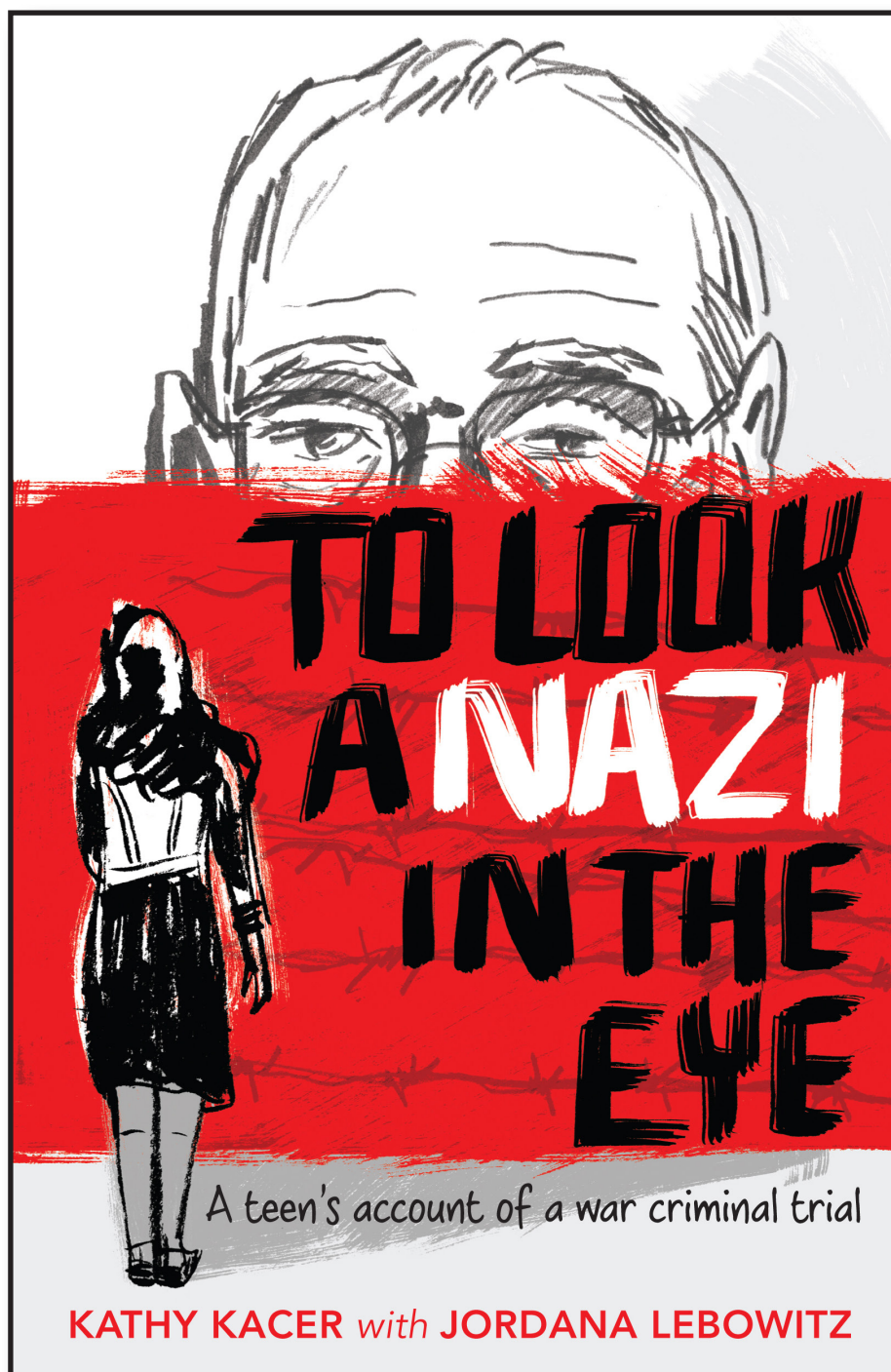


Grades 9–12; Ages 15–19



Teacher's Guide: To Look A Nazi In the Eye  
A teen's account of a war criminal trial  
By Kathy Kacer and Jordana Lebowitz  
Guide by Lawrence Swartz

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## SUMMARY

In 2015, nineteen-year-old Jordana Lebowitz attended the war criminal trial of Oskar Groening, “the bookkeeper of Auschwitz,” who was complicit in the deaths of more than 300,000 Jews. Kathy Kacer outlines Groening’s testimony and also shares the voices and difficult stories of Holocaust survivors who came to testify against him. As witness to the events, Jordana helps readers understand why it is important to remember history and move forward with social justice causes. The book is presented in a number of formats: narrative, testimony of Oskar Groening\*, testimony of Holocaust survivors, Jordana Lebowitz’s blog accounts, and photographs.

\*Since there is no transcript of the trial, author Kathy Kacer has reconstructed and reinvented Oskar Groening’s testimony from several sources.

## LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

- HISTORY: World War II: The Holocaust
- HISTORY: Connecting the past and the present
- LAW: How justice is served
- LAW: International law; war crimes
- SOCIAL JUSTICE DIVERSITY AND EQUITY: Human rights
- RELIGION: Recognizing and respecting multi-faith beliefs
- TOLERANCE: Dangers of intolerance, prejudice, and hate
- GENOCIDE: The Holocaust
- BEARING WITNESS: First-person narrative
- LITERACY: Reading and responding to multi-modal texts (narration, transcript, testimony)
- MEDIA: Interpreting blogs; interpreting photographs

**\*NOTE TO TEACHER:** In January 2019, the CBC reported that “one in five young people in Canada either hasn’t heard of the Holocaust or isn’t sure what it is”

(<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/canada-holocaust-survey-remembrance-1.4994602>).

You can present this statistic to the students for discussion and share the article with them before, during, or after reading *To Look a Nazi in the Eye*. It may be useful to print off the stats and impactful sentences and post them around the room or have students pick out important statistics and sentences that have an impact and post those to remind them of the importance of the story today.

## KEY VOCABULARY and TERMINOLOGY

- AIDING AND ABETTING (p. 1)
- *AUSCHWITZ* (p. 1)
- *ARBEIT MACHT FREI*/English: Work Sets You Free (p. 5)
- *BYSTANDER*
- MARCH OF THE LIVING (p. 7)
- DEATH MACHINE (p. 27)
- *BUBIE* (p. 41)
- GENOCIDE (p. 70)
- ZYKLON B GAS (p. 80)
- REINCARNATION (p. 113)
- WITNESS (p. 122)
- *JUSTIFI*: a humanitarian organization (p. 213)

## PREPARING TO READ *To Look a Nazi in the Eye*

The following suggested activities are designed to activate students' prior knowledge of the Holocaust. Student responses can help inform the teacher as to what further historical information students may need.

### 1. Defining Key Vocabulary

- a) Present students with the key vocabulary listed above under Key Vocabulary and Terminology. Working in pairs, students can prepare a definition of these terms. As a follow-up, partners can use their personal devices to research the definitions and compare them to their own.
- b) Students meet in groups of six, or three pairs each. Each pair shares a definition that they have written or researched. Students present information they have about one or more of these terms.

### 2. An Assumption Guide

An *Assumption Guide* (also known as an *Anticipation Guide*) offers a meaningful strategy to consider, articulate, and anticipate concepts connected to an issue such as immigration, poverty, bullying, or the Holocaust. Assumption Guides can be used as a minds-on activity, particularly for reading in the content areas. The activity provides a context to promote the comprehension strategy of making predictions. After reading the text, students can have their assumptions “confirmed” or “challenged.”

OPTION 1: Print and distribute this guide to all students. Have the class work independently to read and then check off either *Strongly Agree* (SA), *Agree* (A), *Disagree* (D) *Strongly Disagree* (SD), or *Unsure* (U), based on students' own opinions about the statement.

OPTION 2: Cut out each statement and post it at a station around the classroom. Under each statement, put a sheet with five columns: *STRONGLY AGREE*, *AGREE*, *DISAGREE*, *STRONGLY DISAGREE*, or *UNSURE*. Have students walk around the

room to each station, read the statement, and print their name in the column that matches their opinion.

1. Explain to the students that this is not a test with right or wrong answers but an opportunity to explore their ideas and opinions.
2. After completing the activity, ask students to choose one statement that they strongly agree with and share it with a partner. The student should explain why they strongly agree.
3. Ask students to choose one statement that they strongly disagree with and share it with a partner.
4. Again, instruct students to explain their choice.
5. Ask students to choose one statement that they are uncertain about, that they have questions about, or that they might respond differently to under certain circumstances, and share it with a new partner.
6. Survey the class to discover the overall collective responses to each of the statements ( i.e., the total number of students that agree and disagree with each statement). Ask students what they can learn from this group analysis.

NOTE: It is important to return to the ASSUMPTION GUIDE at the end of the unit of study and ask students if—having read and discussed this book, and given the work they have done in class—they might change any of their responses.

## ASSUMPTION GUIDE (reproducible master)

For each of the following statements, circle one answer that best represents your own belief/assumption about that statement:

- STRONGLY AGREE / SA
- AGREE / A
- DISAGREE / D
- STRONGLY DISAGREE / SD
- UNSURE / U

1. I know a lot about the Holocaust.

SA    A    D    SD    U

2. It is possible to achieve justice for victims and survivors of the Holocaust.

SA    A    D    SD    U

3. Nazi soldiers and leaders were just following orders and should not be punished for their part in the Holocaust.

SA    A    D    SD    U

4. Those responsible for the Holocaust are too old now to be brought to trial or imprisoned.

SA    A    D    SD    U

5. The Holocaust happened so long ago that there isn't really anything for young people to do today to bring justice to the survivors.

SA    A    D    SD    U

6. The people who stood by and watched and witnessed the persecution of Jews in the Holocaust should also be punished.

SA    A    D    SD    U

7. People who stand by today and witness the persecution of people should be punished.

SA    A    D    SD    U

8. It is important for survivors to continue to tell their stories today, even though the Holocaust happened so long ago.

SA    A    D    SD    U

9. The Nazis spread hatred and anti-Semitism, but that no longer exists in our society today.

SA    A    D    SD    U

10. The Holocaust could never happen again in today's world.

SA    A    D    SD    U



Complete each of these sentences:

- It is important to learn about the Holocaust because...

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- The best way to understand what happened in the Holocaust is...

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### Building Connections: Personal Narratives

Connections could be suggested before, during, and after the reading of the book. It is rather important to make connections following the reading of the book in order to help students see themselves through Jordana and her struggles.

- a) Invite students to share a story about a time when they or someone they know experienced unfair or unjust treatment at school or in the community. Were they treated unfairly because of their age, gender, race, or religion? Did anyone intervene to help the person who was treated unjustly? Was justice served following the experience? Think about what would have needed to happen for there to be justice.
- b) Students work in small groups to share their stories. As a follow-up, some students might choose to share their story with the whole class. Ask the students: Why did you choose to retell this story? What did you learn about yourself from this story? How did it feel to remember and retell the story?

## Possible Extensions

1. Students can prepare a personal written narrative of the story that they told.
2. Students can be given a choice of topics that might help build “text to self” personal connections to the issues in this book. Students can share personal narratives about:
  - being a witness
  - a personal quest
  - heroism
  - survival
  - challenges

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

The following questions are designed to invite students to respond to the information and issues presented in the text. They are presented below in three different chunks according to the timeline of the story. Questions can be implemented in one or more of the following ways:

- Whole-class discussion
- Pairs or small-group discussion
- Written response (followed by discussion)
- Discussion (followed by written response)
- Debate

### Before the Trial, Pages 1 to 56

1. Why did Jordana think it was so important to attend the trial of Oskar Groening? What inspired Jordana to go on this trip? What reasons did she give to her mother to convince her that this was important?
2. What are some concerns that Jordana's parents had about giving their daughter permission to attend the trial? Do you think their concerns were valid? Why or why not?
3. Outline some of the concerns/fears that Jordana had about taking this journey. If given the opportunity, would you have joined Jordana?
4. Why was it important to the German people to bring Oskar Groening to trial sixty years after the Holocaust? Why was it important to the Holocaust survivors? Why was it important to the world?
5. How did the fact that Groening was ninety years old influence people's opinions of the trial? What is your opinion of this fact?

6. Much of the Groening trial was based on the fact that even though he didn't directly kill anyone, he was part of the killing machine. When referring to death camps, Thomas Walther, the prosecutor, claimed, "If you think of the 'death machine' as a machine, then all the parts of the machine must work. Otherwise the machine does not work" (p. 27). Discuss whether you think Groening should be accountable and punished because he was part of the machine.
7. What are some important facts that you learn about Oskar Groening from the testimonies presented in this section of the book? What experiences in his life led him to become "the bookkeeper of Auschwitz"?

## The Trial, Pages 57 to 208

8. From what you've read about Oskar Groening's testimony, how would you describe his role in the killing machine?
9. On page 58, Groening expresses his doubt and outrage at the way the Jewish people were treated. However, he did nothing and continued in his role. What might you do in that situation if you truly believed you were doing something evil?
10. In the trial, Groening says that he continued to hear the cries of the dying in his dreams and in every waking moment. He says, "I can only plead for forgiveness and pray for atonement" (p. 90). Do you believe Groening? How do you think Jordana, the Holocaust survivors, and others attending the trial felt about Groening's confession? What is your reaction? Do you believe he is sincere in his remorse?
11. On the first day of the trial, Jordana stands in front of Oskar Groening, stares at him, and tries to imagine him in Auschwitz. If Jordana was given the chance to speak to Groening at this moment, what might she say? What might she ask?
12. Reread the paragraph on page 111 that begins with the sentence, "And then a horrifying thought struck Jordana." The author outlines some questions that were going through Jordana's head about the possible outcome of the trial. How might you answer these questions? Do you think that enough time has passed that those who were part of the death machine should no longer be accountable for their wrongdoings?

13. Eva Mozes Kor is one of the survivors who attends the trial. At the end of her account, Kor approaches Oskar Groening and extends her hand to him in a gesture of reconciliation (p. 142). What did Eva hope to gain from this gesture? How did the other survivors who attended the trial respond to this gesture? What is your own reaction to Eva Kor's gesture?
14. Throughout the narration of the trial, we learn about Jordana's strong reactions to events. What were some of your own reactions as you read about the trial? The following sentence stems will help you consider your own responses:

NOTE: Students might prepare written responses before discussing their reactions with others.

I felt angry when...

I felt confused when...

I felt frustrated when...

I felt sympathetic when...

I felt sad when...

15. If convicted, what do you think would be a fair sentence for Oskar Groening?

## Returning Home and Reflecting on the Trial, Pages 208 to 224

16. Hedy, a survivor, told Jordana that "being in Germany was like getting rid of a heavy weight that had been in her heart and mind." Why was the experience of attending the trial important to the survivors? Why was it so important to Jordana? Why was it important to the world?
17. On day four of the trial, April 24, 2015, Jordana writes in her blog: "It is my responsibility to pass on these stories. I am now a witness" (p. 177). What is the responsibility (or responsibilities) of a being witness to any act of injustice? What are some actions that witnesses might take in moving toward social justice and equity?

18. Thomas Walther, the prosecutor, volunteered his services for the trial, even though he wasn't Jewish. Previously, he had successfully prosecuted another Nazi war criminal. Why was Walther so committed to this work?
19. Oskar Groening was found guilty of being complicit in the murder of 300,000 Jews in Auschwitz. He was sentenced to four years in prison. Jordana was outraged. The survivors were satisfied with the outcome. What is your reaction to this verdict?
20. In the Epilogue to this story (pp. 221–224), we learn some information about what happened following the trial and what action Jordana took in her life. What questions do you still have about the Holocaust? The trial? Jordana?
21. How truthful is the title *To Look a Nazi in the Eye*?
22. *To Look a Nazi in the Eye* is presented in a variety of formats, including narrative, testimony, blog entries, and photographs. As you read this book, did you find yourself more intrigued with some parts of the story than others? How did presenting the book in different formats help you understand the story?

## RESPONDING TO *To Look a Nazi in the Eye*

### Activity #1: Voices and Perspectives

*To Look a Nazi in the Eye* presents three essential voices connected to the war criminal trial of Oskar Groening: Oskar Groening; Jordana Lebowitz, who attended the trial; and Holocaust survivors, who told their own stories as they testified against Groening. By providing students with quotations excerpted from the book, students can interpret, respond, and reflect on the meaning behind the voices and consider the different perspectives connected to the trial.

Provide students with the reproducible master entitled VOICES. Instruct students to identify three statements that resonate with them by marking each with an asterisk. Students can arrange themselves into small groups to discuss the statements and the meanings behind them. The following questions can guide the discussion:

- Whose perspective is being represented with the statement? Give reasons for your answer.
- Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain.
- What questions come to mind that are connected to this statement?

### Possible Extensions

Option #1: An alternative way to present this activity is to cut the handouts into strips containing one statement each, and distribute one strip to each student. Students can first work in pairs to discuss the statements and then arrange themselves in groups of four to share their responses.

Option #2: Display the statements around the room, and students can go on a *gallery walk* to read the quotations. Students can then stand by the quotation that interests them the most. What questions come to mind after reading this statement? Students can record their questions on a Post-it note and display these notes on a chart.

NOTE: Students can revisit this activity after completing the reading. How have their responses been challenged or confirmed? What new questions might emerge **VOICES (Reproducible Master)**

“If you think of the ‘death machine’ as a machine, then all parts of the machine must work. Otherwise, the machine does not work.” (p. 27)

“If the world can’t convict someone like Oskar Groening, then what message will that send to other dictators and murderers?” (p. 55)

“This guilt will never leave me. I can only plead for forgiveness and pray for atonement.” (p. 90)

“I am very sorry.” (p. 106)

“At the time I said that a life sentence would be worthless for a man of ninety-four. I thought he should be given a sentence to go into schools with an escort and tell students about Auschwitz. He said that he never denied what happened.” (pp. 109–110)

“He asked for forgiveness, but who are we to forgive him?” (p. 111)

“The truth was that Jordana not only had dreams, she had nightmares. And sometimes they were filled with babies dying and scrolls burning and other images from that terrible time—images that she had only seen in books or films.” (p. 112)

“Those who commit crimes today must know they will be held accountable in the future. They cannot say they were just a cog in the machinery.” (p. 122)

“I have a privileged life because I have a family.” (p. 129)

*“We must speak the truth about the Holocaust and bring about a better world—one that eliminates hatred and replaces it with respect and humanity.”* (p. 131)

“You cannot be free from what was done to you unless you remove from our shoulders the daily burden of pain and anger. I forgive the Nazis, not because they deserve it, but because I deserve it.” (p. 153)

“... being in Germany was like getting rid of a heavy weight that had been in her heart and mind.” (p. 173)



*“Groening may not have ordered anyone to their death, but he is as accountable as those who did.”* (p. 176)

*“It is my responsibility to pass on these stories. I am now a witness.”* (p. 177)

“The truth is that my parents and grandparents and others of that generation grew up trying to hide the past. But my generation is trying to understand this history. We want to take responsibility for our country’s past and work for something more positive in the future.” (p. 195)

## Activity #2: Responding to Jordana’s Blog Posts

Jordana expresses her thoughts, feelings, and observations of the trial in a blog she shares with the Canadian Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center. Have students revisit excerpts of Jordana’s blog posts and respond to two of the posts in writing. Students will find longer excerpts of blogs on pages 119, 149, 177, 197, 219. In their written responses students might:

- agree or disagree with Jordana’s thoughts and feelings
- comment or offer advice to Jordana in this moment of the trial
- raise questions
- make connections to their own lives

### Possible Extension

Invite the students to think of an issue in their school, community, or greater society and write a blog post expressing their thoughts, feelings, and opinions on this issue. Students can share their posts with a partner. Students can respond to each other’s posts. This may be done as a closed site for the class so that the teacher can monitor it and then as a class decide how to share it. Maybe that some students are already blogging and this may open the door for other students.

## Activity #3: In the Courtroom: Another Perspective

Invite students to imagine that they are in the courtroom witnessing the trial as:

- a reporter for a Canadian newspaper
- a relative of a survivor
- a historian

Students choose a particular day of the trial and write an account of that day from one of the above perspectives. Ask the students to consider vocabulary and tone to capture the voice of this witness. Students can compare and share their accounts with a partner.

### ***Resources:***

What Happened at the Nuremberg Trials? | History <https://youtu.be/RsA6AdCRI-k>

Eichmann: The End of the Line for a Nazi War Criminal | People & Politics  
<https://youtu.be/aJdSDT32P3c>

Reinhold Hanning trial: Auschwitz survivor Hedy Bohm  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-36542142/reinhold-hanning-trial-auschwitz-survivor-hedy-bohm>

### Possible Extension

#### **Role Play**

Students work with a partner. One student can play the role of a reporter and the partner can play the role (perspective) of the person whose account they chose to write. The reporter can interview their partner to learn more about their perspective and feelings witnessing the trial.

## Activity #4: Reflecting on Survivors' Stories

The following survivors attended the trial of Oskar Groening and related their experiences of being at Auschwitz:

Eva Mozes Kor (pp. 139–144)

Max Eisen (pp. 157–163)

Bill Glied (pp. 164–167)

Hedy Bohm (pp. 181–187)

Invite students to select one of the testimonies presented in the trial that particularly touched them. Students can reflect on the testimony using the following thinking stems:

- i. I chose this testimony because...

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- ii. Three new facts or observations I learned about the Holocaust through this testimony are...

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- iii. Two questions or comments I would have for the survivor are...

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- iv. One image in the testimony that will stay with me is...

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- v. One quotation/statement revealed by the survivor is...

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## Possible Extension

After completing their written statements, students can share and compare their responses with a partner who chose to reflect on a different testimony.

## Activity #5: Role on the Wall: Reflecting on the Character of Jordana Lebowitz

Role on the Wall presents an outline of a character displayed on a chart, which preferably hangs “on the wall.” Students use the role-on-the-wall figure to reflect and record thoughts, feelings, and qualities that are significant to a character. Students record words, phrases, statements, or questions on the chart.

The following activity demonstrates how the role-on-the-wall strategy can be used to have students think about the character of Jordana.

Invite students to work in small groups to create an outline of a girl (Jordana) on a large sheet of paper. Each group is given three markers of different colours to record facts, information, and their responses as follows:

- Step #1: In one colour and on the outside of the outline, record facts you know about Jordana: her background, education, age, inspiration.
- Step #2: In a different colour and on the inside of the outline, write everything you know about Jordana’s feelings, dreams, fears, hopes, qualities.
- Step #3: In a third colour, list questions on the page that students might ask Jordana about her life and her experiences visiting Germany.

## Possible Extension

Students can share their role-on-the-wall creations with another group and discuss:

- i. What do we learn about Jordana from her actions, from her blogs, and from what others say about her?
- ii. How do we know that Jordana was:
  - tenacious/determined

- a good friend
  - clever
  - resourceful
  - sympathetic
  - inspirational
  - brave
- iii. What qualities does Jordana have that are similar to yours? What qualities does she have that you would like to have?

Do you know anyone like Jordana?

## Activity #6: Planning a Future Equity Project

Jordana was inspired by March of the Living, and she continued to follow her dreams to learn more and to educate students by attending the Groening trial and later by creating a Holocaust museum piece in a boxcar.

Students work in groups to brainstorm ways, strategies, and ideas to educate their peers today about the Holocaust. They could plan an event that recognizes The Holocaust. use social media, films, a field trip etc. Students can select one of their ideas and write a proposal to bring to the principal or the school board or community for approval and funding. The proposal might include the following:

- Why this plan? Overall purpose.
- What will the participants learn? Will the project help change their thinking, understanding?
- How will this unfold? Logistics, place, time, resources, social media, budget.

Students can pitch their ideas and plans to the class, and maybe a class project will emerge for educating their peers about the Holocaust.

## Activity #7: Revisiting the Assumption Guide

**NOTE:** It is important to return to the ASSUMPTION GUIDE at the end of the unit of study and ask students if—having read and discussed this book, and given the work they have done in class—they might change any of their responses. It might be interesting for the students to repeat the activity and then compare their answers to those they provided at the beginning of the unit.

In small groups, students can discuss the following:

- What changes might you make from your original answers to any of these statements? Why?
- What information did you learn by reading *To Look a Nazi in the Eye* that better informed you about the issues connected to justice?
- Which statement(s) do you STRONGLY DISAGREE with? Why?
- Which statement(s) do you STRONGLY AGREE with? Why?
- What questions still emerge for you about the trial of Oskar Groening and its aftermath?

## LISTENING AND VIEWING INQUIRY

The following media resources and programs provide further support for students to investigate 1) the history of the Holocaust and 2) the implications of taking action to address social justice and equity issues.

- NOTE: Essential viewing to accompany *To Look a Nazi in the Eye* is the documentary *The Accountant of Auschwitz* (2018). This film is a visual documentary of Oskar Groening's trial; it includes testimonies from survivors who attended the trial.
- Fighting Anti-Semitism Together, FAST, provides a free online program to schools across Canada via the *Voices into Action* website. One component of this program draws attention to the Holocaust. Other components help students to preserve and defend the human rights of all people through such topics as the *Komagata Maru*, *Residential Schools in Canada*, *Confronting Physical and Mental Challenges*, *Islamophobia*.
- *March of the Living* and *March of Remembrance and Hope* websites. Special viewing: Survivor Testimony from the archives of the *USC Shoah Foundation* and *March of the Living* websites.
- Facing History is an organization, both online and with regional offices, that promotes students' historical understanding, critical thinking, and social-emotional learning. Facing History provides educators with resources, lesson plans, and units of study, coaching, and professional development to assist with the implementation, in the classroom, of complex and sensitive topics such as the Holocaust. <https://www.facinghistory.org>

## FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES FOR READERS

### **Picture Books**

*Rose Blanche* by Roberto Gallaz; illus. Robert Innocenti  
*The Magician of Auschwitz* by Kathy Kacer; illus. Gillian Newland  
*Fania's Heart* by Anne Renaud; illus. Richard Rudnicki  
*The Promise* by Pnina Bat Zvi & Margie Wolfe; illus. Isabelle Cardinal

### **Graphic Texts**

*Auschwitz* by Pascal Croci  
*Maus* by Art Spiegelman (also: *Maus II*)  
*The Diary of Anne Frank: Graphic Adaptation* by Ari Folman; illus. David Polonsky  
*What the Night Sings* by Vesper Stamper

### **Historical Fiction**

*The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyne  
*The Choice* by Kathy Clark  
*The Librarian of Auschwitz* by Antonio Iturbe and Lilit Thwaites (translator)  
*To Hope and Back: The Journey of the St. Louis* by Kathy Kacer  
*The Tattooist of Auschwitz* by Heather Morris  
*Milkweed* by Jerry Spinelli  
*Mapping the Bones* by Jane Yolen  
*The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak

### **Non-Fiction**

*All About Anne* by Anne Frank House and illustrated by Frank Scarry  
*Hidden Gold: A True Story of the Holocaust* by Ella Burakowski  
*By Chance Alone: A Remarkable True Story of Courage and Survival at Auschwitz* by Max Eisen  
*The Underground Reporters* by Kathy Kacer



*We Are Their Voice: Young People Respond to the Holocaust* by Kathy Kacer  
*Auschwitz: A New History* by Laurence Rees  
*Witness: Passing the Torch of Holocaust Memory to New Generations* compiled by Eli Rubenstein with the March of the Living  
*Branded by the Pink Triangle* by Ken Settrington  
*Night* by Elie Wiesel  
*When We Were Shadows* by Janet Wees