





# Elementary School Teacher Guide

## Grades 3-5

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This online interactive museum tells the life story of Beba Epstein, a Jewish girl born in eastern Europe in 1922. Over ten chapters, this exhibition relates the details of Beba's life. Though she never moved as a child, her home, Vilna, was first part of Poland, then the Soviet Union, then briefly the capital of Lithuania and renamed Vilnius, then occupied by Germany during WWII, then after the war again a part of the Soviet Union. Finally, in 1991, Vilnius became the capital of an independent Lithuania. The borders and governments kept changing and the laws kept changing and Beba's life kept changing, but she managed to survive illness, wars, famine, more wars, the death of her parents, imprisonment, forced labor, almost drowning, more illness and finally a struggle to join her last close living relative in the United States. This interactive exhibition shows how chance, luck, hard work, generosity, bravery, perseverance and her personal sagacity all played a part in Beba's survival and happy ending as an American citizen living in southern California. This is her unique story, but in one way or another it is the story of many immigrants who have come to the United States and many other countries around the world.

### NOTE THIS INTERACTIVE EXHIBITION:

- has three separate guides: one for elementary grades 3-5, one for middle grades 6-8, and one for high school grades 9-12. **Download the guide that best fits your class's needs. Each student can access the exhibition in their own computer or you can access the entire exhibition in a Smartboard and control what your students see and do;**
- has a **timeline** on the left side of the screen to let you and your students know when each event in Beba's life story occurred in relation to what else was going on in the world. (If the timeline overlaps the text just change your screen to 90% zoom rather than 100% or more.)
- contains **primary resource materials** and **maps**. Just click on the ARTIFACTS  OR MAPS  button on the right-hand side of the screen. The artifacts contain letters, diaries, newspaper articles, photographs, short videos and images of objects and buildings. Many of the text documents are translated into English. The maps are all relevant to the time covered in that particular chapter. **Please note that artifacts open in a new window. To return to the artifact list just close the artifact page tab in your browser, at the top of your screen.**
- **Note: if using a Smartboard, open and test each Chapter in a separate tab or page before class, since this exhibition contains a lot of information and it will take time to load everything (even if your classroom has high speed internet).**

## It can be used:

- by students on their laptops or opened in a Smart Board and used under a teacher's direction;
- depending on your classes' needs or the amount of time you have, the exhibition can be used either as an entire curriculum or an enrichment of your study of:
  - American or World history from WWI through the 1950s;
  - how stereotypical attitudes towards groups or individuals different from the general population has often led to disastrous results;
  - historical and contemporary prejudicial attitudes and how they negatively impact on individuals and general populations;
  - the history of Poland, Germany and Russia from the 1920s through the 1940s.
- to help your students develop strong research skills. You may want to start your students' research with the question *What documents do we save and why?*
- to discuss the what and why of prejudice and its terrible consequences, as well as recent questions of racial typecasting, immigration, and asylum seeking, particularly with reference to the American Dream if you're in the United States.

## Pre/Post Classroom Activity for Elementary School Students

**Before viewing this interactive exhibition** download <https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/TT-Social-Justice-Standards-June-2019.pdf>. The text clearly defines and explains the four Social Justice Standards - Identity, Diversity, Justice and Action. Copy the appropriate grade level outcomes from the chart for your class (3rd to 5th) pages 8 and 9 and format as a questionnaire. Hand out the questionnaire to each student and have them read each statement and then check if they agree or disagree with it. Discuss.

**At the completion of the project**, have your students again answer this questionnaire and discuss if and why some of their answers have changed.

## List of books for elementary school classes that you may wish to enrich your class's experience:

- *Survivors of the Holocaust: True Stories of Extraordinary Children* by Zane Whittingham
- *Passage to Freedom: The Sugihara Story* by Ken Mochizuki
- *The Whispering Town* by Jennifer Elgren
- *The Grande Mosque of Paris* by Karen Gray Ruelle
- *I will come back for you* by Marisabina Russo
- *The Harmonica* by Tony Johnston
- *Benno and the Night of Broken Glass* by Meg Wiviott
- *Simple History: A Simple Guide to World War II* by Daniel Turner

**PLEASE NOTE: YOU CAN PICK AND CHOOSE THE CHAPTERS AND ACTIVITIES THAT BEST FIT YOUR CLASSROOM NEEDS. IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO DO ALL LESSONS ON ALL CHAPTERS – FEEL FREE TO ADAPT THIS MATERIAL TO YOUR TEACHING GOALS.**

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION FOR THE TEACHER

Before beginning your exploration of this interactive exhibition, explain to your students that it is divided into 10 chapters. Each chapter covers a different moment in the actual life of Beba Epstein. The early chapters of Beba's life are based on information found in Beba's recently rediscovered autobiography of her and her family which she wrote when she was about 11. It was recently found hidden in a church in Vilnius, Lithuania. The autobiography is one of many documents that were found there. These materials were saved from the Germans during World War II. Later, these documents were hidden from the Soviets inside a church in Vilnius by a Lithuanian librarian, Antanas Ulpis. The later chapters of the exhibition are largely based on information from a video Beba agreed to do as a Holocaust survivor as well as an audio interview. In this video (excerpts can be seen in Chapter 8) Beba discussed her life just before, during and right after World War II. Other than this one video interview, Beba rarely spoke of her past once she was safe in the United States. Much of the information in this exhibition not found in Beba's autobiography or video or interviews with her family has been filled in from primary source materials.

### CHAPTER 1 Introduction



**Time Needed:** 10 minutes

**Format:** Animation

**Focus:** Introduction to Beba as a baby and young child.

**Introductory Statement:** "This online museum exhibition is about the life of Beba Epstein who was born in Vilna, Poland in 1922. This chapter introduces you to Beba as a young child - note the personal characteristics she had as a child. Many of these personal characteristics will reappear again and again. Some of them helped her survive the terrible experiences she had during WWII and the difficulties she faced trying to immigrate to the United States after the war!"

**Process:** Let students watch this short section and then ask them: "What do you think Beba was like? What words would you use to describe her as a baby? What questions does this raise in your minds about where this interactive exhibition will take them?"

You can point out the various information on the screen such as the **timeline** on the left and the **ARTIFACTS**  and **MAPS**  buttons on the right. Click them to demonstrate what is available. If the students are researching on their own laptops, have them click the artifact button to find out more about the topic. Explore a few artifacts with the class. There is much more information in each of the following chapters!! Every chapter has its own specific primary source materials available to the students to search through if interested. **You can pull down the list of artifacts and select only those you want your students to use.**

**Resource materials:** Images of sections of student written autobiographies and translated excerpts of biographies give a fuller picture of the lives of different Jews living in and around Vilna in the late 1800s and early 1900s and a scholar's text.

**Follow-up Activity:** Have your students ask their parents: What were they like as a baby? Do they have any nice stories to tell about when they were very young? Are they still the same as they were when they were babies? How are they the same and how have they changed?

## CHAPTER 2

### Biographies of Beba’s grandparents, parents, and siblings

**Time Needed:** 20 minutes plus discussion time.

**Format:** Animations with voice-over by young Beba.

**Focus:** What is known about Beba’s family and her background and life before, during, and after WWI in greater Poland from the mid 1800s through mid 1930s.

**Resource Materials:** Photos, posters and objects to increase your students’ understanding of the life of Jewish families living in Poland and Russia from mid 1800s to early 1900s. The resources include texts, images and music and a scholar text.

**Introductory Statement:** “Beba was 11 when she wrote an autobiography of her life and her family as a school assignment which she submitted to a children’s autobiography contest. This chapter is based on what she wrote about her family. Her autobiography was recently found among documents hidden since WWII. This autobiography was recently found hidden in a church in Vilnius, Lithuania. The autobiography is one of many documents that were found there. These materials were saved from the Germans during World War II. During the war, Germans were selecting, collecting and sending Jewish documents and objects to the “Institute for the Jewish Question” in Frankfurt. The Institute was founded to collect and supply Germans with “scientific evidence” that Jews were inferior. This “evidence” justified what the Nazis were doing to the Jews. The Nazis planned to build a museum about the former race of Jews after the war. Beba’s autobiography was not selected by the Germans, but the Jewish workers who were sorting the materials saved it and hid it to avoid destruction. After the war, it was hidden from the Soviets in a church in Lithuania by a Lithuanian librarian, Antanas Ulpis, and only discovered in 2017.”

**Process:** Have students listen to and read the text along with Beba as she introduces each member of her family. Point out that Beba has four grandparents, her father’s parents and her mother’s parents. Beba begins with her mother’s parents. Next Beba describes her father’s parents, then her father and her mother and finally her siblings. Students can write a few keywords that describe each member of Beba’s family as they listen. Discuss students’ notes and what they think of Beba’s family.

**Discussion:** This is a good introduction to comparative cultures. Ask, “How are Beba’s family members like yours and how are they different?”

Next, ask students if they know people in their community or neighborhood who are different from them and their families. Ask students to focus on – “What things do they have in common with you?” Explain: “Focusing on those things we share in common with people who are different from us can help us overcome prejudice.”

**Follow-up Activity:** Have your students ask the following question at home after viewing this first section: “Who is the oldest living member of our family?” Have your students interview that person or a parent, grandparent or another older relative and take notes to bring back to class. They might ask: What do you remember about growing up and your school? What were the most significant events or things that happened to them when they were young? How have things changed? Were there any new technologies created when they were young? (TV, rockets to the moon, computers, cell phones, digital cameras, internet, etc.) How did these things change your life?

Or

Have students interview one of their oldest relatives (parent, grandparent, great grandparent or great aunt or uncle) and turn their notes into a short biography of that family member’s life.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Beba’s summers as a young child**

**Time Needed:** 20-30 minutes depending on how long it takes to read each text and have a follow-up discussion about the segregation of groups based on religious beliefs or nationality. If you don’t have too much time just click on Drosknik and read about where Beba spent her early summers.

**Format:** Map of Poland in the late 1920s and early 1930s with dots marking popular summer resorts. To find out more about any resort just click the dot. It will pull up that summer resort town with pictures and a brief descriptive text. You can then click on resource materials to find out more if your students are interested.

**Focus:** More about the lifestyle of and relationship between Jews and non-Jews living in Poland between WWI and WWII. – For your class, the question related to this section is – **What is your attitude toward people in your town, neighborhood or community who are different from you and your family?**

**Resource Materials:** Large selection of photographs and other images of people visiting summer resorts from the mid- and late 1920s through the late 1930s and a scholar’s text on the topic.

**Process:** Ask questions in the introductory statement and then look at each site briefly. Read the discussion text below to your students after they have explored all the sites. This section will reinforce reading to find information and drawing information from images. The resort nearest to Vilna is where Beba spent her summers as a young child. This section will also include an animation of Beba as a child practicing several of the activities she did during her summer vacations. For most classes, a single click will provide enough information to have a discussion about how prejudice can be found by just noting with whom you choose to be friendly.

**Introductory Statement:** “How do you spend your summer? Who do you play with? Do your friends have the same religion or race as you? We believe most of Beba’s friends were Jewish though she did have non-Jewish acquaintances such as some neighbors and the family maid. What does this say about Beba’s

childhood and where she lived? In Europe, in the 1920s, Jews and most Slavic people were regarded as inferior by people of Germanic origin. Poland, where Beba lived in the 1920s, following WWI, was relatively liberal. Social mixing, even if not complete, was more common than in most European countries.”

**Discussion:** Through looking at how most people spent their summers in post-WWI Poland, students should become aware of the social and religious segregation in all Central and Eastern European countries. Though Jews had lived in Vilna for over 150 years, most never fully integrated into Polish society. However, the Poles did, on occasion, socialize with Jews. Poles were also prejudiced against Ukrainians and Lithuanians. ‘Why do you think this was?’

Many clothing, hardware and food stores well as shoemakers and dressmaker shops were owned by Jews. Many Christians and Jews worked together in factories owned by either Christians or Jews. Often rich and middle-class Christians and Jews would attend the same operas and concerts, but they rarely socialized together or went out to dinner together. “Can you think of examples of this prejudice in our community?”

Jewish families who had enough money made use of Jewish domestic servants and also sometimes hired Christian Poles to work for them as cooks, maids or nannies caring for their children. Beba’s father was an assistant bank manager and worked with both Christians and Jews. Middle-class Jews were more likely to meet and socialize with Polish Christians than with Orthodox Jews. **Why would Jews be even less likely to associate with Orthodox members of their community than with members of the Polish Christian community?**

Orthodox Jews tended to separate themselves from the non-Orthodox Jews because of their different lifestyles. Religious Jews had their own schools taught in Hebrew, ate only kosher food and had special customs that were different from non-orthodox Jews such as men and women not shaking hands and women always covering their hair. This prejudice still exists. Have your students ask themselves; “Do you have a prejudice against another group of people or individuals based on where they come from, the way they look or dress or because of their religious beliefs?” **This can be a sensitive topic**, but students must understand that the United States, as well as many other countries, are nations of immigrants and that is what makes them strong. Each person brings a different strength, skillset, ideas or knowledge which benefits everyone.

**Follow-up Activity:** Have your students write a few reasons why prejudice is wrong and how they would feel if other students in the class rejected or teased them and wouldn’t let them join in games because they were different in some way. Alternately, have them look up famous American immigrants such as Albert Einstein, Salman Khan, Oscar de la Renta, Henry Kissinger, Pablo Casals, Yoyo Ma, Sergey Brin, Bob Marley, Carlos Santana, Gloria Estefan, Guillermo del Toro, Nikola Tesla, Ayn Rand, Andrew Carnegie, Joseph Pulitzer, etc. and write a short paragraph on where they came from, why they immigrated, why they are famous and how it has benefited the United States or Americans. If you are not in the United States, you can find examples of famous immigrants (or famous people from a group that suffers prejudice in your society) in your own countries and have your students research the same topics.



## CHAPTER 4

### Beba in upper elementary school

**Time Needed:** 20 minutes to 1 hour depending on discussion length and interest in looking at and reading the many examples of students' work.

**Format:** Images of many school notebooks created by students age 8 to 12 attending different types of Jewish schools in Poland in the 1920s and 1930s.

**Focus:** Beba's elementary school education

**Resource Materials:** Photos and videos of students and teachers in a wide variety of religious and secular Jewish schools as well as student texts, lists of school rules, classroom activities and music performed in schools by and for students and a scholar text.

**Process:** Read the introductory statement and then have your students review the materials in this section. Discuss how having students who were Jewish and Christian attending different schools may have led to prejudice.

**Introduction:** Ask, "Why would people of different religious beliefs have difficulty relating to each other?"

**How would school help create a segregated society?**

Many Jewish children spoke Yiddish at home throughout Central and Eastern Europe. The Yiddish language is a combination of several sources, with medieval German and Hebrew as the main components, and is written in Hebrew characters. This is not exceptional, as many languages integrate components of others. English, for example, consists of a balance between its two historic elements, the Germanic and the Romance languages.

All Poles spoke Polish at home.

In Polish public schools and church-run schools everything was taught in Polish.

Many Polish Jewish children attended Jewish schools.

- Boys from Orthodox Jewish families could attend religious schools where they were taught in Hebrew. Later studies in such schools focused on a study of the Torah (the first five books of the bible).
- Orthodox Jewish girls and all other Jewish children, even those from non-religious families, could attend a variety of other Jewish schools. In these schools, Yiddish was the language of instruction because Yiddish was spoken in most Jewish homes. The students first learned to read and write in Yiddish as well as to do simple arithmetic. Some other schools were beginning to teach in Hebrew because they were Zionist, a movement that advocated for the use of the Hebrew language by Jews among other things.
- Students from poor families likely attended Polish public schools, or sometimes the community could come together to help pay for a child's education at a private Jewish school. Many studied until 3rd grade and then had to leave school to work to help support their families.

- Starting in fourth grade, students in Jewish schools were taught in both Polish (the national language) and Yiddish and studied all subjects from literature and higher mathematics to geography and science.
- In Jewish high school students were taught additional languages. The most popular languages were German and Russian.

**Discussion:** “The school work you have accessed was done by students in the late 1920s and early 1930s in progressive Jewish schools similar to Beba’s school. How does the schoolwork that Beba and her classmates were required to do compare with what you do in school today? How do you feel about the fact that many poor Jewish children had to leave school to go to work at age 8 or 9 once they had mastered simple arithmetic and basic reading and writing?” “What language(s) do you speak? What languages do you learn in school? How has school changed in the past 100 years? Why? Middle-class students like Beba and her friends learned to read, write and speak Yiddish, Polish and a third language. How would not being able to speak or read Polish properly affect poorer Jews? How would Beba’s ability to speak and write Polish, Russian, and Yiddish affect her relationship with her non-Jewish neighbors?” Note: Many Yiddish words are the same or similar in German. This may have made it easier for Beba to learn German later in life.

## CHAPTER 5

### 3D animated walk-through map of Vilna with photos of people and places Beba would have recognized

**Time Needed:** 30 to 60 minutes

**Format:** Interactive map of Vilna. Students can walk through six areas of 1930s Vilna where most of the Jews lived, worked and played.

**Focus:** How to read a map. How maps provide information about its history, importance and its relationship to the surrounding area? How to use a map to trace a city’s growth and history. Use maps to help students think about what one finds in the center of most old cities and what exists around the edges. (**Note: *the oldest parts of a city are usually in its center while parks, industrial zones and suburbs are usually further away from the center.***) Students can use the walk-throughs to assess who lived and worked in Vilna.

**(Note: Most Jews in Vilna lived and worked in integrated communities of Catholics, Protestants and Jews. Only very orthodox Jews live in areas which were totally Jewish.)**

**Resource Materials:** Photos of central Vilna and people, videos of street scenes, objects, music and a scholar lecture.

**Process:** Read the introductory statement. Then ask your students to select areas to walk through 1930s Vilna. Have them look carefully to see if they can tell if the individuals they pass by are Jewish or Christian. Have them also click on the red dots they find around each scene. That will open windows that will let them see into schools and buildings, etc. Ask “How is Vilna in the 1920s and 1930s similar to your city or town? How is it different?”



**Introduction:** This Chapter will give students a sense of what Vilna was like when Beba was growing up in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Christians and non-religious Jews lived and worked in the same residential and commercial areas. As Beba's parents were middle-class, non-Orthodox Jews, her neighborhood was integrated. In fact, most middle-class, non-Orthodox Jews in Vilna lived in religiously integrated apartment houses and neighborhoods. Many of the stores in Vilna where everyone shopped were owned by Jews. Both Christians and non-religious middle-class Jews attended the same cultural events from movies to operas and concerts and visited cultural centers, museums and parks. Christian and Jewish factory workers worked together in factories that were owned by either Jews or Christians.

In contrast, Orthodox Jews did not socialize with Christians. Orthodox Jews living in Vilna lived together in the same apartment houses near kosher butchers and stores owned by other Orthodox Jews. The most religious Jews living in Poland generally lived in segregated small towns rather than in cities.

**Note before clicking on the map:** Most men, rich and poor, in the 1920s and 1930s wore hats and suits. Most women wore dresses, hats or scarves and long-sleeved coats or jackets when outside except in the warm summer. Orthodox Jewish women cut their hair short after they were married for religious reasons, but they wore scarves or wigs to cover their heads. Most Orthodox Jewish men wore beards while most non-Orthodox Jewish men shaved. Some Christian men wore beards and others shaved. So, most of the time, it was not possible to tell most people's religious beliefs by the way they looked.

**Follow-up:** Have students working alone or in groups create a map of their neighborhood or even a map of their city or town with short texts highlighting the important places. They can document areas using smartphones if they have access to them. **Ask:** Are most of the people living in your communities limited to one ethnicity or religion? Are there many different types of people living in your community or town? Can you tell how much a family earns by the way they look? Can you tell by looking at someone where they originally came from, or their religious beliefs? What influences where people live in your town or city? Does this matter to you? Does it influence whom you chose as your friends? **Purpose:** Do your students indicate prejudices against a particular group for any reason? **Discuss:** The United States, as many other countries, is a nation of immigrants and all people are equal under the law! This will become important as you move through this series of exhibits!

## CHAPTER 6

### Beba as a teenager spent a summer working as a junior counselor at a Bund Camp

**Time Needed:** 30 minutes including discussion

**Format:** Comics of six different types of summer camps. Click on each comic to bring it up. Below it is more information about the camp and the people attending it.

**Focus:** How life continued in Poland after WWI. Before Germany attacked Poland, there was a change: new ideas became popular including socialism where all people were considered equal and the government

was supposed to help take care of all the people. There was even a slow integration of some Jews into Polish middle-class society, though only among liberal Poles. This change can be seen by looking at the summer camps of post-WWI Poland. In the summer, many Jewish and non-Jewish children went to summer camp. The various political and social attitudes of Christians and Jews living in Poland in the early 1930s can be seen reflected in the different summer camps that their children attended.

**Resource Materials:** Photographs, video, letters and pamphlets, music and a scholar's text.

**Process:** Before clicking on each comic and reading and discussing it, read the introductory statement below. Then have your students read each cartoon and try and figure out if it is a Bund, CENTOS, Yehudia, teacher training camp or some other type of camp and then decide which camp Beba attended. If your students are interested, have them click on the additional information to find out more. There are many photographs of the actual camps. The political topics may be of little interest to your students. But, the fact that one camp was religiously integrated and was free to attend for both Jewish and non-Jewish poor orphans was rare in Europe at this time.

**Introductory Statement:** "There were many different types of summer camps in Poland during the late 1920s and early 1930s. The wide variety of camps reflect the culture and values of Jews and non-Jews living in and around Vilna at this time?" **Note:** *A lot was happening in Europe. There was terrible inflation in Germany and people were rioting. Money lost all value. For example, you would need 50 pounds of dollar bills to buy one loaf of bread. But life went on in the new Poland established after WWI, as if the terrible inflation and the rise of Hitler in Germany had little effect on them. When Beba was a teenager, she worked as a junior counselor at a Bund camp for children with health issues.* **Note:** *The Bund was a socialist organization begun in the late 1800s. "In Bund camps, campers were expected to set up their own tents and do work to improve the area. This was different from most other camps. Another camp was run by CENTOS, a Jewish organization that ran orphanages for poor Jewish and non-Jewish orphans. CENTOS summer camps were free to Jewish or Christian orphans as well as very poor children from both Jewish and Christian families. In CENTOS camps, boys and girls spent the days together doing all kinds of activities from sports to eating together. Unlike the Bund and CENTOS camps, Orthodox Jewish children attended Orthodox camps, like Yehudia. There, boys and girls were totally separated. The children of secular or not very religious Jews never sent their children to the Orthodox summer camps.*

**Follow-up:** Have students create a small comic about how they spend their summers. Make sure that their comics tell something about their values, such as how important their friends or family vacations are to them or how summers are a chance to meet different people, see a new place, or explore nature, etc.

## CHAPTER 7

# Antisemitism grows around the world

**Time Needed:** 20 minutes to 1 hour

**Format:** Large globe of the world which students can spin and click on any red dot on the globe to find out how antisemitism was affecting Jews in that country in the 1920s and 1930s. There are also images and additional texts. (see Resource Materials)

**Focus:** The growth of antisemitism and how it prevented Jews from escaping from Europe to a safer place.

**Resource Materials:** Photos, video, printed documents and letters including one Beba wrote to her uncle in New York City in English and Yiddish as well as a scholar text.

**Process:** Read the introductory statement and then have students spin the globe and see if they can find any country where Jews would be welcomed. End with a discussion about prejudice and how asylum seekers are being treated today.

**Introductory Statement:** Life changed when Beba was in high school. There was an economic depression. Many people lost their jobs. This made life difficult for everyone and increased the tendency of blaming the Jews for the problems. By 1933, there was a rise in antisemitism not only in Poland but many other parts of the world as well. What do we mean by antisemitism?

Have your students spin the globe and try to find a country that welcomed the Jews that were trying to escape Europe.

**Discussion: Ask:** What is prejudice? What are some of your prejudices? Why do we typecast people? Would you like to be typecast? Can you think of some occasion when you have typecast someone? Have the students complete the empathy activity sheet in the attached link <https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/TT-Social-Justice-Standards-June-2019.pdf> if they haven't filled it out already.

**Ask:** Why do some countries, even today, severely **limit or eliminate the right of people seeking asylum to immigrate**, such as the Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar, young Sudanese boys trying to avoid becoming child soldiers against their will, or Hondurans trying to reach the United States and safety because of threats and killings by gangs?

And/or have your **students write** a few paragraphs about how they feel about something that has happened in your school, town or city such as the picking-on or the hurting of an individual or group just because they were different. i.e. a different race, religion, spoke a different language, wore different clothes, wore their hair in a strange way, ate different food in the lunchroom, etc. **Discuss** how the victims might have felt.

**Follow-up:** Discuss how some countries or people today, perhaps even in your local community, speak badly about or attack or blame or refuse to sit next to someone or a group that is different from them in some way.

## CHAPTER 8

# WWII and the Holocaust

**Note: This topic is difficult. You should review the entire four parts of this chapter before showing it to your class! In order to prevent students from accidentally clicking on images or information that may be inappropriate for them to see, we recommend you use a Smartboard or project the website for the whole class. That way, you can control what your students see and don't see or read. If you have young or sensitive viewers, it is best to only use texts and images that appear on the screen. Some of the videos may be inappropriate for your students! View all of the videos before showing them to your class!**

The Holocaust can be a difficult topic for elementary school age children. This chapter contains some topics, images and texts that are inappropriate for young children. Be sure to review this entire chapter before showing it to your class. There are a few places in the teacher notes where we suggest you might want to click on a button to see more or seek more information. Finally, before showing this section to your students, you might wish to send a note home to let parents know what you are discussing in class.

**Time Needed:** 2 to 4 class periods depending on how much time you want to spend on this topic.

**Format:** The chapter is divided into four parts – 1940, 1941, 1941-1945 and 1945. It is best if you teach each part separately. Each part includes texts and video clips from Beba's testimony made in 1984, almost forty years after WWII, as part of the University of California, Los Angeles Holocaust Testimonies Project in cooperation with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. According to Beba's children, this was one of the few times that Beba spoke publicly about what she had gone through and how she managed to survive the Holocaust.

The original video is quite long. Most clips included are only a few minutes long. The texts in small print are adapted transcriptions from Beba's video. They appear throughout the four parts and tell the full story of her life and survival. There are also historic images and additional texts in bold or some which you can click on to open and view. **Many of the additional texts are not appropriate for young students. You can retrieve all hidden information by clicking on either the "i" button or the resource materials button on the right. These more difficult texts and images should only be opened by you!**

**Focus:** Beba's life and what she needed to do to survive WWII. It is divided into four parts. **WWII before German occupation of Vilna, when the Soviets occupied Vilna – German Nazi's occupation of Vilna – Life and survival in concentration camps – Beba's final escape and the end of WWII.**

**Resource Materials: Only show the materials that are included in the short version.** Other materials may have images and information that might be difficult or inappropriate for young students.

Resource materials include photographs of children and adults in concentration camps (beware that one picture shows corpses), documents, letters and postcards from Beba and her family to Lasar Epstein in New York City, ID cards, and a scholar text as well as a Japanese visa provided to a Jew. (Unlike the Germans, Russians, Poles, French, Spanish and many other nationalities, the Japanese never showed particular prejudice against Jews during WWII.)

**Process:** Before opening Chapter 8, read the introductory statement to your students. Use a map of Europe if you have one to point out the countries involved in the beginning of WWII – England, France, and Poland versus greater Germany (Germany, the Rhineland, Austria and Czechoslovakia), USSR, Italy.

Always start each of the four parts of this chapter by reading the introductory text and then scrolling through this section to the parts indicated. Read short excerpts and watch some of the videos of Beba talking about her experiences. There is a written text below each video as Beba is not always easy to understand. Stop and discuss as you go along.

**Introductory Statement:** Prejudice and a desire for revenge can lead to terrible consequences.

If possible, have a map of Europe to point to as you read the following. “In 1914 Germany had started WWI. By the end of WWI in 1918, over 40 million people had either died or been wounded. The winning allies including England, France and the United States wanted to make Germany pay for what they had done. In doing so, Germany’s entire economy collapsed. German money lost all value - a loaf of bread cost an entire wheelbarrow full of paper money. Germans were starving.

So, in 1933, Adolph Hitler, the leader of the Nazi Party, was appointed chancellor of Germany. The Nazis blamed all of Germany’s problems on the Jews. The Nazi government under Hitler built up a strong war machine. This created a lot of jobs. People could afford to buy food again. Then, in 1936, Germany started to invade other countries. First Hitler claimed the Rhineland region, which Germany had lost after WWI. By 1940, Germany had invaded and controlled not only the Rhineland, but also Austria and Czechoslovakia. Then in the summer of 1940, Germany invaded Poland, starting WWII!

This is the story of how Beba, a Jewish teenager from Vilna, Poland managed to survive WWII and the Nazi’s efforts to kill all Jews. Terrible things happened but Beba’s determination not to give up, despite the loss of her family, hard work, freezing cold, little food and the many terrible things she saw and had to do, helped her survive. Good fortune, many acts of bravery and humanity by her and others as well as events totally out of her own control, all combined to keep Beba alive.”

**Part I – 1940 – A new country and turbulent events but life went on** – This section tells of Beba’s last year of high school, the rise of anti-Jewish feelings in Poland, the creation of a Lithuanian state (Vilna became Vilnius), the Soviet Russian occupation of Lithuania and Beba’s father failed efforts to escape the country. **Video clip** – Beba begins to tell her story about these times.

**Part II – 1941 – They arrive, along with terror and suffering** – This section begins with the invasion of Vilnius by Germany and the terrible consequences – **Video Clip I** tells about how her family did nothing to escape. They didn’t think it would last that long. Germans put anti-Jewish laws into place including all Jews needing to wear a yellow star so they could be recognized as Jews. Then all of the Jews in Vilnius were put into two ghettos. Life in the ghetto. Missing her family, Beba returned to the Vilna ghetto only to discover her entire family had been killed. **Video Clip II** tells about Beba’s life in the ghetto – how she was forced to work first in a garden and then for the Gestapo cleaning rooms and even worse, as well as her participation in the Jewish resistance. **Stop the video when Beba starts to discuss the Lithuanian unit at 3:10 minutes into the video – because this part contains material which is inappropriate for**

**your students.** The section ends with information about life in the ghetto and the Jewish resistance. There are several transcriptions from Beba's testimonial video as well as photographs, images of the Jewish stars every Jew had to wear, maps of the ghetto and other documents.

**Part III – 1941-1945 – Konzentrationslager** – This is a very difficult section as it describes Beba's life and the things she had to do to survive in various German forced labor camps – **Video Clip I** tells of Beba's arrival at Kaiserwald and her first few hours there – **Video Clip II** tells of Beba's work in a factory near Riga and interactions with fellow workers – **Video Clip III** tells of Beba escaping to use the restroom and being beaten for it. *Note these videos may be too harsh for your students.*

**Part IV – 1945 – The end (or is it?)** – How Beba escaped and what happened to her. How she ended up in Sweden. **Video Clip I** tells how Germans put all prisoners on boats and left them to be blown up by the allies/ or bombs they attached to the boats and how she manages to survive this. **Video Clip II** tells of Beba's escape into a forest and her collapse from illness and finally being rescued and why she ended up in Sweden as a refugee.

**Follow-up:** Discuss how this could have happened. Be sure that the students understand that Beba was one of the lucky Jews who survived the war. Depending on your class and its sophistication, you can point out how prejudice led to the death of 6,000,000 Jews and untold numbers of Roma people and people with disabilities. Ask if students can understand why prejudices and typecasting are wrong.

## CHAPTER 9

### Beba's Efforts to Immigrate to the United States

**Time Needed:** 15 minutes to 1 hour including discussion

**Format:** This chapter is set up as a quiz game. The class or each student can try to get Beba to the United States. To do this they have to correctly replicate the process that Beba experienced as an asylum seeker trying to come to the United States after WWII. Every small mistake in filling out any of the forms will send them back to repeat that part of the process. Having your students go through the process Beba went through will help them appreciate the many hurdles that immigrants face today in trying to enter the United States. Your students may find it harder than they think. The chapter ends with the question: Would Beba have the same chances to immigrate today?

**Focus:** Beba's efforts to immigrate to the United States after WWII and the difficulty that victims of WWII who had survived the Holocaust had in trying to seek asylum in the United States. Even though members of the United States government knew what these people had experienced, they still made the process very difficult for these asylum seekers who had survived the Holocaust.

The final section offers your class an opportunity to discuss immigration of asylum seekers to the United States today. It asks the difficult question – Why do the immigration laws hinder rather than help individuals seeking asylum come to the United States?



**Resource Materials:** Photographs and scholar text

**Introductory Statement:** “This section takes you through the process that Beba needed to follow in order to be granted a visa to immigrate to the United States after WWII. Even one small mistake in filling out the form caused her to get stuck and having to redo that part of the process. The hurdles are much higher today for immigrants to enter the United States. Playing this game will reinforce the many difficulties immigrants need to overcome in trying to enter the United States and other developed countries. You and your students may find it harder than they think it will be. The challenges that immigrants face today are far greater than those that Beba faced.”

**Process:** If possible, have students work their way through the process individually on their own laptops. Rushing will cause your students to make mistakes and, just as Beba, they will need to begin all over again. It won't take that long, but their frustration at the process should help lead to a good discussion about why the government of a nation of immigrants would throw up so many roadblocks in the immigration process.

1. Why do people want to leave their country today?
2. What is the real purpose of the United States' immigration laws today?
3. What is happening in many countries in Europe, the Middle East, parts of Africa and Latin America today which is causing the desperation of those who are willing to risk their lives to immigrate to a new country?

**Follow-up:** Have your students write either a list, paragraph or short essay on “*How immigrants can benefit a country?*” or “*Why would a person be willing to risk their life in order to immigrate to a new country?*”

## CHAPTER 10

### Beba's life in the United States – What is the American dream?

**Time Needed:** 15 minutes to 1 class period

**Format:** Texts, images and video clips of Beba discussing her life in California, how she spent her life in the United States helping others, her regrets and some of the questions that continued to worry her. The - *what if's* - in life. There is a poem by her grandson, letters, images of her family and the many people she helped assimilate into American life.

**Focus:** The difficulty immigrants experience once they have succeeded in getting to the United States. How one family realized its American dream.

**Resource Materials:** Images of her husband, children, uncle and friends as well as images of Jews who succeeded in escaping the Soviet Union and immigrating to America. Beba helped many immigrants like these adjust to their new life. It also includes a scholar text, posters, ads and a cover of the book *Der Lamed-Vounik*, which tells the story of 36 righteous individuals who selflessly help others. There are many non-Jews honored for risking their lives to help save Jews before and during WWII. Many of them are discussed at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Righteous\\_Among\\_the\\_Nations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Righteous_Among_the_Nations). The movie *Schindler's List* tells the story of one of them.

**Process:** Begin with the introductory statement and then scroll through the texts and watch the video inserts. Read the poem by her grandson and end by discussing “*Why do you think Beba rarely wanted to talk about her life in Vilna before the war with her family?*” and, “*Why did Beba finally agree to be videoed as she told about her life during the war and how she managed to survive? What were Beba’s **what if’s?***”

**Introductory Statement:** When Beba finally arrived in the United States she was taken in by her uncle and his family. In the beginning, Beba had a hard time adjusting to life in New York City. In Vilna, where she had grown up, Beba was free to wander around the center of the city alone even as a young girl. Suddenly she was in a large, fast-paced, urban city filled with dirt, noise, and crowds of people who behaved differently from her. Her war experiences had left many scars. With great effort, she learned English, her fourth language, found a job and slowly adjusted to this strange place. She met and fell in love with Elias Lee Leventhal, a young Jewish man whose family had escaped Europe before WWII and settled in Mexico City. In the end, they married and moved to California where Lee completed his studies in chemical engineering. Beba completed her college degree. They settled in California and raised a family – completing the American Dream. In her later life, Beba helped other Jews fleeing from the Soviet Union adjust to life in the United States.

**Follow-up:** Your students might be interested in researching and possibly writing about one of the righteous. These individuals and their deeds of courage are varied. (see link above)

Or ask your class: “Do you think Beba was finally happy? Why? Do you think she and her family achieved the American Dream? Why?”