

Among the Righteous---Classroom Discussion Guide

Lost Stories from the Holocaust in Arab Lands

by Robert Satloff

For the facilitator of pre-screening discussion

The sheets are accompanied by a facilitator's guide with some leading questions.

Some tips:

- Don't expect that you know the answers; and open and fair discussion is the key...there may not be right answers at all.
- The purpose of this discussion is to allow students to learn about and address questions that the film raises.
- Conversations may at times become awkward or uncomfortable. That's okay. There is more than one way to look at every situation. But by looking at things—even with heated emotions— a clearer understanding can be achieved.
- True discussion and true listening don't demand agreement, but they can result in a deeper understanding.

Leading questions to think about before the movie:

- What do we know about the Holocaust?
- What is a bystander? What is a collaborator? What might be the definition of an "upstander"?

After-the-film Discussion Guide

For the facilitator of post-screening discussion

A few tips:

- **Let the film sink in**—Don't start the discussion the moment the film ends. Watch the credits out of respect for the filmmakers and let that time be a period for reflection. If you can, let people breathe, chat and recover themselves before expecting them to express themselves clearly.
- **Present your questions in an open manner**—When you are asking questions, you want to encourage discussion, not come across as a know-it-all. Let people come to their own answers. Ignite the conversation, rather than trying to control it. Every opinion matters, even if you don't agree.
- **Allow quiet**—A little silence is OK. Sometimes people need a little time to prepare their thoughts before they speak. It's not necessary to jump right in if no one answers immediately. If needed, clarify, expand or rephrase the question.
- **Let the conversation flow**—Don't worry about asking all the questions as written or in the order they are given. They are conversation starters and that's their function. Go with the flow. If one good thought leads to another, let it flow.
- **Make connections between comments**—Try to find a link between an answer and the next question. By connecting people's comments to the questions, you'll help build momentum in the conversation.
- **Occasionally direct questions toward quiet people**—You don't want to embarrass anyone, but you want everyone to know that their opinions are valued. If you have a few talkative people who are dominating the conversation, directing a question to someone else may help draw out the quieter people (and let the talkative people know it is time to give someone else a turn).
- **Keep the discussion focused**—A little wandering in the conversation is fine, but you also want to respect the purpose of the discussion. As the facilitator, it is your job to recognize tangents and gently bring the discussion back to the film.
- **Wrap up the discussion**—One good way to wrap up a conversation and help people summarize their opinions of the film is to ask each person to rate the film on a scale of one to five, one being not helpful to promoting understanding and five being very helpful.

After-the-film Discussion

WARM UP QUESTIONS:

- Give one word to sum up your feelings after the movie.
- Give two sentences—one ending with an exclamation point, and one with a question mark – that you are left with after the film
- How might the film have been changed for you, if no stories had been uncovered in the exploration?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The inspiration for Robert Satloff’s journey came from a simple question: Did any Arab save any Jews during the Holocaust? Below are a number of questions that will help promote discussion of the film and its many stories. You can decide which of the questions are most suitable to open the conversation.

- Did you have any previous knowledge about what happened to Jews in Arab countries during World War II? Did you know anything about Jews in **this** country during that time?
- How did your prior views of the Holocaust affect your viewing of the film?
- In the film, we learn that Jews in Arab lands suffered many of the same injustice of Nazi persecution as the Jews of Europe. Does this change your understanding of the Holocaust? If so, how?
- Satloff argues that local Arabs behaved toward Jews in much the same way as Europeans behaved toward Jews: most were bystanders, some were collaborators, and a small number helped, protected and even rescued Jews. Are there differences between people’s culture, experience, and character that would lead to different responses?
- Were you surprised by the references to concentration camps in the movie *Casablanca*?
- What is your response to the story of the Scemla family that was turned into the Germans? What might help explain the behavior of Hassen Ferjani who betrayed them?
- In the film we learn that some Jewish organizations have honored Arabs for helping Jews during the Holocaust but that none have yet to be officially recognized by Yad Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust memorial, as “Righteous among the Nations.” Why do you think that is?

- Satloff says he has found three approaches to the treatment of Jews in Arab societies during World War II: ignorance, relativism and denial. How do you think politics has shaped today's viewpoints on the Holocaust in Arab lands?
- Satloff discusses the phenomenon of some Arabs not wanting to take credit for their significant role in helping the Jews during the Holocaust. Why do you think this is so?
- Satloff would like to educate Arab schoolchildren about this particular piece of history? What are the barriers to this happening? How could the film provide a forum for such education?
- Do you believe that if Arabs learned about stories of Arabs who helped or protected Jews it would help counter those Arabs who deny the Holocaust? Could it build a bridge a dialogue between Arabs and Jews?
- At the end of the documentary we see a man who is angry that so much attention is given to the Holocaust during World War II but not enough to what he called the "Holocaust in Palestine." Is it naïve to think that the information in this documentary could open an effective dialogue where there has been little?
- Most people—including Jews – think of the Holocaust as a tragedy that only befell European Jews. After viewing this film, how much attention does the story of Jews in Arab lands deserve? Should it be a part of Modern History classes in American high schools and colleges?
- Do you think Jews in Arab lands who lived under Germany or fascist occupation should be called "Holocaust survivors"?
- Did the film uncover things for you that you would rather not know?
- How does the film leave you feeling about the relationships between Arabs and Jews?
- 'Making choices' is a central theme throughout this documentary—including the choice not to do anything. How does this idea of "choice" show up through the story? How does this theme apply today—in the Middle East and in your own life?