

# Lesson Plan for the Butterfly Project of Holocaust Museum Houston

## Rationale / Purpose for the Lesson

More than 12,000 children under the age of 15 passed through the Terezin Concentration Camp (also known by its German name of Theresienstadt) between the years 1942 and 1944. Of these, more than 90 percent perished during the Holocaust. During the completion of this project, students will learn about the experience of young children during the Holocaust through a study of the poems and pictures drawn by those imprisoned in Theresienstadt. They will create handmade butterflies to represent the children who were imprisoned. These butterflies are displayed in the classroom.

This set of activities should demonstrate to children that very few children survived in Terezin. By the end of the lesson, the butterflies that have been hung in the classroom with such beauty and hope are cut down for no significant reason. The butterflies that survived the cutting are usually not the most beautiful, biggest nor the brightest. Just like the children of Terezin, death of the children was random. The most beautiful did not necessarily live, nor did the biggest.

Make sure your students understand that many dreams died with the children of Terezin, dreams just like their own. Point out that one of the children (butterfly) could have been a LeBron James or Miley Cyrus. One could have been the person that cured AIDS.

This lesson plan was originally conceived by Mary Kay Porter, an advanced placement English Teacher; Cyndy Elliot, a speech and drama teacher; and Susan Myers, executive director of Holocaust Museum Houston. It was edited by the Museum's Education Department staff in April 2009.

## Materials / Teaching Resources Needed

- "I Never Saw Another Butterfly: Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp 1942–1944," edited by Hana Volavkova. Copies of this book can be found in the Holocaust Museum Houston curriculum trunks that are available for shipping to the 48 contiguous states.
- Class set of copies of the poem "I Never Saw Another Butterfly" by Pavel Friedman (p. 39 of the above text).
- Materials to make butterflies: sheets of colorful paper, glue, scissors and string. Any decorative items will do, with the exception of glitter and food products.

## Activities (2-3 Class Periods)

1. Hand out copies of the poem "The Butterfly" to your students. Read the poem aloud as a class. Discuss the following questions:
  - a. Who do you think wrote this poem?
  - b. What experiences do you think generated this poem?
  - c. To what is the poem referring?
  - d. How does this poem make you feel?
2. Introduce the book "I Never Saw Another Butterfly" by discussing with students the information found in the "Epilogue" of the book (pp. 101-103). For a shortened assignment, let them read the back cover of the book. Discuss with students their feelings and thoughts about what has been read.

3. Assign a poem to each student to read from "I Never Saw Another Butterfly." After several silent readings, ask students to see if they can find any examples of hopes, dreams and/or fears in their child's poem. After the students have read the poems and feel comfortable with it, each student should discuss his or her poem with another classmate.
4. Assign students the task of preparing an oral interpretative reading of their poems.
5. Give the students many sheets of colorful paper, glue, scissors and string. (Any decorative items will do, with the exception of glitter). Have the students create a butterfly that is a representative of the author of their poem. Students should write the name of their child on the butterfly if the child's name is available.

It is important to let each child be creative and encourage them to make whatever butterfly they feel comfortable making. Students should be prepared to explain their choice of enhancement of each of their butterflies.

Then, have the students hang their butterflies from the ceiling with string. (You may use a hole punch to make a place to attach the string to the butterfly.) Every student's butterfly should be displayed.

By the end of the class period you will have many bright and beautiful butterflies hanging from the ceiling, each representing a child of Theresienstadt.

6. Students will become attached to their butterflies, and it won't be unusual for them to bring others into the classroom to see the butterflies.

After they are comfortable with having the butterflies hanging, which could be several minutes to several days, have students give their oral interpretative reading of their child's poem. Have the student come to the front of the class, read his or her poem aloud and explain the enhancements chosen for the butterfly.

After the students' oral interpretative readings, the teacher should turn to page 96 of the book. This part of the book tells the fate of each child. After the child completes the reading, tell the class the destiny of each child. If the child dies (out of the more than 12,000, 90 percent perished) have the student walk up and cut down their butterfly.

Children will be shocked and disappointed when they learn the fate of their butterfly. Few butterflies will remain hanging from your ceiling by the end of the class period.

7. If you choose to do so, collect all of the butterflies from your class and send them to Holocaust Museum Houston (see information below).

### **Extensions**

1. Theresienstadt and Terezin can arguably be the name for the same place. People using German would call the town Theresienstadt (stadt means city), while Czechs would use the name Terezin. In writing about the ghetto, the name is used interchangeably, depending on the language and/or purpose of the writer. It is a common practice in historian's writing about the past to use the names and terms utilized by the political authorities of the time. Thus, historians write about the ghetto Theresienstadt, but before 1941 and after 1945 some refer to the town as Terezin. Today, in the Czech Republic, the town is called Terezin and the memorial is named the Terezin Memorial.

It is interesting to note that, in the diary entries of Gonda Redlich, who was in charge of the youth welfare department, he, like many other Czechs sent to Theresienstadt, continues to refer

to the Czech garrison town by its Czech name, Terezin, rather than by the term used by speakers of the German language or during the Nazi regime.

Ask your students: What is in a name? Why are these distinctions important linguistically, historically or culturally?

2. The newspapers and magazines created by children in Theresienstadt show their perception of what was happening around them. From the children's point of view, we read stories of how they dealt with daily life in the ghetto, including how they related to each other, themselves, their parents and their caretakers. We also learn of their daily concerns of hunger, transports and saying goodbye to friends and family. The objective of the writers was to impart knowledge, provide reading material and entertain.

The journal "Kamarad" (meaning Comrade or Friend) was published by the boys who lived in Room A of the children's barrack at Q609. Twenty-two issues of the journal were published. The issues were written in the children's handwriting and illustrated by its editor, Ivan Polak.

Beit Theresienstadt in Israel houses many of the original issues of "Kamarad" and has placed scans online. Beit Theresienstadt has translated one of the issues into English (Issue 8). Have students visit the Web site at <http://www.bterezin.org.il/kamarad/index.htm> to view the journals and read the translated issue.

Ask your students how this aspect of children's response to the events of the Holocaust differs from that of the poems and drawings they viewed in the book "I Never Saw Another Butterfly."

As a followup, you could create a class newspaper that details events over a period of time using materials you find in the classroom.

### **Assessment of Student Learning**

In addition to creating the butterflies per the above directions, have students journal about the butterfly they created – why they chose the decorations they did, what the poem meant to them and how this poem relates to one child's experience during the Holocaust. It is usually helpful for students to reflect on the following quote:

"Children were neither just the mute and traumatized witnesses to this war, nor merely its innocent victims; the war invaded their imaginations, and the war raged inside them."  
— Nicholas Stargardt, "Witnesses of War: Children's Lives Under the Nazis"

# The Butterfly

The last, the very last,  
So richly, brightly, dazzlingly yellow.  
Perhaps if the sun's tears would sing  
against a white stone....

Such, such a yellow Is carried lightly 'way up high. It went away I'm sure because it wished to kiss the world good-bye.	For seven weeks I've lived in here, Penned up inside this ghetto. But I have found what I love here. The dandelions call to me And the white chestnut branches in the court. Only I never saw another butterfly.
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That butterfly was the last one.  
Butterflies don't live in here, in the ghetto.

Pavel Friedman, June 4, 1942

Born in Prague on January 7, 1921.  
Deported to the Terezin Concentration Camp on April 26, 1942.  
Died in Aushchwitz on September 29, 1944.