

Mini Lesson: Elie Wiesel

Talking About Indifference

Subject Area: ELA

Grade Level: 9 - 10

Duration: 30 minutes

Standard Addressed: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1.

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Learning Aim: As a result of the lesson, students will compare two forms of text on the topic of indifference, analyze an individual's perspective to gain insight about the personal impact of events, and participate in an academic discussion on the topic of indifference.

Testimony:

Edith Reiss

Rescuer and Aid Provider



(1:21)

CONSIDER

- Begin by explaining that today the students will further develop their academic discussion skills. This activity requires that they listen closely, gather evidence, and speak to each other. Require students to use one of the following sentence starters:
 - ◇ I think this means...
 - ◇ I agree with ____ because...
 - ◇ My ideas are similar to ____ because...
 - ◇ I hear what ____ is saying, but I disagree because...
 - ◇ My idea is different than ____ because...
- State that today's discussion will be about indifference.
- Ask volunteers to answer the following question: What is indifference? Once the discussion is completed, explain that they will now read an excerpt and watch a clip of testimony about the concept of indifference to gain different perspectives.

COLLECT

- Tell students that they will analyze an excerpt from a book written by a survivor of the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel. Tell them the Holocaust offers us an example of the consequences of indifference. Ensure students have background knowledge on the Holocaust. Consult the following for more information: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's ["Introduction to the Holocaust"](#).
- Now, display the following excerpt: "Indifference is not a beginning, it is an end. And, therefore, indifference is always the friend of the enemy, for it benefits the aggressor -- never his victim, whose pain is magnified when he or she feels forgotten. The political prisoner in his cell, the hungry children, the homeless refugees -- not to respond to their plight, not to relieve their solitude by offering them a spark of hope is to exile them from human memory. And in denying their humanity we betray our own" (excerpt from Elie Wiesel's "The Perils of Indifference").
- Clarify any unfamiliar vocabulary. Then, ask volunteers to share their interpretation of the excerpt. To what extent do they agree or disagree with the statement? Remind them to use one of the sentence starters.
- Students will now watch Edith Reiss' clip of testimony twice to gain a different perspective on indifference; this time, the perspective will come from a Holocaust rescuer who tells of her experience in an audiovisual format.
 - ◇ First viewing: display Edith's bio on the overhead and read it to students, then ask students to listen to her story and be ready to summarize what she is talking about. Ask for a volunteers to share out.
 - ◇ Second viewing: ask students to focus on the various elements of the event—the victim, the bystanders, reactions, the outcome. Ask: Is this an example of indifference? Why or why not? Have volunteers share out. Remind them to use one of the sentence starters.

CONSTRUCT

- Once again ask students "What is indifference?" This time they will need to respond to this by referencing Wiesel's excerpt, Edith's clip of testimony, and their own experience.
- Have students write their responses in preparation for a final discussion.

COMMUNICATE

- Have students share their responses. Depending on how much time is available, allow each student to respond to each other using the sentence starters. Encourage students to share their ideas and reactions, and to support their claims with specific evidence from the texts. Guide them to ask new questions that relate the conversation to broader themes and ideas.

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Student Handout

Edith Reiss Biography

Edith Reiss was born in Bolton, England in 1916, the second of four daughters. She was raised by a working mother and a father who had been blinded by a work accident. She learned about the world's troubles at a young age as her father had her read the daily newspaper to him. She had a knack for language and learned German in school. When unrest began on the continent, she worked to settle German-Jewish refugees in her home town. Edith went to university in London to study physiology but her studies were soon disrupted. She took a class trip to Germany in 1939, and was horrified by the treatment of the Jews. Only three days after she returned to England, war broke out.

Edith was trained as a Welfare Officer in the British army, and stationed in a British Military Hospital in Rome. She remembers treating both wounded Allied Soldiers as well as German Prisoners of War, who expressed gratitude for her kind treatment of them. As the war came to a close, Edith's story was far from over. She witnessed the hanging of Mussolini in Milan, and soon after she was sent to Dachau to help liberate the camp survivors. Her day at the camp marked her forever. On her way back through Rome, she had the chance to meet the Pope, and she shared her experience in the camp with him. Before returning to England, she spent time helping recovering soldiers, and there she met an American army doctor who would become her husband. She moved to the United States to be with him soon after they were married. In the United States, she finally finished her bachelors, and went on to get a masters in Gerontology. After her retirement she became involved in a Holocaust memorial foundation where she shared her war experience with students.

Her interview took place in Coral Gables, FL in 1998.

Note to Teacher

Background information about Elie Wiesel: Elie Wiesel was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986 and was the author of the memoir *Night*. He delivered his speech on April 12, 1999 at the White House. You can access "The Perils of Indifference" speech, transcript and audio at <http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/wiesel.htm>.