

## Family Stories: We're All Part of History

Dear Educator,

Most students think that history is only something we read about in books. They don't realize that we are *all* part of history, that *they* are making history--and that our experiences and those of our families, friends, neighbors and classmates all have something to teach us.

This activity is about personal stories. They will discover that *everyone* has a story. When we ask good questions and listen to each other, we understand each other better. This is a perfect activity to do now, while so many of us are at home, concerned about family members or neighbors we can't visit. Make a phone call or use FaceTime or some other app to connect.

There is an array of ways you can use this activity.

- 1) Stand alone using the handouts provided here. (Grades 5 and up)
  - a) Students interview a family or community member using the attached guidelines (10 minutes or more depending how the conversation goes)
  - b) Students creatively share what they learn in the interview using one of the suggestions below. (45 minutes)
  
- 2) If you have more time, you can introduce the activity using one of the following resources. ([Preview resources here](#)). These resources are especially appropriate to use in April, which is Genocide Awareness Month. They share one person's family history, expressed through painting, film and literature.
  - a) *The Memory Project* Video (10 minutes). The video shows Roz Jacobs painting her uncle Kalman as his sister, Anna, describes how she and Kalman struggled to escape from the Warsaw ghetto and evade the Nazis.

**Note:** This video can serve as a springboard for asking questions and responding creatively to a family story. It is a hopeful view of the power of connection and creativity.

- b) *Finding Kalman* film (30 minutes). Shared memories and art help a family reclaim the spirit of child lost in the Holocaust, reaffirming that no matter what happens in life there must always be room for joy. This award-winning film features four generations of a Holocaust survivor's family and shows how the legacy has been communicated across generations. It provides some historical

background about the Warsaw ghetto. It can inspire students to ask questions of their elders and share their stories.

**Note:** There are 45 seconds showing disturbing images of the Warsaw ghetto from 10:50 through 11:28 in the film. These include starving people and two dead bodies without clothing being placed on a handwagon. We recommend you preview the film to see if it's appropriate for your students.

c) *Finding Kalman: A Boy in Six Million* (64-page book) Grades 5 and up

*Finding Kalman: A Boy In Six Million* weaves a Holocaust survivor's story of escape and survival with her daughter's desire to have a purposeful life, to answer destruction through the act of creating.

Kalman was a young boy who was killed during the Holocaust. His voice, though silenced, remains loud in the lives of both mother and daughter in this story of memory, self-discovery and creation. The book is a beautiful mother-daughter dialogue about growing up and sharing a difficult past with love and optimism. This paperback book usually sells for \$19.99. During the Coronavirus pandemic, you can download a pdf copy of the book free of charge.

[Download the book: \*Finding Kalman: A Boy in Six Million\*](#)

[Download a discussion guide and background information.](#)

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Most of us think that history is only something we read about in books. We don't realize that we are *all* part of history, that *we* are making history--and that our experiences and those of our families, friends, neighbors and classmates all have something to teach us.

In this activity, you'll discover that *everyone* has a story. When we ask good questions and listen to each other, we understand each other better. Make a phone call or use an app to connect. You may be surprised by how much this interview means to the person you call.

### What to do:

1. Interview a family member or a person you know who has had a life-changing experience, Use the questions on the next page. Feel free to add your own questions. Write the responses to the interview questions on a piece of paper.
2. Think about the person's answers. Does it change the way you view him or her? Does it change the way you view yourself? Was there anything that surprised you? Explain.
3. Find a way to share what you learned about the person. Here are some ideas:
  - a. Write a poem, story or song about the person's life
  - b. Draw a picture of the person. Here's a lesson for making portraits using black and gray [crayons](#). You can use any materials you have. Write a caption to go with your picture.
  - c. Make an exhibit panel about the person with an illustration and a caption that will help someone understand something about your subject.
  - d. Make a book with illustrations and text describing important moments in the person's life. You could write a "dual memoir" with incidents from your own life and the other person's. For ideas, read the memoir, [Finding Kalman](#), written by a Holocaust survivor and her daughter. This presentation has more ideas.
  - e. Write a letter to the person telling him or her what their story meant to you.
4. Share your creation with the person you interviewed and other members of the family or community.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **Family Stories: We're All Part of History**

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where are you from originally? Where do you live now?
4. Describe an experience that changed your life?
5. Why was the experience life changing?
6. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?