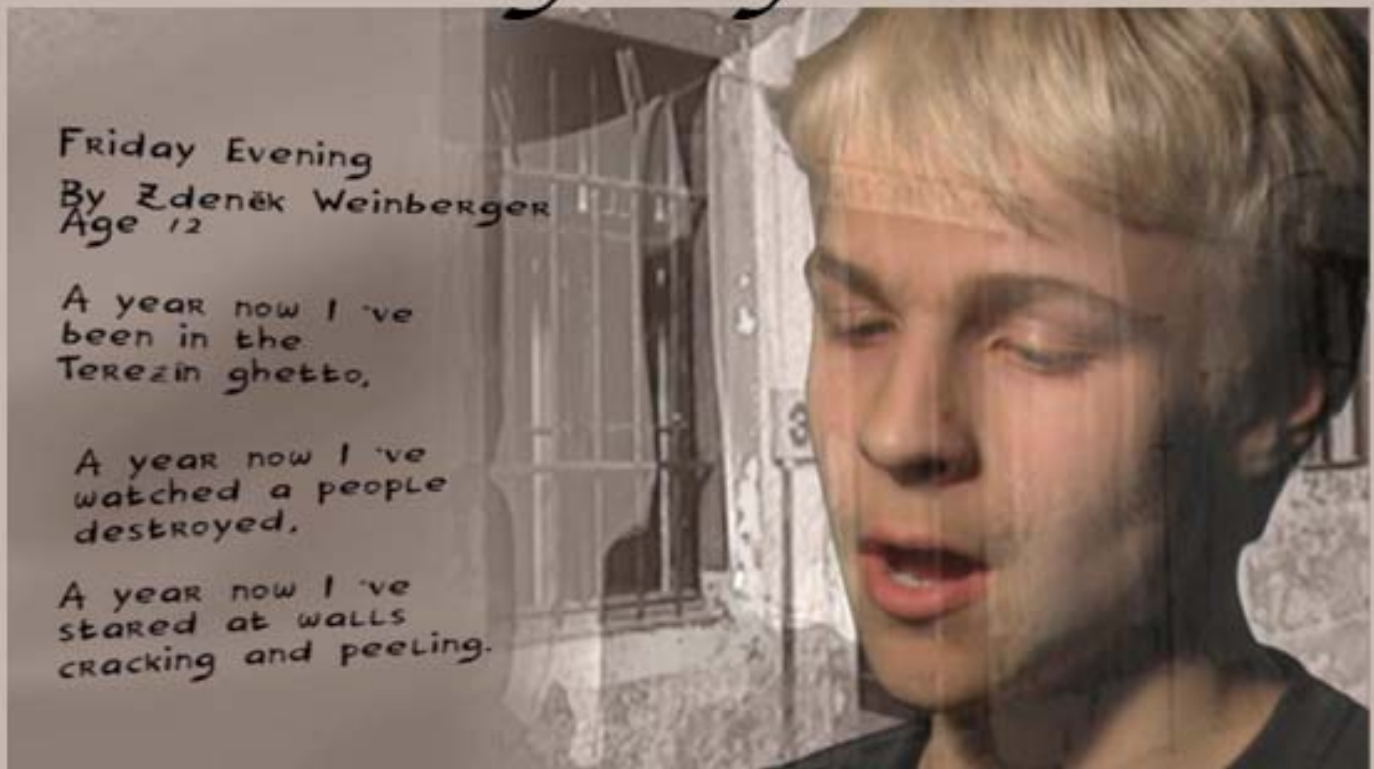


The Boys of Terezín



Teacher Resource Package

Prepared by:
Susan Starkman, B.A., M.Ed



**Toronto Jewish
Film Festival**

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Synopsis

Country of Origin: United States

Director: John Sharify

Runtime: 52 minutes

Themes: Holocaust, overcoming adversity, healing power of art, music and literature

This uplifting documentary is testament to the way that the drive for creativity cannot be stifled, even under the most challenging conditions. Risking their lives, the teenage residents of Home One, a children's concentration camp, created a magazine called VEDEM that chronicled their daily lives through essays, poems and pictures. The last boy to remain at Terezin buried all 800 pages, retrieving the manuscript after liberation. In 2010, Music of Remembrance commissioned Vedem, an oratorio based on the boys' experiences, to be performed by the Seattle Boychoir. Included in this group, is Toronto's George Brady, familiar to many as the brother of Hana Brady (Hana's Suitcase).

Curriculum Links

The Boys of Terezin can be used to meet the requirements of the Media Studies component of English, Grades 7-12. It can also be used to meet the requirements of Grade 10 History (CHC2D), Grade 12 World History: The West and the World (CHY4U), and Grade 12 Adventures in World History (CHM4E).

Related Texts

The Boys of Terezin Official Website

<http://theboysofterezin.com/~musicofr/>

Music of Remembrance

<http://musicofremembrance.org/~musicofr/>

We are Children Just the Same: Vedem, the Secret Magazine by the Boys of Terezin. Translated by R. Elizabeth Novak, edited by Paul R. Wilson. Philadelphia and Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1995.

Vedem 2010: http://www.vedem-terezin.cz/ENGLISH/home_en.html

Ways into the Text: Context

Before viewing this film, students should have some knowledge of the Holocaust. There are numerous online resources relating to Holocaust education that students can access to learn more. The official website for the film includes a detailed unit of work about Vedem magazine. That study guide can be downloaded at <http://theboysofterezin.com/~musicofr/page/vedem-teachers-resource>. Listed below are a few websites that can provide students with an introduction to learning about the Holocaust in general:

Yad Vashem

http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/index.asp?WT.mc_id=ggcamp&WT.src_h=1

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<http://www.ushmm.org/education/>

Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Centre

<http://www.wsherc.org/>

USC Shoah Foundation Institute

<http://college.usc.edu/vhi/about/segmentsfortheclassroom/index.php?gclid=CiiCttuyzqcCFcW8KgodfBMmFA>

The Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme

<http://www.un.org/en/holocaustremembrance/emainpage.shtml>

Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behaviour

<http://www.facinghistory.org/resources/hhb>

Boys of Terezin: Discussion Questions/ Activities

1. Five of the Terezin boys are interviewed in the film: George Brady, Sidney Taussig, Yehudah Bacon, Emil Kopel and Leo Lowy. Write a brief character sketch of each of these men. What do you think they were like as children? What skills did each of them draw on to survive? How does each man relate to his traumatic past? Are they alike or similar in the way that they deal with their memories of Terezin?
2. The film begins with Dvorak's Humoresques and Emil Koppel's recollection of how it kept him alive on the death march. Why do think that the director chose to begin the film this way? How does this anecdote highlight the central theme of the film?
3. Some of the boys' writing is read aloud in the film against a backdrop of archival footage of Terezin. How do the images reinforce what is being read? Do you think that the poems are as effective without the accompanying images? Why/why not?
4. Rather than have the men narrate the poetry from Vedem, the director chooses to have the boys from the Youth Choir read them aloud. Why do you think he chose do to this? What effect is it intended to have on the audience?
5. Yehudah Bacon remarks that the boys "had humour even in this most horrible situation." How do you think the boys were able to maintain their humour even when they were surrounded by so much death?
6. How effective do you think the oratorio is in conveying the words of the boys through music?
7. Music was also used as a creative outlet in Terezin. Research the children's opera Brundibar by composer Hans Krasa. How did this opera convey its subversive message?
8. Divide the class into groups of three or four and have each group look at the effects of a particular conflict on the children in those countries. Listed below are some websites that they can turn to for their research:
<http://www.unicef.org/graca/index.html>
<http://www.hrw.org/topic/childrens-rights>
<http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/children-s-rights/child-soldiers>
<http://www.icrc.org/eng/war-and-law/protected-persons/children/>
9. Have students write their own poem/essay reflecting on what they have learned from the film.

Selected Poems and Discussion Questions

Listed below are some selected passages from Vedem and discussion questions relating to them.

The Republic of Skid Anthem

Oh, what glory; all are cheering
The whole of One is on its feet
Government has come to being
Of the Republic of Škid
Every man is our brother
Christian or Jewish kid
United we march under the banner
Of the Republic of Škid
Insult us no one shall dare
No one shall dare to hit
To work hard we swear
To honor the Republic of Škid.

1. This anthem was sung every Friday as well as at all public Vedem readings and government meetings. Why was it important for the boys to have this anthem?
2. Create a musical score for the anthem (you can hear what the real anthem sounded like at: [download in mp3](#))
3. What are the values espoused by the group? Why would these values be so important to the boys?
4. What do you think the line "The whole of One is on its feet" means?
5. What is the overall tone of the anthem?

With You Mother

In filth and sludge and hunger, we suffer here, Cast into a pit of darkness, of infinite pain,
Held down by our masters, deprived of our rights, Mother mine, we shall walk forever together.
We shall walk toward the sun, though tired and weary We shall walk with courage in our brethren's footsteps, Walk on, though our bodies be numb from the beating, We shall walk to the east through the pools of blood.
We shall walk to a distant place, far beyond mountains, Into a clean world, a world of equality,
Into a world where freedom's flags fly, And all former ills are long forgotten.
We shall come to our goal, no matter how distant Fresh smiles on our faces, the race

we shall win. Dear Mother, we'll be with you forever and ever, In freedom to live,
and our rights to enjoy.

Orče (Zdeněk Ornest)

1. Who are the "brethren's footsteps" that the writer is referring to in this poem?
2. What is the significance of walking to the east?
3. Do you think that the writer has a specific country/destination in mind? If so, what might it be and why do you think so?
4. What is the tone of the poem?
5. What is the goal that the writer claims they will reach?

The Madman

I walk the streets alone and alone Pondering the evil in the world. And thoughts
about it fill my mind, As I walk the dark streets alone and alone.

I remember. Long, long ago, A madman wished to change the world, Turn it upside
down and inside out, Fill people and youth with one ideal: Take nothing on trust, let
nothing stand, Fight for every inch of land. If something is down, then lift it up, If
others stay silent, you must speak up. And so this madman years ago Tried turning
the world upside down And walked his cat instead of his dog.

Ca-nz (Petr Ginz)

1. Who is the madman that the writer is referring to? Why do you think so?
2. Why does the writer repeat the word alone in the second line?
3. What does the writer mean by turning the world upside down? How did the madman do this?
4. What do you think that the writer means by the end of the passage (And he walked his cat instead of his dog)?

The Heart

In every heart, in a nameless corner
There's probably a tiny room
Where a man cherishes his
"I" Like a ring on his little finger.
A terrible burden I cherish there,
So many feelings without a name
And I cannot express them.
I am an echo in the wind.
My child, when he is born,
Eager to live, will be a man
May he never live through
What I have seen and suffered.

I do not know what name to give
To my small room with its small door,
Perhaps a bird will whisper a message
In my ear like an echo.
Perhaps my child will say: "Dad, I know how
you are: ' My heart is so cruel to me
It will not let me dream,
But always says:
"My good man
How would you put me into words?"
Today I said: the heart is a fire,
I have no strength to put it out.

Academy (Hanuš Hachenburg)

1. What does the writer mean when he refers to a place where a man cherishes his "I"?
2. How can a person "cherish" a terrible burden"? How can you explain this contradiction?
3. What does the writer mean when he claims to be "an echo in the wind"?
4. What is the tone of the poem? Refer to specific lines to support your response.
5. What are the writer's hopes for the future?

Five

This morning at seven, so bright and so early
Five novels lay there, sewn up in a sack
Sewn up in a sack, like all of our lives,
They lay there so silent, all five.
Five books that flung back the curtain of silence,
Calling for freedom, and not for the world,
They're somebody's novels, someone who loves them....
They called out, they cried, they shed tears, and they pleaded
That they hadn't been finished, the pitiful five.
They declared to the world that the state trades in bodies
Then they slowly vanished and went out of sight.
They kept their eyes open, and they looked for the world
But nothing they found. They were silent, all five.

Academy (Hanuš Hachenburg)

1. Do you think that novels are a metaphor for something else? What might that be?
2. How can books “[fling] back the curtain of silence”? What does the writer mean by this?
3. What is the tone of this poem? Provide evidence for your response by quoting particular lines.
4. Do you think that there might be some significance to the number five? What might that be?
5. What is the greater significance of the books having “vanished and [gone] out of sight?”

My Country

I kiss my land and caress it,
Passing much time in its presence.
This land is not on this earth
Yet it is within us everywhere.

It is in the heavens, in the stars above,
Wherever the bird nation lives.
I see it again in my soul today,
And my heart is heavy with tears.

One day I shall fly to the heights above,
Free from my body's encumbrance,
Free in expansiveness, free in distance,
And free with me, my country.

Today it is small. A handful of dreams
Encloses its distant horizons
And through the heavy dreams
Shimmer the furies of war.

One day I shall enter my country,
I shall rejoin my motherland
There is my country! There is yours!
There is no "I" and no misery.

Academy (Hanuš Hachenburg)

1. Is the writer referring to a real country or a metaphorical one?
2. What does the writer mean by “bird nation”?

3. Analyse the fourth stanza of the poem. What do you think it means?
4. Why is it important for this country to have no "I"?

References

(All websites cited are from April, 2012)

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Yad Vashem

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USC Shoah Foundation Institute

<http://college.usc.edu/vhi/about/segmentsfortheclassroom/index.php?gclid=CiiCttuyzqcCFcW8KgodfBMmFA>

The Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme

<http://www.un.org/en/holocaustremembrance/emainpage.shtml>

Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behaviour

<http://www.facinghistory.org/resources/hhb>

Unicef

<http://www.unicef.org/graca/index.html>

Human Rights Watch

<http://www.hrw.org/topic/childrens-rights>

Amnesty International USA

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/children-s-rights/child-soldiers>

International Committee of the Red Cross

<http://www.icrc.org/eng/war-and-law/protected-persons/children/>