

Discussion Questions
Howard Cwick: Eyewitness to History

Name _____

1. In what ways does Howard experience antisemitism in his own life?
2. Howard says there are two faces that he will never forget. Whose faces? Why do you think he cannot forget them?
3. What are some of Howard's examples of his youth and inexperience as a GI?
4. Howard's company leader instructed Howard to take off his dog tags before the company entered Germany. Why?
5. How does Howard describe the two days that he spent in Buchenwald? What specific details do you remember from his testimony?

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11. Inside Buchenwald, Howard experiences many moments that could be considered life-altering, such as having prisoners say that Allied forces had arrived too late or accuse him of poisoning their friend, seeing people brought in from nearby Weimar and being forced to witness what had happened in Buchenwald, and allowing another man to be killed before his eyes. How might moments like these change a person? Can becoming a witness to history affect whether you take action later on when you see other examples of injustice in the world? Explain.

12. Howard said, “There is the capability of hatred, and everything that goes along with it, in every one of us. And this is something that every human being has to work to suppress because I think every one of us is capable of doing horrible things...” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? If we all have the capability within us to be motivated by hatred to act, how can we fight hatred within us? What can be done to combat violence associated with hate?

13. Early in his testimony, Howard speaks of his mother’s dedication to charitable works and to helping others. Do you think her acts of altruism influenced Howard’s worldview? Why or why not? What altruistic acts have you witnessed from the role models in your own life?

14. How do Howard’s experiences as a liberator of Buchenwald provide him the opportunity to become an eyewitness? How does Howard choose to deliver the message? What can we learn through Howard’s experiences and testimony to apply to our own lives?

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15. How is it possible for someone with no background knowledge or context to recognize injustice and inhumanity when confronted by it? Explain your answer. How does one acknowledge those things? What factors can complicate, hinder, challenge, or make it impossible to acknowledge injustice, inhumanity, or mistreatment?

16. Have you ever witnessed mistreatment, injustices, or inhumanity? How did you feel as a witness to those things?

17. Consider your own present “universe of obligation” and construct a list of those to whom you are obligated to help. How does getting involved or activism fit into it? Consider small choices you could make, and explain the potential for lasting effects they could have.

18. Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize recipient Elie Wiesel, who was liberated from Buchenwald, said in his Nobel acceptance speech, “Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Whenever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must—at that moment—become the center of the universe.” Explain why you think it is our responsibility as human beings to recognize when injustice or mistreatment is occurring in the world and to share that with others. How can we share that message?