

Reader's Guide

The Holocaust took place before and during World War II (1939–45) when German leader Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party sought to systematically destroy Europe's Jews, political opponents of Nazism, and other people whom Hitler considered undesirables, such as Roma (Gypsies), homosexuals, and the mentally and physically disabled. *Experiencing the Holocaust: Novels, Nonfiction Books, Short Stories, Poems, Plays, Films, and Music* is a two-volume reference set that provides detailed information on twenty-three creative works, appropriate for young-adult audiences, about the Holocaust. Many of the works were written by people who were alive during the Holocaust era: victims, survivors, witnesses, and bystanders. Some of these works, like *The Diary of a Young Girl*, were written during the Holocaust and reflect daily experiences in an extraordinary time. Others, including Ruth Minsky Sender's memoir *The Cage*, were written many years later, after decades of painful reflection. Some of the works in this set were created by the children of survivors, people who spent their lives far from Hitler's Europe and yet grew up constantly under its shadow. And finally, a number of the pieces discussed in *Experiencing the Holocaust* were crafted by people



who have no direct link to the Holocaust but who have been moved to address these events of unparalleled tragedy and gross inhumanity.

Experiencing the Holocaust will help students understand the complexities of the Holocaust era through examinations of important works of literature, film, and music. Such works offer personal perspectives on a subject that can be daunting in its enormity. The statistics and bare facts of the Holocaust can be overwhelming, but the stories of individuals as rendered on the page or screen—their suffering, desperation, and determination—can give students fresh insights and deeper understanding of the time. Through the study of these works, students can explore specific events, issues, personalities, and themes associated with the Nazis' attempt to destroy European Jewry. Each of the books, poems, plays, and other works in this set—many of which are commonly taught in today's classrooms—addresses significant aspects of the Holocaust, including the widespread anti-Semitism in pre-war Germany; the imprisonment of Jews and others in ghettos and in concentration camps; the mass murders of Jews and other prisoners in death camps; resistance efforts in the ghettos and camps; courageous rescues undertaken by individuals and communities; and the plight of the Jewish refugees in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

Each essay in *Experiencing the Holocaust* is supplemented with informative sidebars that offer additional insight into the people, places, and happenings of the Holocaust. Other features of this set include a timeline listing important events of the Holocaust era; a words to know section defining terms used throughout the set; a bibliography of general Holocaust sources, including notable Internet sites; and a comprehensive subject index.

Organization of *Experiencing the Holocaust*

The twenty-three essays included in *Experiencing the Holocaust* are arranged by genre. Each of the seven main genre sections contained in the set—novels, nonfiction books, short stories, poems, plays, films, and music—begins with an overview of Holocaust-related works of that genre and also includes an annotated list of additional notable titles. Some of these works are intended for a general audience, but many are

specifically directed at young adults. Following the overview essay that begins each genre section—with the exception of the music section—two to six essays provide detailed analysis of specific works in that genre. Some of the essays contain excerpts from the works being examined. All of the essays include the following sections:

- Identification and summary of the work
- Biographical information on the author or director of the work
- A brief chronology of historical events relating to the work
- Historical background on the issues and events highlighted in the work, providing a larger context in which to view the work
- Plot and character summary or, for poems and nonfiction books, an analysis of subject matter
- Major themes and stylistic characteristics of the work
- Research and activity ideas that explore different facets of the work
- Guide to sources—books and Web sites—containing additional information on the work and the events it addresses

The music genre section is an extended overview of Holocaust-related music, including specific composers, orchestral pieces, and protest songs.

Inclusion Criteria

A number of criteria were considered in the selection of titles to be featured in *Experiencing the Holocaust*. Included are several of the world's most significant works about the Holocaust—such as Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* and Elie Wiesel's memoir *Night*—that are suitable for students. Many of the works discussed in this set feature young characters, offering students protagonists with whom they can readily identify. Presenting a wide variety of viewpoints was another important factor in deciding which works to include. The pieces discussed in *Experiencing the Holocaust* explore the era from the perspective of men and women, young and old,

victims and survivors, rescuers and bystanders. While the Holocaust is studied primarily as a tragedy of the Jewish people, several million others, including non-Jewish Poles, Roma (Gypsies), and Jehovah's Witnesses, were persecuted and murdered by the Nazis, and their experiences are addressed here as well.

Finally, *Experiencing the Holocaust* was compiled with the intention of exploring a broad spectrum of issues and events associated with the Holocaust era. For example, subjects addressed in this set include the hiding of a Jewish boy at a Catholic school in France (Louis Malle's film *Au Revoir Les Enfants*); a Jew passing as a Christian in Nazi-held Poland (Rose Zar's memoir *In the Mouth of the Wolf*); the horrifying presence of the crematoria in the Nazi death camps (Nelly Sachs's poem "O the Chimneys"); England's extraordinary but flawed program to rescue thousands of Jewish children (the documentary film *Into the Arms of Strangers*); and the postwar illegal immigration to the region that became the state of Israel (Carol Matas's novel *After the War*).

Special Thanks

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Comments and Suggestions

We welcome your comments on *Experiencing the Holocaust*. Please send correspondence to: Editor, *Experiencing the Holocaust*, U•X•L, 27500 Drake Road, Farmington Hills, Michigan, 48331-3535; call toll-free: 800-877-4253; fax to: 248-699-8097; or send e-mail via <http://www.gale.com>.