

IWitness is a free educational website from USC Shoah Foundation that uses testimonies – personal stories – from survivors and witnesses of genocide to teach students worldwide the importance of compassion and in bringing about positive societal change.

Teaching the World Through Testimony

IWitness combines the power of storytelling with testimony-based educational content, best practices in education and the advantage of technology to improve academic performance and promote students' global citizenship by:

- Connecting the past to the present and the future
- Boosting subject matter knowledge
- Cultivating empathy and an understanding of other races and cultures
- Improving critical thinking skills
- Developing digital literacy skills

The goal of IWitness is to motivate students to act responsibly and ultimately to help them uphold important values. These include justice, equality, diversity, tolerance and how best to counter attitudes and acts of hatred.

IWitness was developed by USC Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education based on its theory of change, which states that working with testimony will change the attitudes and actions of students and teachers, so that they are more likely to contribute to civil society.

IWitness features an array of multimedia activities and resources built around a continually growing list of over 500 short, curated clips of testimony from the Institute's Visual History Archive. These clips complement curriculum in many subjects, such as history, social studies, English language arts, foreign language, government, and character educa-

tion.

The Visual History Archive is the world's largest digital collection of eyewitness accounts of genocide — 55,000 testimonies that were conducted in 62 countries and 41 languages. In addition to 500-plus curated clips of testimony in IWitness, the website also includes over 2,200 full length testimonies of survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust, the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda, the 1937 Nanjing Massacre, the 1915 Armenian Genocide, the 1980s Guatemalan Genocide and the 1970s Cambodian Genocide.

IWitness lessons range from 20-minute skill-building mini-lessons to project-based activities that lead to video projects that challenge students to research and produce PSAs, video essays, or short films using the built-in video editor in IWitness.

Currently, IWitness has 124 activities created by education professionals at the Institute or via partnerships. One hundred and four activities are in English, seven in Hungarian, four in Czech, five in Spanish, two in Ukrainian and one each in Polish and French.

All activities in IWitness are built around a framework of the 4 Cs: consider, collect, construct, and communicate. Each section involves student analysis and concise writing that is reflective or evidence-based in nature.

- Consider - Students spend time reflecting on their experiences and knowledge in order to be able to connect to new knowledge.

- Collect- Students analyze and gather evidence from testimony clips and secondary sources and think critically about the topic.

- Construct - Students craft an essay, report, short story, poem or video using their new knowledge.

- Communicate - Students interact with their peers to reflect what they have learned.

IWitness is used in both formal and informal education settings. The primary audience for IWitness is educators and their students ages 12-20.

“My classroom of fifth- and sixth-grade boys often struggled in demonstrating empathy and kindness toward others. Now, they recognize their actions and more importantly, their voice, could have purpose in the world.”

*Andra Coulter, teacher,
Calgary, Canada*

Developing Voice Through Testimony

Featured within IWitness are a series of “Connections” videos to aid students on topics such as “What Is Testimony?,” “Guidelines for Teaching with Testimony in the Classroom,” “Ethical Editing,” “What Is the Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda?,” and “What is the Armenian Genocide?” Each activity also includes a Tool Kit that equips students with an encyclopedia, glos-



sary, note-taking tool, and additional downloadable resources.

A sampling of lessons and other resources in IWitness:

1.) *Kettos kisebbsegen (Identity in Double Minority)*: A mini lesson designed to introduce students to primary source analysis and multiple perspectives, deepens their awareness of complex identities and strengthens critical thinking. Students analyze one clip, complete a worksheet and contribute to a discussion. For grades 7-12; requires 20 minutes to complete.

2.) *Segments for the Classroom/Segmentos para la clase*: An online lesson that features seven clips in English and Spanish for educators to preview and consider using as a supplement to enhance their own lessons and activities. Topics covered by the downloadable clips include: The Holocaust through the Eyes of Child Survivors, Facing Persecution as a Jehovah's Witness, The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Surviving Auschwitz II-Birkenau, The Auschwitz II-Birkenau Sonderkommando, and the Sobibor Uprising. For grades 6-12.

3.) *Born in the City that became Auschwitz*: An online exhibit with downloadable videos that asks students to explore the town of Oświęcim's history through first-person accounts from individuals who grew up there. Available in 11 languages. For grades secondary level and college students, 28 minutes to watch.

4.) *Finding your seat on the bus*: A mini quest that requires students to explore the concepts of grit, determination and resilience. They learn about individuals now and in the past who exemplified those characteristics and became social innovators. Students will craft a poem based on what they learn and reflect on how they can harness grit and determination to make a difference in their own lives. For grades 9-12, requires 2 hours to complete.

5.) *Fighting in the face of racism*: An information quest where students are asked to design a word cloud after they learn about two

former American soldiers who helped liberate Jews during the Holocaust and who themselves experienced racism/prejudice in the United States before and after WWII. For grades 8-12, requires 1.5 hours to complete.

6.) *Radiotrž (Radio Mart)*: An IWalk activity in Czech that connects Radiotrž in Prague, Czech Republic, the former exhibition hall that was used as a collection center for Jews before they were deported to Theresienstadt and other camps and ghettos, with clips of testimony from survivors recounting memories of historical events that took place there. This IWalk includes three testimony clip reels about survivors' deportation experiences.

7.) *Narratives of Identity*: In this video activity, students learn about and reflect on the many identities we carry as individuals and about the decisions we make to hide them. Through the testimony of a survivor of the Holocaust and stories of life as an undocumented American, students will be asked to reflect on the universal theme of identity and produce a short video journal in which they reflect on their own identities. For grades 6-9, requires 3 hours to complete.

8.) *IWitness Video Challenge*: Our annual video contest for students to win scholarships and prizes. The IWitness Video Challenge highlights the extraordinary change that can occur when ordinary people make positive choices. Students listen to testimonies in IWitness, develop insight into the opportunities for change in their communities, get motivated to make a difference and submit a video essay telling how they made their community and our world a better place. For grades 5-12, requires 8 hours to complete.

As students progress through an IWitness activity they hone a myriad of skills, including analysis, questioning, evidence-based reasoning, synthesizing, developing digital and information literacy, writing and more. Each step in an IWitness activity has students analyzing and reflecting, typically using evidence from clips of testimony, text-based primary and secondary sources, maps and other assets.



Many of these resources are available directly within IWitness, as the website includes built-in access to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's online encyclopedia, Yad Vashem's photo archive, the NIOD Institute's The Holocaust and Other Genocides textbook and the Genocide Archive Rwanda. Students are able to access these resources to research topics that resonate with them on a personal level.

“The power of IWitness is that it is available and discoverable to teachers all over the world and offers truly transformative education. Surveys show that after using IWitness, students are 93% more likely to believe it is important to speak up against stereotyping, and 61% less likely to believe stereotypes are really true.”

*Dr. Kori Street, Director of Education,
USC Shoah Foundation*

What makes IWitness especially compelling for students is that it transforms them from passive observers to reflective thinkers, and provides opportunities to actively engage with witnesses and survivors through their personal narratives. IWitness activities encourage critical thinking and self-reflection, and help students get a sense of their own place in the world and of the profound impact their words and actions can have on the lives of others.