





NOTE THIS HAS NOT YET BEEN TESTED WITH CLASSROOMS DUE TO THE PANDEMIC

## High School Teacher Guide Grades 9-12

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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.

### NOTES:

- this is the guide for high school, grades 9-12.
- the **exhibition can be accessed** on each student's computer or laptop or you can open the entire exhibition onto your Smartboard to assist in controlling the conversation.
- there is 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.
- the ☰ icon in the upper right-hand corner of the screen leads to the table of contents with a list of all of the main themes available in this exhibition.
- two buttons (ARTIFACTS  and MAPS ) on the right side of the screen indicated by round icons can be opened with a touch/click. They provide easy access to a vast set of primary resource materials including a short text written by a scholar in the field, letters, diaries, newspaper articles, photographs, short videos, clips of music and images of objects and buildings. All of the text documents provide at least a summary translation into English.
- **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).**

- **contains a supplemental list of books to enrich your class's experience.**

(TO BE ADDED LATER after testing and meeting with teachers)

- **contains a supplemental list of films appropriate for your grade level.**

(TO BE ADDED LATER after testing and meeting with teachers)

### **It can be used:**

- directly by students or opened in a Smartboard and used under teacher direction;
- to supplement the teaching of the Holocaust, American or World history from WWI through the 1950s or to enrich the study 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, recent questions of racial and gender typecasting, immigration issues including recent events concerning asylum seekers in Europe Australia, the United States, and other countries around the world, and, finally, what is meant by the American Dream.

### **Pre/Post Classroom Activity**

**This should be done by your students before starting this interactive exhibition and at the completion of the exhibition.**

Click on <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- pages 10 and 11 for grades 6-8. These can easily be copied and formatted 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.**

**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

Before starting the exhibition, explain to your students that this interactive exhibition 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 a recently rediscovered autobiography from Beba. She wrote it 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 this interactive exhibition are largely based on information drawn from a video of Beba made about her Holocaust experiences and as a survivor as well as materials found in her uncle's papers, which are part of the YIVO Institute's archives. In the video (excerpts can be seen in Chapters 8, 9, and 10) Beba discussed her life just before, during and right after World War II. Other than this one video interview and other sparse testimonies, 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 family biography or the video have been filled in from primary source materials, which also expand from her personal story to show the historical context of the time.

### CHAPTER 1 Introduction

**Time Needed:** 10 minutes plus time to look at artifacts

**Format:** Animation

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

**Introductory Statement to students:** "This online museum exhibition is about the life of Beba Epstein who was born in Vilna in 1922. This first chapter introduces you to Beba as a baby. Note the personal characteristics she demonstrates as a baby as well as her experiences described in future chapters. Many of her personal qualities will reappear again and helped her survive the many atrocities she saw and experienced during WWII as well as the many difficulties she experienced as a war refugee trying to immigrate to the United States!"

**Process:** Let students watch this short section and then ask if it raises any questions in their mind about where they think this exhibition will take them. Be sure to point out the various information on the screen such as the timeline on the left and the Artifacts and Maps icons on the right. Have your students search more deeply into the exhibition by clicking on the Artifacts and Maps icons. Explain that every chapter has its own specific primary source materials related to the Chapter on the screen. Have your students open the Artifacts window. Be sure that your students read the scholar text and the translation of several of the biographies in Artifacts before moving on.

**Resource materials available:** Images of portions of student written autobiographies and translated excerpts of biographies. These materials can give a fuller picture of the lives of Jewish students living in and around Vilna in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

**Follow-up Activity:** Ask their parents what they were like as babies or toddlers. What personality characteristics did they have as young children? Persevering, curious, determined to get their way, forgiving, easily distracted? How many of these characteristics do they still have now? How do they think these could help them succeed in the future? Beba's early behavior helped her survive WWII!

## 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, background and life before, during, and after WWI in the Russian Empire and then Poland from the mid 1800s through the 1930s.

**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. 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 the students listen to and read the text as Beba talks about each relative. You can pause at any time for discussion. Point out that Beba had four grandparents whom she discusses first. Then she describes her father and her mother and finally her siblings. Have your students write a few key words that describe each member of Beba's family. Have students click on Artifacts and read the scholar's text. Discuss students notes and what they think of Beba's family and in what ways they change with each generation. Note that many middle-class Polish Jews were beginning to assimilate into Polish society starting in the late 1800s with the rise of the Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment movement, which sought to modernize Jewish society.

**Resource Materials:** Many images and texts to fill out your students' understanding of the life of Jewish families living in Poland and Russia from the late 1800s to early 1900s and how life changed for Polish Jews after WWI. The resources include texts, images and music. It includes both Jews living in urban areas who were assimilating and Jews who lived in small towns and remained isolated by language and religion from their non-Jewish neighbors.

**Discussion:** This is a good introduction into comparative cultures. Ask, "How are Beba's family members like yours and how are they different?" Discuss how Jews in Poland were historically not allowed to own

land. That is, in part why, Jews were mostly involved in commerce and trades such as shoemakers or tailors. Also, it explains why Jews settled in towns or cities where they could rent homes. This was true in many European countries, not just Poland. Next ask students, “Do you know people who are different from you? How are they different? 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:** Have your students ask the following question at home after viewing this first section: Who is the oldest living member of their family? Interview their parents, grandparents or if possible, their oldest relative. Key questions they may ask should include: What do they remember about growing up? their school? the most significant historic events in their lifetime? Why do they feel these were so important? How have new technologies changed their lives?

## **CHAPTER 3**

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

**Time Needed:** 10 to 20 minutes depending on how long it takes to read each text and have a follow-up discussion about the segregation of the Jews from the rest of the community.

**Format:** Map with place names that students select. Each button will bring them to a different summer resort in Poland in the late 1920s and early 1930s with pictures and a brief text. This will give the students a feeling for life in the late 1920s and early 1930s in large parts of Europe. It also will demonstrate that Jews and Christians mostly lived parallel lives. How is this similar to many communities today? It also includes simple games where students can play Beba’s favorite activities during her summer holidays. Are they similar to the student’s favorite activities?

**Focus:** Getting to understand the lifestyle and relationship between Jews and non-Jews living in Vilna between WWI and WWII.

**Resource Materials:** Scholar text describes how after WWI many Jews in Poland began to take summer vacations and toured parts of Poland. Also includes a large selection of photographs from the mid- and late 1920s through the late 1930s documenting this.

**Introductory Statement:** “How do you spend your summer? Who do you play with? Are all your friends of the same religion and/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. How does Beba’s childhood and what she and her family did in the summer compare to yours?”

**Process:** Start by reading the scholar’s text found in Artifacts. Then have students explore each resort site and determine why it was a popular resort site. This section is a good source for learning how to find facts in a text and determine which facts are important. Students can compare the information on resorts in Poland in the late 1920s in this section to their own summer experiences.

**Discussion:** Remind students that most Jews and Christians rarely socialized in most parts of Central Europe. Ask: Why do you think this was so?

Through looking at how most individuals spent their summers in post-WWI Poland, students should become aware of the social and religious segregation in almost all Central and Eastern European countries. In fact, though Jews had lived in Vilna for over 150 years, many never socially integrated into Polish society. There were interactions between Christians and Jews, since many commercial establishments (haberdashery stores, shoemakers, dressmakers and hardware stores) were owned by Jews but served everyone. Many Christians and Jews worked together in factories owned by either Christians or Jews. Often rich and middle-class Jews would attend operas and concerts with Christians, but they rarely socialized together. 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. Beba's father was an assistant bank manager working with both Christians and Jews.

**Follow-up:** Write a paragraph or short essay comparing this concept of the parallel lives of the Jews and non-Jews to the relationship or non-relationship of two ethnic or religious groups living in your community.

## CHAPTER 4

### Beba in upper elementary school

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

**Format:** Reproduction of many school notebooks created by students age 8 to 12 attending Jewish schools.

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

**Resource Materials:** Scholar's text by Kalman Weiser on how Jewish political parties supported a network of schools, images of students and teachers working and playing in a wide variety of Jewish schools from the very religious to the most secular as well as student texts, lists of school rules, classroom activities and music performed in schools by and for students.

**Introductory Statement:** "Many Jewish children spoke Yiddish at home as did most Jews all over 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.

Jewish schools were private. If financially possible, Jewish children attended Jewish schools. Poorer students likely attended Polish public schools, where they were taught only in Polish. Many would leave school and begin to work to help support their families after about 3rd grade. Sometimes communities would gather to pay for a Jewish child's education if the family had no means. Boys from orthodox Jewish families could

attend very 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). Children from less or non-religious Jewish families as well as Orthodox Jewish girls could attend a variety of Jewish schools. In most of these schools, Yiddish was the language of instruction as Yiddish was spoken in a majority of Jewish homes. The students first learned to read and write in Yiddish as well as to do simple arithmetic. They began to learn Polish starting in 3rd grade. Polish was the language of the country. Starting in fourth grade, students were taught in both Polish and Yiddish and studied all subjects from literature and higher mathematics to geography and science. In high school students were taught additional languages. The most popular languages were German and Russian. Other schools that were affiliated with Zionist groups had Hebrew as the main language of instruction. This is because Zionists advocated for the use of Hebrew by Jews, among other things.”

**Process:** Have students quickly look through the materials and discuss how the work compares to work they did in school. Discuss how this compares to their local school. Then have students click on the artifacts’ button and read Kalman Weiser’s scholar’s text on how political parties supported different networks of schools. End with a discussion.

**Explain:** “The school work you have looked at was done by students in the late 1920s and early 1930s in progressive Jewish schools similar to Beba’s school. How does the type of schoolwork that Beba and her classmates were required to do, compare with what you do in school? How do you feel about the fact that many poor Jewish children had to leave school at age 8 or 9 once they had mastered simple arithmetic and basic reading and writing? Middle-class students like Beba and her friends learned to read, write and speak in Yiddish, Polish and a third language.”

**Ask:** “How would not being able to speak or read Polish properly separate poorer Jews from the entire Polish, Ukrainian and Lithuanian community? Can you think of a similar situation in your country today? How would Beba’s ability to speak and read both Polish and Russian as well as Yiddish affect her relationship with her non-Jewish neighbors?”

**Discuss the fact that:** “In all American public schools funded by local and federal taxes teachers are not allowed to express political opinions. Schools which don’t receive federal funds can have a political or religious bias.”

**Follow-up:** Have students write a short essay on “How might segregating Jewish and Christian students in different schools lead to prejudice?” or “Why would people with different religious beliefs sometimes have difficulty relating to each other?”

## CHAPTER 5

### 3D tour of Jewish Vilna, where Jews lived, worked, shopped and recreated, and Beba's house and schools

**Time Needed:** 30 to 45 minutes

**Format:** Interactive map of Vilna.

**Focus:** How to read a map. How can maps of cities provide information about their importance to the surrounding area and history? Who lived and worked in Vilna? Students can walk through the areas where the Jews of Vilna lived, worked and played. Note that most Jews in Vilna lived and worked in integrated communities. Only very Orthodox Jews lived in separate areas.

**Resource Materials:** Images of many of the parks, streets and buildings found in central Vilna.

**Introductory Statement:** "This Chapter serves two purposes. First, it gives a sense of the city where Beba grew up in the 1920s and 30s. The Orthodox Jews lived in segregated areas near their synagogues (houses of worship) and the kosher butchers, bakers and food stores owned by Orthodox Jews. However most non-Orthodox and middle-class Jews lived in integrated apartment houses and neighborhoods. It should be noted most poor Jews generally did not socialize with Christian Poles because they left school before they could master how to read, write and speak in Polish. Most Christians as well as middle-class Jews spoke Polish and shopped in the same stores.

The cultural centers including the movie theaters and parks were used by everyone living in Vilna. Non-orthodox, middle-class Jews and Christians attended the same cultural events such as the opera and concerts but rarely socialized together.

Since the early Middle Ages, Jews had been forbidden the right to own land in most of Europe. Many Jews became itinerant traders, traveling from place to place selling things and loaning money. Over time, Jews became shop owners and involved in all kinds of commercial ventures."

**Note:** Vilna "was known as the 'Jerusalem of the North.'" It was a center for Jewish learning with over 100 synagogues and houses of study. But it was also a hub for the Haskalah, known as the Jewish Enlightenment, a modern Jewish intellectual movement. Vilna did have small factories and breweries but not large industrial complexes. Can you think of any American cities that don't have large industrial areas? Why were they originally formed? What does this say about Vilna and its history?

**Process:** Ask your students to use the chapter to walk through six virtual areas of 1930s Vilna. Have them look at the popup windows on each 3D tour, accessible by clicking on the red dots. Be sure to open all of the images at each stop as the 3D tour is stylized and the images show exactly how each place depicted on them looked like. Then have them click on the **ARTIFACTS**  icon and listen to the lecture by Samuel Kassow. Ask: "What did this mean for the Jews living in Vilna? How is Vilna in the 1920s and 1930s similar to your city or town? How is it different?"

**Discuss:** Is your local community limited to one ethnic or religious group or are there many different ethnic or religious groups living in your neighborhood? How do economic and/or historic events, ease of



transportation, geographic features (railroad tracks, rivers, large hills, lakes, etc.), prejudice, money and wealth might influence where people live in your village, town or city? Discuss the meaning of the short lecture by Prof. Kassow. How would only reading Jewish newspapers, whether in Yiddish or Polish affect their behavior as Germany became more and more aggressive?

**Follow-up:** Have students, either alone or working in groups, create a map of their neighborhood or even a map of their city or town with short texts highlighting the important places or the political or social issues the map might reveal.

## CHAPTER 6 Summer Camps

**Time Needed:** 30 minutes including discussion

**Format:** Comics of six different types of summer camps.

**Resource Materials:** One scholar text, one scholar lecture, photographs, short film clips, translated letters and pamphlets all about the various Jewish camps and other summer activities in the late 1920s and 1930s before WWII.

**Focus:** How normal life continued in Post WWI Poland. The beginning of the integration of Jews into the middle-class by looking at the summer camps in Post WWI Poland. In the summer most Jews and non-Jews attended different camps. By the 1930s many Jews read, wrote and spoke Polish. They mostly lead parallel lives with Poles. There was little socialization between the Christian and Jewish communities at cultural events and day to day experiences such as shopping and dining in restaurants and cafes. However, there was even less socialization between secular (non-religious) Polish speaking Jews and Orthodox (very religious) Yiddish speaking Jews. In fact, in Vilna and other Central and Eastern European cities there were more interactions between secular, urban Jews and Christians than between secular urban Jews and Orthodox Jews.

**Introductory Statement:** “There were many different types of summer camps in Poland during the late 1920s and early 1930s. The wide variety of camps reflected the diverse cultural values and political opinions of Jews living in Poland at this time. Unlike Germany, Poland had benefited from the Treaty of Paris at the end of WWI and was prospering. After WWI, a lot of changes were happening in Germany including the rise of Hitler. But life went on in the new Poland and, for now, the rise of Hitler in Germany had little effect on them. Beba, as a teenager, spent her summer working as a junior counselor at a Bund camp for children who needed to improve their health. Remember, Beba’s family had members in the Polish Bund.

The Bund was a socialist organization that 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. CENTOS was a Jewish organization that ran orphanages for both Jewish orphans and orphan children from poor non-Jewish families. CENTOS summer camps were free to Jewish or Christian orphans as well as very poor children from 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 only attended Orthodox summer camps like Yehudia, where all religious laws were practiced from only serving kosher foods to saying daily prayers and keeping boys and girls totally separated. The children of secular or less religious Jews never sent their children to Orthodox camps. Sickly children were often sent to sanitariums in the summer where they were given healthy foods and lots of time was spent resting. All of these camps were a microcosm of the diverse political, cultural and religious beliefs of the Jews living in Poland at this time.”

**Process:** First have students click on the ARTIFACTS  icon, view the Scholar’s Text *Hearts and Minds: Jewish Youth Movements in Interwar Poland* by Jack Jacobs and read. This will provide a background for the six comics. Next, based on what students already know about Beba and her family, have them guess in which camp she worked. Then have your students click on each camp comic, read the comic and discuss what they think the comic means and then read the text below to see if they were correct. Finally, discuss how these camps were a microcosm of the Jews living in Poland at this time. Students may be interested in reviewing many of the other artifacts as well.

**Follow-up:** Discuss the following: What was the Bund movement? How is Socialism different from Communism? What does it say about Beba’s family that they let her work during the summer at a Bund camp? End with a discussion of the difference between Communism and Socialism and how Hitler used the rise of antisemitism in Germany to gain power.

## 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 country on the globe that has a red dot. Once in a country, students can read about that country’s attitude toward immigration and, more specifically, Jewish immigration:: did the country have laws that encouraged antisemitism? was the government of the country willing to accept Jews who were trying to escape the Nazis? or did it passively support antisemitism in the 1920s and 1930s?

**Focus:** The growth of antisemitism and how it affected the Jews trying to escape Europe to a safer place. Why is this relevant today?

**Resource Materials:** Images and documents from each country highlighted on the globe.

**Introductory Statement:** “Life changed when Beba was in high school. There was a rise in antisemitism in the 1930s around the world. The rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party in Germany was partly successful because of Hitler’s strong anti-Semitic rhetoric. The 1929 crash of the stock market in the United States and the growing economic depression throughout the world led to political unrest. It made life difficult for everyone in Poland. The slowing economy increased the tendency of blaming the Jews for all the economic problems in Europe and a rise in antisemitism. What is antisemitism?”

**Process:** Discuss the meaning of antisemitism. Ask your students where in the world did they think Jews were welcome in the 1930s? Then have your students spin the globe and see if they were correct. See if they can find any country where a Jew could have escaped to from Germany, Poland or any other European country and been welcome.




**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 typecasted anyone?

**Follow-up:** Your students can write an opinion piece or short essay on the consequences of prejudicial actions taking place in various countries today. Possible topics to choose from are: the limiting of the rights of asylum seekers to Australia, Hungary or the US; the jailing of children seeking asylum by ICE; the shutting off of immigration to other countries by asylum seeking Rohingya Muslims fleeing Myanmar; limiting admission into many European countries of young Sudanese boys fleeing their homeland in order to avoid being forced to become child soldiers; or Hondurans trying to escape the threats and killings by gangs or local starvation caused by climate change, etc.

## CHAPTER 8

### WWII and the Holocaust

**Time Needed:** To give the subject matter justice, you will need at least four to five class periods.

**Format:** *Chapter 8 begins the year before Germany attacks Poland and ends just after the German Axis is finally defeated.* Chapter 8 is divided into **four parts: 1940, 1941, 1941-1945 and 1945.** Each **part** includes documents, images, maps, texts and video clips of Beba describing her experiences. The original video made in 1984 as part of the University of California, Los Angeles Holocaust Testimonies Project in cooperation with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is over two hours long. The individual clips included in this chapter range from just over 1 to 5+ minutes in length. The clips appear throughout the four parts and tell of Beba's wartime experiences and survival. All of the texts in small print and many of the texts in **bold** are adapted from a transcription of the entire video made of Beba describing her life and survival during WWII as well as an audio interview. There are also historic images and additional informational texts. These can be opened with a click. **A few of the resources and texts are not appropriate for sensitive students. You can retrieve all hidden information by clicking on** either the  icon, the  icon within the text, or the **ARTIFACTS**  icon on the right. You should **review all material before sharing** this with your students!

**Focus:** This chapter is the story of how Beba, a teenage Jewish girl living in Vilna, managed to survive WWII and the Holocaust. However, in its larger aspects, this is the story of how hate based on prejudice led to the death of around 6,000,000 Jews, 275,000 individuals with disabilities, and about a quarter of a million Roma people. It is best if you teach each part as a separate section rather than viewing the entire Chapter and then discussing it. Each part has different texts, documents and video clips taken from Beba Leventhal's testimony made almost forty years after WWII. According to Beba's children, this was one of the only times that Beba spoke publicly about what she had gone through and how she managed to survive the Holocaust.

**Resource Materials:** Photographs, objects, images, film clips, documents and texts

**Introductory Statement: Use the text below: if your students are unaware of the steps that led up to WWII; if you want to put this time period into clearer perspective for your students or if you haven't already introduced this topic to your class. Note: Use the two linked maps linked below of 1930s Europe to point out the countries as you review this brief summary of the rise of Nazi Germany and the start of WWII.**

"In 1918, WWI ended when Germany, which had started the war, was defeated by France, England and the United States. Most Europeans were angry with Germany for causing WWI. To get even, the Treaty of Versailles forced Germany to pay reparations to all of the countries that had suffered in WWI.

This created many problems for the German people who were desperately poor after losing the war. The Germans printed more and more money to pay their war debts. By the 1930s, the German mark (their currency at the time) wasn't worth anything. In fact, a German needed an entire wheelbarrow full of German marks to pay for one loaf of bread. The cost of everything ballooned. This economic situation is called inflation. Seeking a scapegoat, some of the German people began to blame the Jews for starting the war, even though the Jews had had nothing to do with it! In the early 1930s, Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany in part by blaming the Jews for everything that was going wrong with the German economy. This made Germans feel better.

The Nazis were a political party in Germany, whose leader was Hitler, who became Germany's chancellor in 1933. Hitler's goal since 1922 had been the extermination of all Jews. Under Hitler's appeal to German nationalism, Germany began to occupy other Germany-speaking countries. In March 1936, Germany occupied the Rhineland, a territory Germany lost after WWI. Then in 1938, Germany occupied Austria. Germany was welcomed into Austria by the German-speaking Austrians. In 1939, Germany occupied the German-speaking Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia. Throughout this period, France and England had tried to appease Germany in order to stop its expansion. In response to this last act of aggression by Germany, England, France, the USSR and Poland signed an agreement to protect Poland if Germany moved to occupy it.

However, unbeknownst to England, France and Poland, the USSR under Stalin had signed a secret agreement with Hitler to divide up Poland when Germany attacked it. On September 1st, 1939, Germany entered Poland. England and France immediately declared war on Germany. By September 3, 1939, Germany had completely occupied the western half of Poland including Warsaw, its capital. The eastern half of Poland, where Beba lived, was occupied by the USSR. It all happened so quickly, England and France had no chance to protect Poland. **This was the start of WWII.**

The **Allies** included Great Britain and its colonies – India, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa – the United States, China and the USSR. The USSR had switched back to join the Allies after Germany marched into eastern Poland and attacked the USSR soldiers in 1941. The United States, which had secretly been supporting Great Britain, officially declared war on both Germany and Japan and joined the Allies in late 1941 after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. The **Axis** powers included Germany, Spain, Italy and their colonies in Africa as well as Japan in the Pacific."

**Process:**



## DAY ONE

**Day one should be used to provide background knowledge of European history and the start of WWII.** Start with the information in the above summary statement if your students need more background information than is given in the texts in the exhibition. Also, if your students are unfamiliar with the European countries created by the Versailles Treaty of 1919, this map <http://dmorgan.web.wesleyan.edu/easteur/magocsi44.gif> shows the new borders. Starting in 1936 Germany began to annex other territories and countries claiming them a part of Germany because the people in these countries spoke German. This 1939 map of Germany shows its annexations and its initial invasion of Poland. <https://omniatlas.com/maps/europe/19390916/>. The two maps will enable your students to locate all of the countries listed below that were occupied just before and in the beginning of WWII – the Rhineland, Austria, Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia and then Poland.

End the session by clicking on **Chapter 8 World War II**, clicking the ARTIFACTS  icon on the right and opening and reading the **Scholar Text** by Robert Shapiro. **Discuss.**

## CHAPTER 8 WORLD WAR II

**Process for Day 2 to Day 5:** Have your students slowly go through reading **all the small print texts** (explain that most are drawn from the transcript of Beba's video testimonial). Click on every



 icon and  icon and watch all the video clips of Beba speaking about her life in Vilna in 1940 before the German invasion of Poland. (They all have subtitles it is not always easy to understand what is being said.) Stop and discuss as your students slowly scroll through reading all texts and view all video clips and images. *Continue with a different part each day.*

## DAY TWO

**Part I – 1940 – A new country and turbulent events but life went on** – This section covers the time Beba was a senior in high school, the rise of anti-Jewish feelings in her city, the Soviet Russian occupation, the unexpected creation of a Lithuanian state (Vilna became Vilnius), and Beba's father's failed efforts to escape Vilnius because he was a member of the Socialist Bund and the Russians were Communists. (During the Russian Revolution the Communists defeated the Socialist movement.) **Video 1** – Beba begins to tell her story about these times. Note the lack of panic by Beba's family as these events unfolded. **Video 2** – Beba describes why her father and aunt felt they had to hide. In the end nothing happened to them and so as Beba said, "My family felt there was no imminent threat if we stayed in Vilnius. We were keeping our eyes open about what was going on. But it seemed to make sense to stay where we were." Discuss this decision knowing that Beba's father was a member of the socialist Bund and could never have escaped east through Russia and the trans-Siberian railroad to China and Shanghai. Students should also look up the Katyn massacre.




## DAY THREE

**Part II – 1941 – They arrive, along with terror and suffering** – This section begins with the invasion of USSR controlled Vilnius by Germany and the terrible consequences: the forcing of all the Jews into ghettos,

life in the ghettos, the killing of 8,500 Jews, the forced labor of the remaining Jews and the role of the Jewish Resistance against the Nazis. This is told through some transcriptions of Beba's story, old photographs, maps and documents and two video clips of Beba telling her story. Be sure to read all of the information in each  icon about the Nazi's antisemitism – **Racism and Lebensraum**, life in the **Jewish Ghetto** where all the Jews were forced to live and how life was overseen by the **Jewish Police** – includes texts and images – and watch the **video clips** of Beba describing how she was forced to work in a garden that the Germans had seized from nuns and how her whole family was taken to a death camp. Beba was forced to work for the gestapo, how she was able to secretly help the Jewish Resistance. Click on every  icon and the popups called “**The ideal Aryan**” and “**Jewish resistance.**” Be sure to listen to Beba discuss the resistance.

**Follow-up discussion:** How do your students feel about what happened to Beba and her family? How would you have acted had this happened to you? Do you think things like this are happening in the world today?

## DAY FOUR

**Part III – 1941-1945 – Konzentrationslager** – This is a very difficult section as it describes Beba's life in German labor and concentration camps and the things she had to do to survive in these forced labor camps. This Part begins with a description of the Pole's reaction to the Jews being forced to leave Vilnius by the Nazis. Read it as well as clicking the  icon about the “**Perpetrators, Collaborators, Victims, Bystanders and Rescuers.**” **Discuss.** What would they have done? Students continue to the end of Part III reading all of the small print texts, “**Additional Context: The ‘Final Solution’**” and Beba's description of how she was taken with others to a labor camp where they were greeted with a metal sign that said *Arbeit Macht Frei* and describes how everyone was afraid of taking a shower. Students should continue reading the small text print being sure to click every icon for  which explains about the showers and “**Additional Context: Medical experiments**” popup which describes some of the horrors of one of the jobs she held at a concentration camp. This part follows Beba's life and how she ended up working at various concentration camps and factories. Beba describes her experiences in a video clip. Have your students note how her attitudes hardened over time. Students should read on including the “**Additional Context: Profiting from murder**” popup. **Pause and discuss:** the moral and ethical questions this text raises. This section ends with Beba being sent to Stutthof in the fall of 1944. She described Stutthof as an Auschwitz because it had a crematorium to burn all the dead bodies. Click on the “**Additional Context: The world knew**” popup and read it before watching Beba's final video clip describing her experience in this camp. Read about “*the gate of death*” in the  icon. Discuss not only what happened, but how inhuman treatment can change a person. Beba began the war as a frightened teenager and ended as a hardened individual, comfortable threatening others and inured to death. In the end Beba was so changed she could stack dead bodies without feeling anything. **Discuss:** What things can we take away from all of this? How is this relevant to us today?

## DAY FIVE

**Part IV – 1945 – The end (or is it?)** – Students should start at the very beginning with the small text print about the evacuation of the camps and then click on “**Additional Context: The final moments**” icon – it

describes the **death marches**, and the **liberation** of camps including images. The Russians freed the camps in the east including Auschwitz. The Allies (Americans, British and French) freed the camps in the west. There are two **video clips** – one of Beba describing how the remaining prisoners of war were put on concrete barges and boats and floated out into the sea. The Germans had attached explosives to her barge and then escaped on a small motorboat, leaving the prisoners stranded at sea. Beba describes how the allies mistook the boats and barges for fleeing German soldiers and blew many of them up, killing the prisoners on board. Beba tells how at the last moment she jumped into the sea and, though ill, managed to swim to shore. On shore Beba and other prisoners fled death by running into a forest as the German soldiers fired on them. Read the small print text which describes how Beba was found and saved by British soldiers who took her to a German hospital controlled by the British. She was ill, delirious and only weighed 67 pounds.

Click on **“Additional Context: Poland after World War II.”** It describes what happened at the end of the war. How the Soviets claimed all of the land they had negotiated with Germany at the beginning of the war (in the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact) as well as a large part of eastern Germany. Relate the chaos and confusion as thousands of prisoners of war and concentration and work camp survivors wandered around looking for family and how to get back to their homes.

Students should read the remaining small print texts. They describe how Beba ended up in Sweden in another hospital, how Russians and Poles advised her to return to Poland, Jews encouraged her to go to Palestine (Israel was created 3 years after, in 1948), and others suggested she look for her family. But, she knew that her entire close family living in Vilna before the war had been killed, so Beba stayed in Sweden.

The last paragraph ends with “How did I survive?”

**Follow-up:** Discuss how all this could have happened. Be sure that the students understand that Beba was one of the lucky Jews who survived the war. Around 6,000,000 Jews and untold numbers of Roma people and people with disabilities had been killed. Tens of thousands had died in the war. Millions more were starving and displaced. Ask students if they can understand why this could happen? Has it happened since? Is war, hate, prejudice, the need to blame others for things that go wrong intrinsic to all humans?

Discuss the fact that there have been several holocausts in the world since Nazi Germany’s efforts to eliminate all the Jews in the world. Have your student research and discuss the reasons why a holocaust occurs. What are some of the more recent holocausts? (Look at Africa and Asia)

You might also want to show your students a movie about surviving WWII or life in East Germany under the USSR after the war. The following are easy to obtain and appropriate for students: *Schindler’s List*, *The Pianist*, or *Other People’s Lives*. The first two films give a more complete understanding of what Beba had to do to survive, the third is about life in East Germany after WWII under the Russians and the intrusion of the **stasi**.

## CHAPTER 9

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

This section covers the period in Beba's life when she tried to immigrate to the United States after WWII. It deals with the difficulty that victims of WWII, who had survived the Holocaust, had in seeking asylum in the United States. Even though by 1945-46 members of the United States government knew what these asylum seekers had experienced during the war, they still made the process very difficult for them to come to the United States. This is a good opportunity for you to discuss the issues of immigration today and why the United States would create laws that hinder rather than help individuals seeking asylum come to the USA.

**Format:** This section takes viewers through how Beba ended up in Sweden and found out that she had one uncle alive and living in Brooklyn. This chapter follows the complicated process that Beba and her uncle Lasar had to complete in order for Beba to immigrate to the United States. Even one small mistake by Beba or her uncle in filling out a section of the many forms required to immigrate forced Beba to begin the process all over again. In this chapter your students will need to go through the immigration process to move from one section of the chapter to the next. It is easy to make a mistake which will leave them stuck, sending them back where they were until they get it right. The students will feel some of the frustration and better help them appreciate the many hurdles that today's immigrants face in trying to enter the United States or other developed countries. Your students may find it harder than they think.

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

**Focus:** How difficult it was for a victim of WWII to be granted refuge in another country. How the United States, a nation mostly made up of immigrants, still makes it difficult for new immigrants to enter. Why? What is the value of being a nation of immigrants?

**Introductory Statement:** "This section takes viewers through the process that Beba needed to follow in order to be granted permission to immigrate to the United States at the end of WWII. Even one small mistake in the paperwork caused Beba to begin the process all over again. The hurdles are much higher today for immigrants wishing to enter the United States. Playing this game will reinforce the many difficulties immigrants need to overcome in trying to enter the United States. You and your students may find it harder than you think. The challenges that immigrants face today are far greater than in the past when Beba was trying to come to the United States."

**Resource Materials:** Scholar Text by Roberta Newman on Immigration Quotas, many photographs, and a 50-minute podcast

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



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 all of the unrest and desperation of those willing to risk their lives to immigrate to a new country?
4. How are different countries in Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia dealing with a rise in immigration?

**Follow-up:** Have your students write an essay on “*Are tough immigration laws beneficial or bad for a nation?*”

## CHAPTER 10

### Beba's Life in the United States – What is the American Dream?

**Format:** Beba describing life in the United States living with her Uncle Lazar, the noise and dirt and difficulties adjusting to American ways, the meeting and marrying of her husband, their life in southern California, her growing family, finishing her college degree and interspersed with photographs of her family and illustrative photographs of immigrants like the ones she helped adjust to life in the United States.

**Time Needed:** 15 minutes plus discussion time

**Focus:** The difficulties Beba experienced as an immigrant as she tried to adjust to life in the United States and how she finally realized the American dream.

**Introductory Statement:** “Once Beba arrived in the United States she was taken in by her uncle and his family. She 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 with all the dirt and noise and crowds of people that were not like her. With great effort she learned English and found a job and adjusted to this strange place. She met and fell in love with a young Jewish man whose family had escaped Europe before WWII and had settled in Mexico City. In the end they were married in Texas. From there they moved to California so that Beba's husband could complete a Master's program in engineering. They settled in California and raised a family. Later, Beba was finally able to get her college degree. They had two children and ended up living the American Dream.”

**Resource Materials:** letters, images of Beba's family and Jews who fled the Soviet Union, video of Beba.

**Process:** Explain that many Jews after WWII were unable to get into the United States. Many settled in Palestine, but others settled in South America. The Scholar Text by Professor Ilan Stavans of Amherst College explains why this happened. Have students read this and discuss. Remind your students that Beba's husband had survived the war by escaping as a young child with his family to Mexico. Have your students review this chapter either as a group or individually. Ask your students if they can relate to this section? How is it similar to their family's story? How is it different from their family's story? Can they think of any long-term effects Beba's war experiences had on her? Can they think of any indications of the trauma that Beba had experienced?

**Follow-up:** Discussion about the experiences of immigrants in the United States today. If you are not in the United States, how is the experience of immigrants in your country? What might be the effects of the trauma they experienced?

## Post Classroom Activity to be done at the completion of this interactive exhibition.

Click on <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 high school grades on pages 12 and 13 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.

Have your students answer this questionnaire and compare to the questionnaire they completed before starting this exhibition. Discuss if and why some of their answers have changed and why.