

A **JEWISH EDUCATIONAL SUPPLEMENT** FOR

**BLESSED
IS THE
MATCH**

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF HANNAH SENESH



FACING
HISTORY
AND
OURSSELVES

Facing History and Ourselves is an international educational and professional development organization whose mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and antisemitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry. By studying the historical development of the Holocaust and other examples of genocide, students make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives. For more information about Facing History and Ourselves, please visit our website at www.facinghistory.org.

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www.hannahsenesh.org.il

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<http://www.facinghistory.org/blessedisthematch>.



Facing History and Ourselves Headquarters
16 Hurd Road
Brookline, MA 02445-6919

INTRODUCTION

The following supplement was written as a companion to the study guide that was developed for the film *Blessed is the Match: The Life and Death of Hannah Senesh* by Facing History and Ourselves. The activities described in this supplement provide opportunities for teachers in Jewish educational settings to connect the story of Hannah's life and her choices to the larger context of Jewish history, and integrate Jewish textual sources into the themes that are raised by the film.

The following activities described are aligned with the lessons in the study guide and act as extensions which add an additional layer to the activity for Jewish educational settings.

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

PREVIEW ACTIVITIES

Jewish Life in Pre-War Hungary

Within a Jewish educational setting it is particularly important for students to learn about the diversity of Jewish life in Central Europe (and in this instance Hungary in particular) before World War II. The Background Information section of the guide contains helpful information about this time period.

Additional research can be done by students through an online investigation of the photography archive of the United States Holocaust Museum, <http://www.ushmm.org/research/collections/photo/>. Ask students to search the archive for photographs from pre-war Hungary, and gather as much information as possible about the photographs. Alternatively, the following images from the USHM archive can be provided to groups or individual students to investigate. These pictures evoke the diverse range of Jewish experience prior to World War II. Use the USHMM's search engine to find the images by photograph number.

Group portrait of young Hungarian rabbis [*Photograph #04588*]

Group portrait of Jewish high school students at the Hebrew gymnasium [*Photograph #42559*]

A group of Hungarian and Jewish children pose with their teacher [*Photograph #14679*]

Prewar portrait of a large Hungarian Jewish family in Budapest [*Photograph #23754*]

A group of Hungarian Jewish friends [*Photograph #23754*]

Group portrait of members of a Jewish youth group in Budapest [*Photograph #14671*]

Group portrait of students in a Hungarian yeshiva [*Photograph #63711*]

A group of Jewish friends gathers in an apartment in Kalocsa [*Photograph #45556*]

Group portrait of Jewish and non Jewish children in a public school in Tacovo [*Photograph #49445*]

Portrait of the family of Pal Kornhauser in Budapest [*Photograph #14678*]

The following activities utilize photographs to deepen student understanding of pre-war Jewish life in Hungary.

- Begin the photograph assignment with a K-W-L organizer. Ask students to divide a blank page into three columns. In the first column (K – Know) students should record what they know about Jewish life in Hungary before World War II. In the second column (W – Want to know) students record their questions about this time period and the people who lived through it. As a class, students should share their responses in the first two columns. The third column (L – Learned) remains blank until the end of the activity, at which point students share what they learned from the photographs.
- To help structure the presentation of photographs, students may be asked to create an identity chart for one person in a picture they chose or were assigned. (See page 22 in the [Blessed is the Match Study Guide](#).) Students can then display their photograph and the individual’s identity chart for the class to see. Students should then choose an individual from a different photograph and compare and contrast the identity charts of the two individuals, focusing on the following questions:
 - What do you think accounts for the similarities between the identities?
 - What do you think accounts for the differences between the identities?
 - Think of an occasion for these two individuals to meet; what might they say to one another? What might the conversation be like?



Defining a Hero

In the *Blessed Is The Match* study guide, we considered the definition of a *hero* and considered whether Hannah Senesh was a hero (see page 20 of the study guide). As part of that activity students considered five heros and the heroic qualities that each possesses. Encourage students to choose personalities from Jewish history—biblical or modern.

POSTVIEW ACTIVITIES

Identity, Decision Making and Voice

As an additional layer to this activity ask students to think about Hannah’s Jewish identity at different times in Hannah’s life. How do aspects of her Jewish identity affect the choices that she makes? What role does Zionism play in her life? Which moments in her life guided the development of her Zionist identity? You can also ask students to consider their own Jewish identities—what impacts or helps to shape this aspect of their identities, and how their own sense of their Jewish identity informs their decision making and choices.

Return to the Concept of a Hero

In the working definition of the word *hero* that the class created prior to watching the film, was the word *courage* (or *courageous*) included?

The word for *courage* in Modern Hebrew is *ometz lev* (אומץ-לב). While the word *ometz* can be used on its own for *courage*, often it is followed by the word *lev* (לב , “heart”).

- Why do you think that the Hebrew word for courage combines these two words?
- Do you think that courageous acts always involve the heart?
- Would you use this Hebrew term to describe Hannah's actions? Why? Why not?

Ask the class if they would choose to add *ometz lev* (אומץ-לב) to the working definition of *hero* that was created prior to watching the film.

Rescue and Responsibility

Talking about the motivation behind Hannah's decision to join the mission to Hungary provides an opportunity to contextualize her actions within the Jewish concept of *tikun olam*, "repairing the world."



In the message from the Senesh family in the introduction (page ix) to the study guide Eitan Senesh writes: "As you are watching [*Blessed is the Match*], reading Hannah's poetry, or leading discussions about Hannah, I hope you might ask yourself: 'What can I do for others?' 'What are my goals and how can I achieve them?' and 'What lessons can I learn from Hannah's life story?' I hope you'll ask these questions not because you've been inspired by a mythical figure, but instead by a gifted and very human young woman who was able to light the way for those around her. As Hannah wrote: 'There are stars whose radiance is visible on earth though they have long been extinct.

There are people whose brilliance continues to light the world though they are no longer among the living. These lights are particularly bright when the night is dark. They light the way for mankind.'"

- What does Eitan Senesh want us to take away from Hannah's story?
- How does it connect with what you know of the concept of *tikun olam*?
- What does the quotation that Eitan Senesh uses at the end of his introduction say about the impact of the choices that individuals make?
- Has watching the film and learning about the life of Hannah Senesh affected your view of *tikun olam* and the choices that you make in your life?
- What is your passion? Are there issues that motivate you to action?

Pirkei Avot, Ethics of the Fathers 2:21 states: "He (Rabbi Tarfon) used to say: It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task. Yet, you are not free to desist from it."

הוא היה אומר, לא עליך כל המלאכה לגמור, ולא אתה בן חורין ליבטל.

- How does this piece of text connect with Hannah's story?
- What, if anything, do you think was accomplished by the mission?

When asking the question of why Hannah and the others who joined the mission from Palestine made the choices that they did, it is interesting to consider a quote from the film of Aharon Megged in which he compares Hannah to biblical prophets: "Like in the Prophets. 'Send me. Send me to serve the good and the beauty in the world.'"

Hannah's voice in the film says: "In the mountains one can believe—and must believe. In the mountains one involuntarily hears the query, 'Whom shall I send?' and the answer, 'Send me!'"

- Why would Megged make this comparison to biblical prophecy?
- What are qualities of some of the prophets from the Bible?
- What is the role of a prophet in the Bible? How is this similar and different to the role that Hannah Senesh played?

Research Projects

One significant influence on the life of Hannah Senesh was Zionism and the Zionist youth movement in which she became an active member while still living in Budapest. The film *Blessed is the Match* provides an opportunity to highlight the long history, within the context of ordinary Jewish life, of Zionism, which predates the Holocaust and the establishment of the modern state of Israel. There is a common misconception that the Zionist movement was founded solely as a reaction to antisemitism. While discrimination against and persecution of the Jewish people has been one important defining characteristic of Jewish history, the emergence of Zionism is best understood in the contexts of ancient Jewish history, the origins of Jews in Palestine, and nineteenth and twentieth century European history.

Have students research the various Zionist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, their positions, and their leaders. In their research, students should consider the different reasons that individuals joined Zionist movements. How are these motivating factors similar or different from those that influenced Hannah?

Students can organize their findings into campaign posters for each movement, which would include the information that they discovered as well as a slogan for their Zionist group. The slogan and poster should be designed to sway others to the position of their movement.

Zionist groups and leaders students may investigate include:

Political Zionism—Theodor Herzl
 Labor Zionism—Ber Berochov
 Revisionist Zionism—Zev Jabotinsky
 Religious Zionism—Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook

Other Zionist leaders and pioneers for research include:

Leo Pinsker
 Ahad Ha'am
 David Ben-Gurion
 Golda Meir
 Nathan Birnbaum