



American Witnesses

Poster Set Discussion Guide

Introduction

The poster set *American Witnesses* highlights the experiences of men and women in the US military who saw firsthand evidence of Nazi atrocities in April 1945. It explores their reactions to what they saw and heard using their oral, written, and visual testimony. The poster set also includes the testimonies of Holocaust survivors liberated by US military personnel.

The following is a discussion guide to be used in conjunction with the poster set, which can be found on the Museum's website [here](#). In this guide, you will find resource suggestions to convey pertinent historical background information, ideas on how to display the poster set, and optional discussion questions and group activities.

Discussion Goals

- Participants will think critically about the responses of and challenges faced by both the servicemen and women who liberated the camps, as well as the challenges faced by survivors in the aftermath of the Holocaust.
- Participants will have an increased understanding of how the impact of genocide affects post-war conditions.

Preparation and Background Materials

This discussion guide is most effective when paired with contextual information about the Holocaust, which can be conveyed in advance of viewing the posters or as part of the session.

I. Historical Background on the Holocaust

For participants:

Providing participants with information about how and why the Holocaust happened helps to ensure that all participants have a shared level of knowledge, and also helps participants understand the larger context of Nazi Germany and World War II. The film [The Path to Nazi Genocide](#) provides relevant background information and can be shown during the session, or participants can watch all or part of the film before viewing the posters. The 38-minute film examines the Nazis' rise and consolidation of power in Germany, and can provoke reflection and discussion about the role of ordinary people, professions, institutions, and nations between 1918 and 1945.



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For instructors or facilitators:

The following resources offer useful context for those preparing for and running discussions.

[Holocaust Encyclopedia Articles](#)

[Introduction to the Holocaust](#)

[Antisemitism](#)

["Final Solution": Overview](#)

[Nazi Camps](#)

[Series: Liberation of Nazi Camps](#)

[The Aftermath of the Holocaust: Effects on Survivors](#)

[The Aftermath of the Holocaust: Personal Stories](#)

II. Materials

The *American Witnesses* Poster Set is available for free download on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum [website](#). It can be printed as either a 3' x 2' (large format) or 8.5" by 11" (small format) full-color poster set. In the event that the posters need to be viewed digitally, a powerpoint presentation of the posters is also available. Each poster set includes 18 different posters and audio testimony, which can be found by dialing the number found on each poster.

Before starting the session, decide how you will print and display the posters, and if you will ask participants to view the posters individually or in small groups. In the "Discussion Options" section below, you'll find guidance for how to run a discussion in either format.

Additional resources can also be found at www.ushmm.org/awposters:

Poster Set Preview

- Thumbnail version of the full set of 18 posters.

Audio Testimony Transcripts

- Each poster is accompanied by an audio testimony. These transcripts are provided if you are outside of the domestic United States and cannot access the dial-in audio tour, or if you wish to print out the transcripts of the testimonies.

Eyewitness Films

- This amateur footage, filmed by American servicemen and women using handheld cameras, captures some of the moments of liberation. The film is about eight minutes long and contains graphic footage that may not be suitable for all audiences.



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Discussion Options

The following sequence is timed to take around 45 minutes depending on the size of the group and the available time for the discussion.

I. Introductory Comments (5 minutes)

Pass out posters, or hang them up around a common space for participants to view. Let participants know that they will need their phone to call in to the audio tour. (Note: If participants are unable to use their phones, or if you are outside of the domestic United States, the audio testimonies are available to be printed for participants to read while viewing the posters.)

Explain: “We’re going to look more closely at liberation, and specifically, the American men and women who liberated the camps at the end of the war, as well as survivors who experienced liberation at this time. In a moment, you’ll have time to view and listen to individual stories of those who were present at liberation. As you explore these stories, think about their response to what they are seeing. What challenges faced these individuals, both the liberators and the survivors? What choices would they have had to make? What realities might have influenced their choices? After you have time to view the posters and listen to the testimony, we’ll come together as a group to discuss what you saw and heard.”

II. Individual/Small Group Work (15–20 minutes)

There are many different ways to run this discussion. Below you’ll find a few options based on the size of the group and the ability to print the posters in a large or small format. In either format, allow participants 15–20 minutes to view the posters, listen to the audio testimony, and think about the questions you posed in the introduction.

i. Individual Exploration in a Large Group | 3’ x 2’ Posters (Large Format)

Allow participants to explore the posters individually, accessing the audio tour or reading the transcripts of the testimony. If you are unable to print the full set of posters in a large format, it is recommended that the first nine posters be printed. Within the first nine posters, you will find the title and introduction panels, the credit panel, six individual story posters that share a wide variety of witness experiences, and one experience of a Holocaust survivor.

ii. Small Group Exploration | 8” x 11” Posters or 3’ x 2’ Posters (Small or Large Format)

Break the participants into small groups and handout/ask each group to view either poster Set A or Set B. Below you’ll find recommendations for dividing the posters so that each group explores a wide variety of witness experiences and one experience of a Holocaust survivor. If you are unable to print all of the posters, choose either Set A or Set B to print. If possible, display the Title or Introduction poster on a large screen or projector while the participants are in their small groups.

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SET A	SET B
Gina Rappaport <i>Holocaust survivor</i>	Lucjan Salzman <i>Holocaust Survivor</i>
Lieutenant Marie Knowles Ellifritz <i>130th Evacuation Hospital</i>	Lieutenant Beatrice Wachter <i>51st Field Hospital</i>
Sergeant Benjamin Ferencz <i>US Third Army</i>	Chief Warrant Officer Victor L. Wegard <i>US Third Army</i>
Sergeant Leon Bass <i>183rd Combat Engineer Battalion</i>	Sergeant William A. Scott III <i>183rd Combat Engineer Battalion</i>
Corporal Leonard Linton <i>82nd Airborne Division</i>	Private Jesse Oxendine <i>82nd Airborne Division</i>
Corporal Anthony Acevedo <i>70th Infantry Division</i>	Corporal Anthony Acevedo <i>70th Infantry Division</i>
Private Hilbert Margol <i>42nd Infantry Division</i>	Sergeant Raymond Buch <i>11th Armored Division</i>

III. Discussion (10–15 minutes)

After participants are done exploring the poster set, bring the group back together for a discussion about what they saw and heard.

Ask: “In these stories, what challenges did the Allied forces face when they encountered the concentration camps? What choices could they have made? What options were available to them?”

Possible Responses:

- Dealing with their own emotional or mental shock of seeing the camps and the conditions that individuals were forced to endure
- Becoming witnesses to the crimes of the Nazis
- Documenting what had happened in order to prosecute those responsible
- Burying the bodies
- Tending to the living (examples: medical needs, emotional needs, support to move on)
- Addressing disease inside of camps and determining what to do with the camps themselves



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Ask: “Those who survived the camps faced different challenges. What challenges were they immediately faced with in the aftermath of the Holocaust?”

Possible Responses:

- Reclaiming their dignity
- The prospect of rebuilding their lives after the Holocaust was daunting
- The long and difficult road to physical recovery/survival
- Searching for their families (Note: The [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration](#) established the Central Tracing Bureau to help survivors locate relatives who had survived the concentration camps.)
- Dealing with the loss of family, friends, and communities
- Some may have been unable or unwilling to return to their homes because of antisemitism that persisted in parts of Europe and the trauma they had suffered
- They may have also wanted to seek justice or revenge for what had happened to them

Ask: “Why is it important to study the aftermath of the Holocaust? As a member of the military (if applicable), what do you think is important to take away from this discussion?”

IV: Additional Resources

[Additional Oral Testimonies](#)

[Bibliography: Liberators](#)

[Bibliography: Displaced Persons](#)

[Teaching Materials on the Holocaust](#)

These lesson plans introduce key concepts and information to students. Grounded in historical context, the lessons utilize primary source materials from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s collections, and may be useful for educators preparing discussions with a variety of audiences.