

Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day

Introduction

Approximately one and a half million of those murdered in the Holocaust were innocent and helpless children who had not even begun to realize their dreams. Ms. Sue Klau, a prominent member of the local Jewish community in Puerto Rico, has initiated a project to commemorate these children. She chose the butterfly as a symbol of the children murdered during the Holocaust, inspired by the poem *Butterfly* written by Pavel Friedman while he was imprisoned in Theresienstadt ghetto. Ms. Klau asked the Israel Religious Action Center to help recruit Jewish and non-Jewish children from around the world. The idea is that each child paints a paper butterfly, write their name, age and city on its left wing, and sends it in. The butterflies are being collected by the Holocaust Museum in Houston, Texas. The initiative hopes to encourage children around the world to make one and a half million decorated butterflies over a period of ten years, so that every child who perished in the Holocaust will be remembered as a human being who bore dreams, liberty and hope. This commemorative project seeks to restore the right of the children who perished, while validating a life of liberty and freedom and reaffirming our hope for a better and more moral world.

Children in the 8th grade are invited to take part in the project and to make "Israeli" butterflies. It is particularly important and meaningful that butterflies should be included in the project from Israeli children engaged in studying their own people and land. The Israeli butterflies will symbolize Israeli and Jewish responsibility for every Jewish person in the world, commitment to mutual assistance, and the desire to treasure the memory of innocent humans murdered while they were still children.

Goals:

1. The students will learn about Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day through the contrast between the "butterfly" and the reality of life in the ghetto.
2. The students will compare different works featuring the motif of the butterfly.
3. The students will take part in the project to commemorate the one and a half million children who perished in the Holocaust.
4. The students will appreciate their commitment as Jews living in Israel to take part in the project commemorating the children who perished in the Holocaust.

Lesson plan:

1. We will listen to the song *Rhythm Butterflies* by Ehud Banai and consider how the butterfly is depicted in the song. What are its characteristics? What is its color? Where are butterflies found? In which season can the most butterflies be seen in Israel? What do they symbolize for us?

2. In the heart of the Israeli spring, just after the Festival of Freedom (Passover), we mark Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day. Write the following sentences on the board;

When I think about butterflies I feel

When I think about the ghetto I feel

Invite the students to complete the sentences, share their feelings, and emphasize the contrast.

Ask the students: Were there butterflies in the ghetto?
3. We will divide up into study pairs and study Pavel Friedman's poem *The Butterfly* and Ehud Banai's song *Rhythm Butterflies*, together with a picture drawn by Anna Flochotnichenko, a 7th grade student from Kfar Sava, and inspired by the song.

The Butterfly
Pavel Friedman

The last, the very last,
So richly, brightly, dazzlingly yellow.
Perhaps if the sun's tears would sing
against a white stone. . . .

Such, such a yellow
Is carried lightly 'way up high.
It went away I'm sure because it wished to
kiss the world good-bye.

For seven weeks I've lived in here,
Penned up inside this ghetto.
But I have found what I love here.
The dandelions call to me
And the white chestnut branches in the
court.
Only I never saw another butterfly.

That butterfly was the last one.
Butterflies don't live in here,
in the ghetto.

Rhythm Butterflies
Lyrics and melody: Ehud Banai

Butterflies float in rhythm
In happiness and in sorrow
Painting a picture for me
Throwing sense into chaos.
Musical butterflies
Play for me mercifully
Play for me gracefully
And anything is possible.



Anna Flohotnichenko, Class 7-1, Sharett Junior High School, Kfar Sava

Questions for discussion and thought:

- A. Describe the authors of each of the works – in what reality did s/he live? Where? How old was s/he?
- B. What does the butterfly symbolize in each work? – find some similarities and some differences.
- C. Why do you think each one chose to express his/her feelings by means of the butterfly?
- D. What emotional experience is evoked by the descriptions of nature in the different works?
- E. Ehud Banai writes: “Musical butterflies play for me mercifully, play for me gracefully, and anything is possible.” To what extent can the feeling that anything is possible also be found in the other works? Why?

4. We explain that the poem *The Butterfly* was written by Pavel Friedman in 1942, when he was 21 and living in Theresienstadt Ghetto. Pavel was murdered in Auschwitz extermination camp in 1944. He was born in 1921 in Prague, Czechoslovakia to a Jewish father and Christian mother. His childhood was calm and pleasant, and one of his hobbies as a child was writing poetry. Like the rest of his family, Pavel was not interested in his Jewish origins as a child. However, the growing hatred toward the Jews throughout Europe, even before the outbreak of World War Two, forced him to consider his heritage. Pavel sensed the change in his surroundings, but refused to be ashamed of his origins. On the contrary, he drew closer to Judaism, and when he was 17 he joined the Jewish youth movement El-Al, in which he was active for five years. On April 26, 1942, at the age of 20, Pavel was expelled to Theresienstadt Ghetto. The living conditions in the ghetto were very harsh and many prisoners died of hunger. However, Pavel worked in the flour mill and bakery in the ghetto, and in return for his work he received bread and managed to keep his strength up. Pavel wrote the poem *The Butterfly* during his first few weeks in the ghetto. He managed to survive in Theresienstadt for 18 months, but in 1944 the Nazis decided to exterminate all the Jews who were still alive in the ghetto. Pavel Friedman was sent to Auschwitz extermination camp on September 23, 1944, and was murdered there by the Nazis. He was 23 years old when he died. While he was in Theresienstadt, Pavel married

Adina Shnitzer, who survived the horrors of the Holocaust and moved to Israel. She remarried and now lives on Kibbutz Ginegar.

5. We explain that one and half million of the victims of the Holocaust were children who had not managed to realize their hopes and dreams, to grow up and to live as adults. In memory of these children, Ms. Sue Klau of Puerto Rico has initiated a commemoration project in which children make butterflies inspired by Pavel Friedman's poem *The Butterfly*. The goal of the project is to collect one and a half million butterflies, in order that the children whose lives ended so early will never be forgotten. The butterflies are being collected by the Holocaust Museum in Houston, Texas.
6. We ask how much we can identify with this project. And what special value do we bring to this effort as Jews living in Israel?
7. We suggest that the class be divided into groups. Each group of children will visit another class ahead of Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day, read Pavel Friedman's poem, discuss the symbolism of the butterfly, and guide the children in the class in preparing butterflies according to the following instructions:
The museum in Houston asks that the butterflies should not be larger than 20 x 25 centimeters, and they must be flat (not three dimensional). Each child should write their name, age, city and the fact that s/he lives in Israel.
8. When the school has completed its work on the project, we suggest holding a reflective discussion about the students' feelings as they took part in a major project to commemorate children who died in the Holocaust. We suggest telling the following Hassidic story, and then considering how it connects to our involvement in this project.

The story is told of a clever boy who went to see a wise man. Holding a butterfly in his hand, he asked: "Is the butterfly in my palm alive or dead." The boy's intentions were obvious. In either case, he would be able to trick the wise man. If the wise man said that the butterfly was alive, the boy would crush it. If he said it was dead, he would let it free. The wise man sagely replied: "The answer lies in your hand."

Question for discussion and reflection:

- A. What is the moral of the story?
- B. How can we interpret the story in light of our involvement in this project?
- C. What can we do to make sure that genocide never happens again?