



Tova Friedman

Holocaust Survivor

Surviving Auschwitz

Lesson Introduction

Interview Log: Interviewed on July 26, 2023 by Noah Remnick

- Access *The Thread* episode of Tova Friedman on our [YouTube channel](#) or at [LifeStories.org](#) and download the transcript [here](#)
- Access her long-form interview on [LifeStories.org](#) and download the transcript [here](#)

Learning Objectives

Social Studies Focus

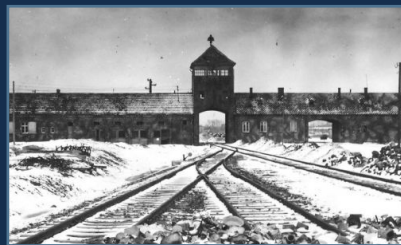
- Deepen understanding about the Holocaust
- Connect one life story to a seminal historical event – World War II and the Holocaust
- Explore the emotions of loss and grief and the capacities of resilience and courage

English Language Arts Focus

- First-person witness account and memoir writing
- Explore the idea of purposeful work and a meaningful life
- Examine perspective taking from the point of view of one Holocaust survivor
- Use Tova Friedman’s interview as an example of testimony and memoir, or as evidence in the writing of a rhetorical argument, commentary, or synthesis essay

Episode Overview

Tova Friedman reflects on being a Holocaust survivor, vividly describing her time in the ghettos, labor camps, and eventually Auschwitz. Friedman shares the challenges her family faced as survivors in postwar America. She emphasizes the importance of storytelling and her commitment to ensuring her children and grandchildren carry on the legacy of remembrance and resilience.



Biography

Tova Friedman was born on September 7, 1938. Before World War II, she was one of 5,000 Jewish children living in Tomaszów Mazowiecki, a small town near Lodz, Poland. Only one in five survived, and more than 150 members of Friedman’s family were also murdered. Friedman, among the youngest to survive the Nazi Holocaust, was one of the few Jewish children to live through the nightmare ordeals of Auschwitz. After the war, she and her parents spent several years in a German tuberculosis sanatorium and in displaced person camps, before arriving in the U.S. when she was 12 years old. They lived in Brooklyn, where she met and married her husband of 60 years, Maier Friedman (recently deceased). Tova Friedman received her Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from Brooklyn College and a Master of Arts in Black literature from City College of New York. She and Maier spent 10 years in Israel, where she taught at the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem. After returning to the U.S., she earned her Master of Arts in social work from Rutgers University and was the Director of Jewish Family Service of Somerset and Warren Counties for over 20 years. Friedman has four children and eight grandchildren. She continues to share her story with students and audiences at schools, colleges, and places of worship all over the country.



Teaching Tip: First Take

A **First Take** is a warm-up writing or conversation exercise created uniquely for *The Thread* that strengthens media literacy skills. Like an opening song in a musical, the first stanza of a poem, or even the first impression one person makes on another, the First Take asks students to reflect and share their initial thoughts and feelings about the episode's opening.

Suggested Steps

- ▣ **Read** the opening of Tova Friedman's episode aloud to students:

"Human beings are built to have resilience. That's how we were made. I really think that human humanity is very strong. It's not always tested. And if we're tested. We'll make it and then we can heal and that we can heal enough to help others heal."

- ▣ **Ask and Discuss:** What do we learn about Tova Friedman from these opening sentences? What insights can you infer?

- ▣ **Next**, have students do a one-minute quick write reflecting on what she shared or have students get into pairs and share their thoughts and feelings.

- ▣ **Last**, as a class discuss the reasons they think the filmmakers choose this opening for the episode?





Teaching Tip:

***THE THREAD* Up Close**

After watching the episode, have students debrief her life story with these suggested questions:

- ▣ Why do you think the filmmakers chose to title Tova Friedman’s episode “Surviving Auschwitz?”
- ▣ Tova Friedman’s story is about surviving the Holocaust and it is about so much more. What other aspects did you connect with her life story?
- ▣ What did you learn about her life story that has enriched your point of view? What new insights did you gain about (yourself, your community, your world) from her story?

After discussing, have students return to ***The Thread*** episode and engage students in a close read and analysis of her interview using the video and transcript. Depending on the lesson, question, or theme you are aligning ***The Thread*** with, have students annotate the transcript, select passages that reflect the assignment, and explain their reasoning in class.

Here is an example of ***A Thread*** connection: As a child survivor of Auschwitz, Tova Friedman has an extraordinary story. Students could use her memory of arriving in Auschwitz as textual evidence supporting this claim. As an educator, you can also use this passage to understand “selection,” the euphemism used by the Nazis for the process of choosing people for the gas chambers by separating them from those considered fit to work.

“There were very few children left, if any. I don’t think there were any except myself, because they had taken. You see, in each place the first thing they did was kill the children and the elderly for all kinds of reasons. I was hidden at the time of the selection came so that I was one or maybe maybe out of two, I don’t know, children that went on the transport to Auschwitz. I remember that very well because that was the first time that my mother and father were separated.”



Photos: Tova Friedman speaking. (Tova Friedman) *left*; Tova Friedman and her family. (Tova Friedman) *right*



Connections

- Why do you think it is important for survivors of important historical periods such as the Holocaust, to tell their story?
- How does hearing Tova Friedman’s testimony influence:
 - Your understanding of this period of history
 - The importance of survivor testimony from the Holocaust and other [genocides](#)
- Tova Friedman said, “Human beings are built to have resilience, that is how we are made. We have to feed that resilience, like a garden, with nourishment.”
 - What did you learn about the capacity for resilience from her life story?
- Tova Friedman graciously shared the lessons she has gathered in her life and the ones she imparts to her grandchildren:
 - Remember this is part of your history if you are Jewish, or not, or just a human being. Remember the innocent people, the destruction of innocence on this earth. Be more cognizant of your environment. By not saying and not listening and not caring this is what may happen. You have to be awake with what is going on. The third, I see hope for humanity. I see positive things but we have to work at it.
 - What lessons from her story would you like to pass on to others?



Activity: Surviving Auschwitz

- Explore Tova Friedman’s [TikTok Channel](#) maintained by her grandson, watch the posts in the History of the Shoah and Daughter of Auschwitz sections and respond with your thoughts and questions.
- Share out in class the posts you explored and what are your takeaways from these additional stories.



Additional Resources

- See the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museums: Guidelines for Teaching with Holocaust Testimony](#), [Yad Vashem: Using Testimony in Holocaust Education](#), [Using Visual History Testimony in the Classroom](#), and USC Shoah Foundation: The Institute for Visual History and Education.
- Read and watch [the Today show](#) reporting on TovaTok
- Read [NorthJersey.com](#) reporting on TovaTok

