THE ENDURING IMPACT OF THE HOLOCAUST IN THE NETHERLANDS

MY FATHER'S WAR
THREE GENERATIONS IN HIDING

LESSON PLANS AND INSpirATIONS
FOR AGES 14+

Published in 2022
Seventy-seven years after the fall of Nazi Germany, the Holocaust stands as a staggering crime against humanity, and the world continues to grapple with the deep void of the millions of souls lost. Yet, in the face of unfathomable horror, fleeting moments of bravery and generosity remind us of our capacity for courage and compassion even under the most harrowing circumstances.

*My Father's War* is a part of Humanity in Action's short film trilogy [Traces — Portraits of Resistance, Survival and Resolve](#), developed by an international team of researchers and animators. The three films, narrated by their protagonists, don't just tell histories of the past. They serve as lessons - learned at a tremendous expense - that help us address today's social and ethical challenges.

In the following, you will find lesson plans based on *My Father's War*. They were developed to offer educators inspirations and tools for creating meaningful, thought-provoking and engaging exchange with and among the students.
AVAILABLE CLASS RESOURCES

25-minute digital animation film
"My Father's War" (link to mp4 file)

6 short interview clips
with Peter Hein
of 30 seconds to 2 minutes each (links to mp4 files)

4 handouts
"Trauma: Key terms" | "Kolonne Henneicke" |
"Polish Law Controversy" | "The myth of Anne Frank"

3 Books (available in Dutch only)
De onderduikers | Het zesde jaar | Een oorlog die de mijne zou zijn
My Father’s War, an animated documentary produced by Humanity in Action, brings to life the experiences of Peter Hein and his son David. As a Jewish toddler in the Netherlands in the 1940s, Peter was separated from his parents and whisked from hiding place to hiding place to escape deportation and death. Decades later, his own son David attempts to forge his own path after his father’s mental health buckles under the weight of his memories. The film reveals the hereditary trauma of the Holocaust: the deep emotional wounds of forefathers passed on to children and grandchildren. Narrated by both Peter and David, the film depicts an intergenerational conversation, reverberating across the decades.

To prepare for a discussion in class, students watch the digital animation film as their home assignment.
To recap the home assignment, watch the film trailer at the beginning of class to create space for the students' reflections and exchange.

1:28 MINUTES
TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

A. The psychological effects of war on children and following generations
   Approx. 70 minutes

B. The dangers of a fragmented society- Jews, collaborators and rescuers in the Netherlands
   Approx. 90-120 minutes

C. The danger of a single narrative: Post-war accountability and national myths
   Approx. 60 minutes
“Wherever war rages, children are the most hurt and the most silent. So, unintentionally, they become the most forgotten victims.”

Dr. Nathan Peretz Durst

Dr. Nathan Peretz Durst was a Berlin-born Jewish trauma psychologist who cofounded "Amcha", an organization which provides psychological support to Holocaust survivors and their families.

In 1939, Durst fled to the Netherlands with his sister, where they survived the war in various hiding places. His parents and two other sisters were left behind, and were later murdered in Auschwitz.

After the war he studied psychology in Groningen before moving to Israel in 1970. He passed away in 2012.
What does Nathan Durst mean by calling child survivors “forgotten victims?”

After the war, caregivers used to persuade children with significant memories to let go of them. Children who wanted to speak were silenced. In a world recovering from war, silence is meant to help children turn to the future and forget the past. But the process of "rebirth" did not allow for the integration or processing of the terrible traumas of the past. Due to this, in the face of new stressful situations and especially with the aging of the survivors, this population is at increased risk for the collapse of the defence mechanisms and the appearance of post-traumatic symptoms.

This approach was also mirrored in the German Reparation Law (Wiedergutmachung), which denied the possibility that childhood experiences leave scars or lead to mental or physical problems. According to lawmakers, since young children were unable to remember the details of their anguish, they could not have suffered permanent harm.

Suggested: 10 minutes
ADDING PETER'S PERSPECTIVE TO THE DISCUSSION

01:02 minute interview clip: Dealing with depression
Interview with Peter Hein, 2022
DISCUSSION: LONG-TERM IMPACT OF TRAUMA

How can Peter’s decent into depression be explained by his experience as a child in hiding?

Does My Father's War suggest ways for developing resilience and coping with depression? Can you think of other ways?

Suggested: 10 minutes for reading the handout followed by 10 minutes group reflection
ADDING PETER'S PERSPECTIVE TO THE DISCUSSION
"Children saved are at the same time children abandoned"

Dr. Elisheva van der Hal, Psychotherapist

There are no exact numbers of how many children survived the holocaust in areas under Nazi rule. However, estimates speak of around 3-4%, approximately 50,000 of 1,250,000 children.

Discussion:

What options did parents have to save their children?
Why do you think Peter's parents made the decision to separate from him?

Suggested: 10 minutes
WAYS IN WHICH CHILDREN SURVIVED THE HOLOCAUST:

1. Staying in a Catholic institution (e.g. monastery)
2. Staying with one or several Christian families
3. Surviving in a concentration camp
4. Hiding in the woods / with a group of partisans

Research findings show that there is no significant difference in the levels of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder between children who survived in either of the four groups.

However...
Thus, high levels of frustration, anxiety and depression were caused, and in some cases resulted in damage to self-worth and confidence which in turn increased the intensity of anger and hostility.

Staying in monasteries or with Christian families, which usually included frequent replacement of one family with another, was associated with greater distress in the long run.

The basic feelings of belonging and identity of these children were often harmed by:

- The often sudden and unexplained perceived abandonment by the parents
- The forced disengagement from their original identity with their parents, feelings and memories.
- At the end of the war, the forced separation from the new and safer (Christian) identity and return to the former identity, associated with fear, often constituted re-traumatization.
"Now to you, my only child, my most beloved. How are you, my good soul? Are you healthy? And are you diligent in your studies? Your beloved mother misses you so much. Pray, my child! Pray every day, morning, noon and evening, for your mommy, aunts, uncles, and nephews. Pray, my child, that we may see you again in health, Amen, Amen! As long as my eyes are open, I bless you, my beloved child! May the Lord bless you and protect you in all your ways, Amen! [...] Never forget your mommy, be good and listen to the voice of your educators. Listen and obey them, because everyone wants the best for you, like your mommy. Oh, how I would like to be with you. Now, farewell. Be healthy and strong, a thousand hugs from mommy who loves you forever, Aunt Santa, Regina, Kata, David, Manfred, Heinz, Walter, Signy and the families, all acquaintances are asking about you and join my requests. Goodbye."
Assuming she will not meet her son again, what does Rosa wish for her son? In what areas of his life is it important for her to leave a mark and chart the path he will take when he grows up without her? The wording in the letter are fragmented and repetitious. Why do you think that is the case?

Suggested: 10 minutes
The letters left by Jews during the Holocaust served as their final wills. Many of them were addressed to their children. The significance of writing to their children whom they will not get to raise and educate is immense. These letters are full of love as well as guidelines and requests for the future, revealing deep pain for the impossibility of a continuing a life together.

Rosa may feel that focusing and investing in studies and education will ensure her son a better future. She also understands and appreciates that when his parents no longer accompany him, he will feel the need to be close to other adults, and will have to trust them.
ADDING PETER'S PERSPECTIVE TO THE DISCUSSION

42 seconds interview clip: Into the Unknown
Interview with Peter Hein. 2022
ROLE PLAY ACTIVITY: TAKING AN IMPOSSIBLE DECISION

Suggested: 20 minutes

Divide the group into pairs.

Within each pair, one person takes the role of Peter's father, Paul, and the other takes the role of Peter's mother, Netta.

The person playing Paul has 5 minutes to present arguments for separating from their 4 year old son to increase his and their chances of survival. Next, the person playing Netta, who is sceptical and rather follow the Nazi orders to report to Westerbork, has 5 minutes to present counter arguments.

Follow with a class reflection on the activity.

⚠️ Trigger warning: Some students might find this type of activity triggering
CONCLUDING DISCUSSION: THE LONG-TERM PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF THE HOLOCAUST

Suggested: 20 minutes

- What do you think were the main psychological challenges Peter and his parents had to confront during the war?

- What could be the long-term psychological effects of the war on them?
CONCLUDING DISCUSSION: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

PARENTS

- The decision to go into hiding
- Separating from the only son and not knowing his fate
- Dealing with the unknown
- Constant anxiety and fear of informants
- Fear of capture, deportation and death
- Boredom
- Longing
- The necessity to hide with strangers and dependence on them for survival
- Overcoming physical and psychological distress of hunger, disease, overcrowding,
- The loss of trust

PETER

- Dealing with the unknown without his parents
- Fear of capture, deportation and death
- Lack of contacts with children his age
- Lack of stability and sense of control
- Difficulty in creating attachment and intimacy
- Loss of identity - name, religion, appearance
Globally in 2020, one in four children (≈426 million) lived in a country affected by armed conflict or disaster.

Read the article [How is the Ukraine war affecting children’s mental health?](#) by Dr. Amir Khan (31 Mar 2022).

What effects of modern wars on children are described in the text? What are the similarities or differences between those effects and the ones discussed in the context of children in the Holocaust?

**Suggested:** 20 minutes
OPENING DISCUSSION: NETHERLANDS AND THE HOLOCAUST

What is the first association that comes to your mind in the context of the Netherlands and the Holocaust?

Suggested: 5 minutes
BACKGROUND: NETHERLANDS AND THE HOLOCAUST

The Germans invaded the Netherlands in May 1940, and occupied it within five days. Queen Wilhelmina and her government fled to Britain, yet the government apparatus continued to function under the tight control of the German occupation regime.

There were about 140,000 Jews living in the Netherlands at the time, including about 16,000 German and Austrian refugees. Anti-Jewish policy in the Netherlands gradually developed with the removal of Jewish workers from the civil service in 1940 and later with the imposition of the obligation to register all Dutch Jews according to Nazi-imposed racial laws. These measures enabled the looting of property and the restriction of the movement of Jews. In February 1941, the Germans ordered the establishment of the "Yodsa Rat" - a Jewish council obliged to follow their instructions and organize internal Jewish life.

In January 1942, the deportation of Dutch Jews began, at first mainly from the coastal strip to Amsterdam, and later to the Westerbork transit camp. In July, their deportation from Westerbork to Auschwitz began under the guise of deportation to labor camps in Germany. Most of the employees of the Dutch municipal administration, the Dutch train company and the Dutch police assisted in the deportation. The last deportations from the Netherlands took place in September 1944.
In this video (3:30 minutes) Holocaust survivors describe their experiences in the Netherlands under the Nazi occupation. The video is an excerpt from the film "Holland-Jewish Life in the Ghetto" from the Holocaust History Museum in Yad Vashem.
About 107,000 Jews out of a total of 140,000 perished - approximately 75-80% of all Jews living in the Netherlands during the German occupation.

(compared to about 40% in Belgium and 25% in France). Only in Poland the number was higher, with 90% of its three and a half million Jews murdered.

About 25,000 Jews went into hiding in the Netherlands, of whom about 16,000 survived.
ADDING PETER'S PERSPECTIVE TO THE DISCUSSION

01:36 minutes interview clip: 
Hiding in the Netherlands
Interview with Peter Hein, 2022
During 1942, Dutch Jews believed that they were being deported to labor camps, but did not know about the plans for their extermination. Many believed that they would survive in the labor camps. Therefore, they sought to protect and hide only their children. Others feared hiding because of the heavy penalties they would face if caught, including deportation to the Mathausen concentration camp.

For most Jews, hiding was not an option at all. They had no real connection with the non-Jewish population and culture, they did not know whom to turn to and did not have the financial means to do so. Only those with non-Jewish ties could consider hiding or using them to make contact with local resistance groups.
DISCUSSION: WHY THE NETHERLANDS?

How does Peter account for the extent of deportation and extermination of Jews in the Netherlands? Can you think of other explanations?

Suggested: 5-10 minutes
WHY THE NETHERLANDS?

1. A fractured society

Dutch society was divided into distinct pillars (pillarization). Each of them had separate institutions and organizations in the fields of society, culture and politics.

The main sectors were Catholics, Protestants, and Socialists-Liberals. Most Jews identified with liberal/social democrats. This structure of Dutch society was one of the important factors in the differentiation of the Jews despite the equality of rights under the law.

In addition: Unofficial and not entirely overt anti-Semitism existed in the Netherlands, based on religious ideas (especially among devout Christians), on prejudices (especially in the less educated strata) and against the background of economic competition.

Despite their partial integration, the Jews were regarded as a foreign factor in Dutch society.
DISCUSSION: PILLARIZED SOCIETY

Could a more cohesive and democratic society with a greater sense of solidarity among its members have changed the fate of Dutch Jews?

Watch the video "Social Cohesion and Combustion" (9:28 minutes).

What is the role of social cohesion in modern societies?
Why is it important today?

Suggested: 20 minutes
WHY THE NETHERLANDS?

ADDITIONAL FACTORS

2. The persecutors of the Jews enjoyed a special status with the German government in the Netherlands, and gained monetary rewards.

3. The Dutch authorities and meticulous bureaucratic system were highly efficient and rapid in executing the goals of the German occupation regime. The traditional approach of Dutch bureaucracy and police emphasised and was committed to the preservation of public order and the hierarchical order of government.

4. Already before the occupation, the Netherlands had maintained an accurate population register and issued sophisticated identity cards that were difficult to forge.

5. The German SS command activated Dutch police as well as civilian Jew-hunters to apprehend hidden Jews.

6. Lack of leadership: The escape of the Queen and government ministers to the UK left secretaries of government ministries in charge. These officials mostly obeyed the German directives, which determined the willingness of the bureaucrats to accept the occupation regime and effectively carry out their orders. The Diaspora government did not show much interest in the fate of the Jews.

7. The Netherlands is a geographically small, densely populated and flat country, making hiding immensely difficult.
In every population of a country occupied by the Nazis, three main groups can be identified: collaborators, bystanders (the silent passive majority) and rescuers.

What motivated citizens in occupied countries to cooperate with the Nazi occupation?

Suggested: 10 minutes
The collaboration or indifference of the local population in countries under Nazi occupation was influenced by various factors:

- **Degree of anti-Semitism** and ethnic hatred in the occupied country. Many citizens of occupied countries held anti-Semitic views even before the war. This perception was reaffirmed by Nazi propaganda.

- **Opportunism and personal gain** - Some people took the opportunity to steal Jewish property and take over Jewish businesses. Others were rewarded for denouncing Jews to authorities.

- **The scarcity** and difficulties following the war led many to focus on their own survival and be indifferent to the suffering of the Jews.

- **Fear of punishment**: Many feared for their lives and the fate of their families if they helped Jews, which was punishable by death.

- **Identification of the Jews with Communism**: The Jews were accused of supporting the Red Army in the countries it occupied and annexed in the Soviet Union in 1939-1940.
Collaboration is the cooperation between elements of the population of a defeated state and representatives of a victorious power.

Collaboration can be divided into:

2. **Servile** - deliberate service to an enemy vs. **ideological** - advocacy of cooperation with a foreign power seen as a champion of desirable domestic transformations.
3. **Active** - Volunteering for local combat units, denunciations and extraditions vs. **Passive** - following the instructions of superiors.
Locating the Jews, capturing them and deporting them to the camps required extensive cooperation between the German occupiers and the local population, which itself was persecuted by the Nazi regime.

This cooperation is manifested in the disregard for the fate of the Jews (the ‘bystanders’), in denunciation of Jews and their extradition, and as active participation in the murder itself (collaborators).

Even after the war, Jews often encountered hostility from their former neighbors as they returned from the concentration camps to their countries and homes. (The best known case is the Kielce pogrom, in Poland, July 1946, during which Poles murdered 42 Holocaust survivors who returned to the city.)

Had not so many civilians outside Germany participated in the extermination campaign, there would have likely been far fewer Jews murdered in the Holocaust.
DISCUSSION: DENOUNCIATIONS IN THE NETHERLANDS

(Denunciation= the action of informing against someone)

"This Jew [...] is so impudent that he walks the streets, in the evening and even during the day, without a Jewish badge, to enjoy extra liberties. I hope that society will soon be ridded of this trouble."

(Citation from an anonymous letter of denunciation)

- Were denunciations a unique phenomenon to the Netherlands and the holocaust?
- Can you think of other historical examples of denunciation?
- What could be the motives of ordinary citizens to denounce Jews in hiding?

Suggested: 10 minutes
The phenomenon of denunciation has been known throughout history in every human society.

The motives for denunciations in the Netherlands were usually selfish and non-ideological. The main motive was greed.

Dutch citizens denounced Jews for the following reasons:

1. Seizing money / property that Jews left in custody to so-called protectors, who then denounced the Jews to the Nazis so as not to return the money.
2. Promising to smuggle Jews out of the country for a high sum and then denouncing them
3. Receiving monetary rewards from the Germans
4. Those arrested on various charges, including on the charge of hiding Jews, could "Buy" their freedom by denouncing Jews.
5. Other motives: jealousy or shaky personal relations with specific Jews, the atmosphere of a "new order" in Europe and of an expected victory of the Germans.

Historical examples of denunciation

- Judas Iscariot denouncement of Jesus to the Romans,
- Christinas denouncing non-believers to the the Catholic Church during the Inquisition,
- Witch hunts over centuries in France, Germany and the United States,
- Citizens denouncing other citizens to the Stasi in post-war East Germany.
THE RESCUERS

Although the vast majority of the Dutch population was uninvolved or passively involved, many Dutch people provided assistance to those in hiding.

The first organized rescue operations, starting in 1942, were concentrated on children and organized by groups of students in Utrecht and Amsterdam. Their missions included: finding people willing to hide Jews in their homes, supplying the needs of those in hiding, forging identity documents and food stamps and paying for the hiding places.

From May 1943 the number of hidden Jews increased due to better organization of the resistance, increased willingness in the Dutch population to take in children and the consent of many parents to hand over their children to the underground.
Common characteristics of the Dutch rescuers:

- Most of them had not known Jews before
- Were equally ready to help irrespective of material resources
- Were equally located in cities and rural areas
- Acted mainly for moral motives
- Received a democratic education
- Had parents who were inclined to help others

The prevailing feeling in almost all the rescuing "parents" interviewed after the war was of immense satisfaction and a feeling of standing up to human challenges in such an inhuman period of ruthless terror. The hiding "parents" stood strong and saved fragile and vulnerable lives. They often looked with feelings of joy at the person they saved and their descendants. Their hallmark is, usually, a sense of humility that comes from the heart.
CONCLUDING DISCUSSION: DUTCH SOCIETY AND THE JEWS AFTER THE WAR

Suggestion: Divide the class into two groups. Each group watches one of the following interview clips, and then both groups discuss the question.

What challenges did the Jews who survived the war face in post-war Netherlands?

Suggested: 15 minutes
ADDING PETER'S PERSPECTIVE TO THE DISCUSSION

02:01 minutes interview clip: Coming out of hiding- Part I

Interview with Peter Hein, 2022
Interview with Peter Hein, 2022

01:40 minutes interview clip: Coming out of hiding - Part II

Interview with Peter Hein, 2022
DUTCH JEWS AFTER THE WAR

Approximately 33,000 Jews returned to the Netherlands after the end of the war in May 1945. In 1947, the census reported only 14,346 Jews living in the Netherlands, 10% of the pre-war population.

Returning Jews and Jews who had survived in hiding were met with total lack of understanding of their fate. The Dutch, who had suffered "The Hunger Winter" of 1944/45, were focused on their own survival and did not show sympathy for the unique misery of the Jews.

The Jewish community was shattered. Most survivors have lost family members and friends, in addition to losing the material foundation of their former world- their homes, assets, and businesses.

Suffering the long-term effects of trauma PTSD without access to mental health care limited their capacity to face those multiple challenges.
Case study: The Jew Hunters

- In what way was the Henneicke Column unique?
- Who were its members?
- How were their actions carried out?
- What was their fate after the war?
At the end of war, 120,000 - 150,000 Dutch citizens were arrested on charges of collaboration. However, the need to rebuild a stable society and viable economy, together with the appeal of the Catholic Church to “Christian compassion” informed a policy of pardons. Dutch courts and tribunals eventually dealt only with approximately 65,000 people. 8% of whom were acquitted, 76% were fined or received sentences of less than five years. 578 people were sentenced to more than fifteen years, 148 to life and 152 to death of whom 42 were executed.

By 1964, all of the convicted Dutch citizens were free. Most government employees who had been dismissed were rehabilitated by the beginning of the 1950’s, and their pension rights were restored.
THE DUTCH NATIONAL MYTH OF RESISTANCE

These lenient punishments, together with the emergence of stories of heroism, resistance and protection, together with the silencing of the returning Jews, paved the way to the emergence of a national myth of resistance.

According to this myth, Dutch society was united in its resistance to anti-Jewish actions and in its collective opposition to German occupying forces. The myth further propagates the idea that Dutch society as a whole – and not Dutch Jews alone – was victimized by the Nazi regime.

The aim of this myth was to create national unity in the aftermath of the war, even at the expense of historical accuracy and compassion for the suffering of the Jews during the war and post-war years. Although some Dutch individuals were singled out as culpable and condemned by society, they were viewed as exceptions to the general standard of resistance that placed the Netherlands as a nation on the right side of the war, fighting for the good of all its citizens.

It was not until the 1980s that the voice of surviving Dutch Jews was being heard for the first time, starting the process of a serious public debate, official apologies, and significant reparation payments.
Do you know the story of Anne Frank? Have you read her diary?
Why do you think this is the best known story of Jews in hiding,
and for the most part - the only one?
How does the Anne Frank story fit into the Dutch national
narrative of resistance?
Do you think Anne Frank's story is representative of
Dutch resistance and the history of Jews in hiding?
What are the similarities and differences between
Anne Frank's story and Peter Hein's story?

Suggested: 25 minutes
Case study 2: The 2018 Polish Law Controversy

- What are the similarities and differences between the Dutch and Polish examples of assuming or denying national post-war responsibility and accountability?
- What was the goal of the Polish government in enacting the law?
- Why has the law been criticized by other governments?

Suggested: 25 minutes
LIST OF SOURCES

- Childhood in the Shadow of the Holocaust/ Robert Krell, 2007
- Lost Childhood- The context of survival, mental distress and quality of life among people who were children during the Holocaust /Rachel Lev-Wiesel and Marianne Amir, 2007
- Collaborationism in France during World War II/ Stanley Hoffmann, 1968
- Denouncing and Rescue/ Pinchas Bar-Efrat, 2016
- This sin will haunt humanity to the end of all days/ State of Israel- Ministry of Education, Pedagogical Secretariat, 2018
- The Myth of Anne Frank/ Judith Goldstein, 2003
- The attitude of the Poles towards the Jews in General-Governor in 1939/ Emanuel Ringelblum, Recent Writings - Jewish-Polish Relations, 1992-1994
- The Dark Consequences of Poland's New Holocaust Law/ Rachel Donadio, 2018
- Yad Vashem educational resource center
- Childhood in the shadow of the Holocaust: Children, survivors and the second generation/ Zehava Solomon, Julia Chaitin (eds.), 2007
- Complicated Legacies of Justice: The Netherlands and World War II/ Chrisje Brants, 2015
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