



HEROINES,  
RESCUERS,  
RABBIS,  
SPIES

UNSUNG WOMEN  
OF THE HOLOCAUST

SARAH SILBERSTEIN SWARTZ

# Heroines, Rescuers, Rabbis, Spies Unsung Women of the Holocaust

Written by Sarah Silberstein Swartz

Teacher's Guide

Grades 8 – 12; Ages 13 and up

ISBN: 978-1-77260-262-3

Second Story Press  
[www.secondstorypress.ca](http://www.secondstorypress.ca)

# *Heroines, Rescuers, Rabbis, Spies Unsung Women of the Holocaust*

Written by Sarah Silberstein Swartz

Guide Written by Jessica Outram

## Summary

The book introduces nine extraordinary women with a focus on their heroic efforts during the Holocaust. Each woman's story includes compelling information about the places she moved through to survive, the barriers she faced along the way, and the extraordinary choices she made that impacted many others.

Some features of the stories include direct quotations from each woman, rich historical connections and context, as well as what happened after the war.

These are the women featured (and the places they moved through):

1. Born for the Pulpit: Rabbi Regina Jonas (Berlin, Germany; Theresienstadt, Czechoslovakia; Auschwitz, Poland).
2. Woman Warrior with a Camera: Faye Lazebnik Schulman (Lenin, White Russia/Belarus; Landsberg am Lech DP Camp, West Germany; Canada).
3. Heroine of Six Thousand Visas: Yukiko Kikuchi Sugihara (Kovno, Lithuania; Bucharest, Romania; Japan).
4. Chronicler and Conscience of the Holocaust: Rachel Eiga Auerbach (Lvov [Ukraine], Warsaw, Poland; Israel).
5. Jewish Spy for the British: Vera Rosenberg Atkins (Bucharest, Romania; Paris, France; London, Great Britain).
6. Surrogate Mother of Many: Lena Kuchler Silberman (Lvov [Ukraine], Warsaw, Krakow, Zakopane, Poland; Bellevue, France; Israel).
7. One Righteous Woman: Irena Gut Opdyke (Radom, Tarnopol [Ukraine], Poland; Hessisch-Lichtenau DP Camp, West Germany; United States).
8. Sister Survivors: Ruth Zlotnik Altman and Regina Zlotnik Silberstein (Vishogrod, Warsaw, Poland; Berlin, Germany; United States).

## About the Author

Sarah Silberstein Swartz, daughter of Jewish-Polish Holocaust survivors, was born in post-war Berlin, Germany. She is a writer and award-winning editor specializing in women's studies and Holocaust literature. Research Associate at the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute at Brandeis University, she lives in Boston with her wife and cat, near her three grandsons.

## Learning Opportunities

<b>Character Education and Social Emotional Learning</b>	<p>Encourage students to reflect on choices people make under pressure and the impact one person's choices can have on others. Some key themes to explore include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Leadership</li><li>● Service</li><li>● Compassion</li><li>● Perseverance</li></ul>
<b>Language Arts</b>	<p>This book can be used in any Language Arts program. Invite students to share their reflections on each story through conversation, writing, or creative projects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Biography and true stories</li></ul>
<b>History &amp; Social Studies</b>	<p>Connect each of the stories to other sources about World War II. Focus on the roles of women during the war as well as how women were impacted by the war.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Government and citizenship</li><li>● Social justice</li><li>● War and conflict</li></ul>

<b>The Arts</b>	<p>Use the art forms included in the stories. Why is self-expression empowering?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Photography (Faye Lazebnik Schulman)</li> <li>● Poetry (Yukiko Kikuchi Sugihara)</li> <li>● Recording and archiving stories (Rachel Eiga Auerbach)</li> </ul>
<b>Holocaust Studies</b>	<p>Identify and articulate actions that can be taken today to oppose antisemitism. One helpful resource for students about learning how to oppose hatred is <i>What Does Hate Look Like?</i> by Sameea Jimenez and Corinne Promislow.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Holocaust</li> <li>● Antisemitism</li> <li>● Hatred and racism</li> <li>● Influence of individual choice</li> </ul>

## Preparing to Read

### 1. Use a Trauma-Informed Approach

- a. Know your students.
- b. Inform them that parts of the stories include antisemitism, loss, and hardships during the war.
- c. Share a process for students to take a break when they need one.
- d. Check in with students along the way.
- e. Avoid compare/contrast questions.
- f. Avoid role play or writing in the voice of a Holocaust survivor or a soldier.
- g. Avoid displaying or sharing symbols of hate or horrific imagery.
- h. Do your research. For example, The Montreal Holocaust Museum provides some tips and resources for teachers.

## 2. Provide Context

- a. Introduce the history of World War II. The book also provides some tools to support building a context for the stories. Explore them before reading, during reading, and after reading.
  - i. Review the “Selected Timeline” (pages 123–127).
  - ii. Review the map of featured locations (pages 128–129). Project a larger map in the classroom with markers on it to show important locations in the book and where each woman travelled.
- b. Explore students’ knowledge and experiences of women’s rights from the early 1900s to now.
- c. The glossary (pages 131–142) is an excellent place to review vocabulary from the stories related to the Holocaust. Ensure that all students have a common understanding of the following:
  - i. Antisemitism
  - ii. Concentration camps
  - iii. Nazis
  - iv. Adolf Hitler
  - v. Documents/papers/visas
  - vi. Genocide
- d. Review vocabulary from the stories related to big ideas:
  - i. Intersectionality
  - ii. Feminism
  - iii. Bias, position, power, and privilege
  - iv. Identity
  - v. Resistance

### 3. Pre-Reading Activities

#### a. What do you know?

- i. Using a shared document (or electronic whiteboard app) invite students to share what they know from movies, conversations, other classes, and anywhere else about the following:
  1. What do you know about World War II?
  2. What do you know about the Holocaust?
- ii. Discuss: how much of what students shared relates to the stories of women during the war? Reflect on the balance of stories and documented history.

#### b. What do you want to know?

- i. Whose voices are missing from the learning you've had so far about World War II and the Holocaust?
- ii. Consider the big ideas of perspective and bias. How does a person's lived experience shape the way they think and act?
- iii. What is a worldview? How do people's experiences shape their worldview? Here is one resource to learn about worldviews: <https://blog.nfb.ca/blog/2021/02/03/mini-lesson-for-the-big-reset-worldviews/>.
- iv. Make a list of perspectives that are missing from your learning. Some examples may include the following:
  1. Feminist
  2. Ecological
  3. Indigenous
  4. Political
  5. Religious or spiritual
  6. Gender
  7. National origin

8. Age
  9. Physical, emotional, developmental (dis)ability
  10. Economics
  11. Language
- v. Why is it important to look at the past through various lenses? How does it help us to better understand how to think and act today?
  - vi. Create another shared document and list all the things you want to know now. *(Come back to this throughout the study of the book to guide class discussions and inquiry. Choose a different idea/question from the document each day to unpack alongside the reading.)*

## Responding to *Heroines, Rescuers, Rabbis, Spies: Unsung Women of the Holocaust*

There are different ways to engage with this book. It can be a whole class book study, or it can spark smaller group presentations. Finally, it can also be explored through independent study.

### Whole Class Book Study and Discussion

1. Commit to spending one learning block a week for eight weeks with this book. There is great value for long-term impact by engaging in this learning over time rather than in a shorter span of time.
2. Assign students to read one story a week or read a story together each week.
3. After reading each story, invite students to write an essay on one of the following:
  - a. How this woman can be celebrated today
  - b. What it means to be a heroine
  - c. Why this woman inspires me
  - d. The power of storytelling
  - e. A topic of their choice inspired by the readings



4. Invite students to complete the organizer below for each story.

<b>Name of Heroine</b>	<b>In Her Words</b> (choose a quote from the story)	<b>Barriers She Faced</b> (make a list)	<b>Questions I Want to Ask Her</b> (make a list)	<b>Heroic Qualities</b> (make a list)
Rabbi Regina Jonas				
Faye Lazebnik Schulman				
Yukiko Kikuchi Sugihara				
Rachel Eiga Auerbach				
Vera Rosenberg Atkins				
Lena Kuchler Silberman				
Irena Gut Opdyke				
Ruth Zlotnik Altman and Regina Zlotnik Silberstein				

### Smaller Group Presentations

1. Divide the class into eight groups.
2. Assign each group to read and reflect on one story.
3. Ask students to develop a seminar presentation for the whole class (10–15 minutes in length). Encourage the use of a slide deck. Students could also present to the class on video, in the style of a news report, a play, etc.

4. Ideas to include in the seminar presentation:
  - a. Who is this woman? Why is she an “unsung” hero?
  - b. What is the timeline of her story? The geography? Historical context?
  - c. Who was impacted most by her actions?
  - d. How will you honour her legacy today? As a group, consider what actions you can take or what you can create to teach others about her story. Use your creativity. One idea is “I Am a Hero” posters to display in the class or school highlighting the significance of the hero assigned.
  - e. Include two to three discussion questions to engage the class in dialogue and reflection on this hero.
  - f. Students may wish to also explore the resources listed on pages 143–146 for Suggested Reading.
  - g. Can you find more information about the person or the circumstances to add to your presentation?

Connect this project to the particular curriculum in your course. Notes for assessment have not been included because the task should be modified to meet the needs of Language Arts/English, Social Studies, Geography, or History curriculum expectations. Prompts have been designed to invite students to summarize the story, make connections to time and place, think critically about its significance, create something to honour her legacy, and lead a larger group discussion.

This project has been designed with the Global Competencies in mind:

- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship
- Learning to learn/self-aware and self-directed
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Global citizenship and sustainability

## Independent Study and Inquiry

Invite students to independently read the whole book.

In the Author’s Note (pages 119–121), Sarah Silberstein Swartz writes: “I offer this book to the next generation to remind them of the history of the Holocaust by evoking the lived narratives of these nine heroic women. And, like the women in this book, I am committed to understanding the lessons of the Holocaust through my female gaze” (pg. 121).

What is your gaze as you read these stories? How can you offer your learning to others?

Encourage students to use an inquiry process as they engage with the ideas in the stories.

1. **QUESTION.** As you read each story, make a list of questions you have about the time, the people, the places, and/or the events.
2. **RESEARCH.** Follow two to three of your questions by engaging in more reading and research.
3. **CREATE.** Choose a form to express what you have learned. Consider an essay, personal reflection, creative writing piece, or other project of your choice.
4. **SHARE.** Decide how you will share your learning with others and then bring your vision to life. How will you help people understand the lessons of the Holocaust?

## Further Reading

### Picture Books (Ages 7+)

Bat Zvi, Pnina and Margie Wolfe; illus. Isabelle Cardinal, *The Promise*

Nonfiction, \$18.95, ISBN: 978-1-77260-058-2

Kacer, Kathy; illus. Gillian Newland, *The Magician of Auschwitz*

Nonfiction, \$18.95, ISBN: 978-1-927583-46-3

Kacer, Kathy; illus. Juliana Kolesova, *The Brave Princess and Me*

Fiction, \$18.95, ISBN: 978-1-77260-102-2

Renaud, Anne; illus. Richard Rudnicki, *Fania's Heart*

Nonfiction, \$18.95, ISBN: 978-1-77260-057-5

Upjohn, Rebecca; illus. Renné Benoit, *The Secret of the Village Fool*

Nonfiction, \$18.95, ISBN: 978-1-926920-75-7

### Middle Grade (Ages 9–12)

Anne Frank House; illus. Huck Scarry, *All About Anne*

Nonfiction, \$24.95, ISBN: 978-1-77260-060-5

Arato, Rona, *The Ship to Nowhere: On Board the Exodus*

Nonfiction, \$14.95, ISBN: 978-1-772600-18-6

Clark, Kathy, *The Choice*

Fiction, \$14.95, ISBN: 978-1-927583-65-4

Clark, Kathy, *Guardian Angel House*

Fiction, \$14.95, ISBN: 978-1-897187-58-6

Dublin, Anne, *She's a Mensch! Ten Amazing Jewish Women*

Nonfiction, \$22.95, ISBN: 978-1-77260-320-0

Jimenez, Sameea and Corinne Promislow with Larry Swartz, *What Does Hate Look Like?*

Nonfiction, \$21.95, ISBN: 978-1-77260-290-6

Kacer, Kathy, *Clara's War*

Fiction, \$8.95, ISBN: 978-1-896764-42-9

Kacer, Kathy, *The Diary of Laura's Twin*

Fiction, \$14.95, ISBN: 978-1-897187-39-5

Kacer, Kathy, *Hidden on the High Wire*

Fiction, \$13.95, ISBN: 978-1-77260-251-7

Kacer, Kathy, *Hiding Edith: A True Story*

Nonfiction, \$14.95, ISBN: 978-1-897187-06-7

Kacer, Kathy, *The Night Spies*

Fiction, \$8.95, ISBN: 978-1-89676-470-2

Kacer, Kathy, *The Secret of Gabi's Dresser*

Fiction, \$10.95, ISBN: 978-1-896764-15-3

Kacer, Kathy, *Shanghai Escape*

Nonfiction, \$14.95, ISBN: 978-1-92758-310-4

Kacer, Kathy, *To Hope and Back: The Journey of the St. Louis*

Nonfiction, \$14.95, ISBN: 978-1-897187-96-8

Kacer, Kathy, *The Underground Reporters*

Nonfiction, \$17.95, ISBN: 978-1-896764-85-6

Kacer, Kathy, *We Are Their Voice: Young People Respond to the Holocaust*

Nonfiction, \$16.95, ISBN: 978-1-926920-77-1

Levine, Karen, *Hana's Suitcase*

Nonfiction, \$18.95, ISBN: 978-1-896764-55-9

Levine, Karen, *Hana's Suitcase Anniversary Album* (10th anniversary special edition)

Nonfiction, \$24.95, ISBN: 978-1-92692-036-8

Levine, Karen and Emil Sher, *Hana's Suitcase on Stage*

Nonfiction / Drama, \$18.95, ISBN: 978-1-89718-705-0

Spring, Debbie, *The Righteous Smuggler*

Fiction, \$9.95, ISBN: 978-1-896764-97-9

Wees, Janet, *When We Were Shadows*

Nonfiction, \$14.95, ISBN: 978-1-77260-061-2

### YA/Adult (Ages 13+)

Burakowski, Ella, *Hidden Gold: A True Story of the Holocaust*

YA Nonfiction, \$14.95, ISBN: 978-1-927583-74-6

Gold, Jennifer, *Names in a Jar*

YA Fiction, \$14.95, ISBN: 978-1-77260-207-4

Kacer, Kathy, *Restitution: A Family's Fight for Their Heritage Lost in the Holocaust*

Adult Nonfiction, \$19.95, ISBN: 978-1-89718-775-3

Kacer, Kathy with Jordana Lebowitz, *To Look a Nazi in the Eye: A Teen's Account of a War Criminal Trial*

YA Nonfiction, \$13.95, ISBN: 978-1-77260-040-7

Kacer, Kathy, *Under the Iron Bridge*

YA Fiction, \$15.95, ISBN: 978-1-77260-205-0

Rubenstein, Eli (compiled by) with March of the Living, *Witness: Passing the Torch of Holocaust Memory to New Generations*

Adult Nonfiction, \$32.95, ISBN: 978-1-77260-149-7

Schulman, Faye, *A Partisan's Memoir: Woman of the Holocaust*

Adult Nonfiction, \$19.95, ISBN: 978-0-92900-576-8

Settingington, Ken, *Branded by the Pink Triangle*

YA Nonfiction, \$15.95, ISBN: 978-1-926920-96-2

## For Teachers

Nesbitt, Shawntelle, *Holocaust Remembrance Series Teacher Resource: Elementary Social Justice Teacher Resource*

Educational Resource, \$149.00, ISBN: 978-1-89718-794-4

544-page Five-Part Comprehensive Guide