

# LESSON: Holocaust Film Guide

**GRADE LEVEL:** Adaptable for grades 7–12

**SUBJECT:** Multidisciplinary

**TIME REQUIRED:** Approximately 60 minutes to introduce the *Before Viewing* section to students. If you have not already done so, additional time (1–3 class periods) is required to complete the Timeline Activity.

Additional time is required while students watch the film. Conclusion and extension options are available.

**This instructional framework provides a structure adaptable to different films.**

## OVERVIEW

This guide is designed to support viewing a film related to the Holocaust by helping students assess the film's historical accuracy. It emphasizes the role of genre and places the film within historical context. The guide encourages students to examine how and why the Holocaust happened.

**This guide works with any film.** Completing the [Timeline Activity](#) is a necessary part of this lesson.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

How can historical context help you understand a film?

## EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

At the end of this activity, students understand:

- Historical context that supports the film
- The historical accuracy of the film they watched

## TEACHER PREPARATION

- The Museum has a [rubric](#) you can use to evaluate films you choose for your classroom. Taking time to review the films you select for your students is essential.
- Before or during the film viewing, students should complete the [Timeline Activity](#).
  - Timeline cards can be printed, or you can request a free set [here](#). Please allow at least two weeks for shipping.
- Preview the student interactive that aligns with your film:
  - [A film based on a book students read](#)
  - [Historical fiction film](#)
  - [Documentary film](#)
- The student interactive will support multiple viewing options. Decide if you:
  - Will provide transcripts;
  - Plan to show an entire film or watch selected clips;
  - Watch uninterrupted or stop for discussions.

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## LEARNER VARIABILITY MODIFICATIONS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

The lesson is intentionally flexible, allowing individual teacher modifications to achieve educational outcomes. The instructional sequence suggests technology and teaching strategies; please use other options if they support your student's learning needs. Consider utilizing graphic organizers, note-taking strategies, reading choices, and online engagement tools.

## BEFORE USING THE GUIDE

Approximately 60-90 minutes

1. To ensure students have historical context for the film, begin with the [Timeline Activity](#). You can complete the entire activity or leave some layers to add while viewing the film. Display in the classroom for the duration of the film viewing.

## PART ONE: BEFORE VIEWING

Approximately 60 minutes

2. Distribute the student interactive that pairs best with the film viewed in your class:
  - [Film based on a book students read](#)
  - [Historical fiction film](#)
  - [Documentary film](#)
3. Next, review the definitions on the first page of the student interactive, focusing on **historical context and historical accuracy**. Ask how these definitions are relevant to viewing a film, and discuss expectations of historical accuracy in films.
  - **Historical context** refers to details about the time and place surrounding a story or event. Those details enable us to interpret and analyze in their proper context rather than according to today's circumstances. This information allows us to think about what life was like at the time a story or event took place.
  - **Historical accuracy asks** if the story told in the book or film matches the true history of an event. It involves source evaluation in which you form a judgment about the correctness of the information provided by a source. To assess a source's accuracy, ask questions like, *do other reliable sources confirm the information? Who wrote or produced the source?*
  - Discuss: What is fair to expect from a movie about accurately portraying historical events?
4. Provide students with a short overview of the film, ideally showing the trailer. Answer the questions in the **Before Viewing** section on the worksheet and also **discuss**:
  - In what ways do the students think the genre of the film (based on a book, a work of historical fiction, or a documentary) impacts the way the story is told?

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## QUESTIONS ON THE STUDENT INTERACTIVE

<p>STUDENT INTERACTIVE: If the film is based on a book they've read</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Ask students:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What is the genre of the book?</li> <li>○ What are they looking forward to seeing? Name a scene that may be tricky to show in a movie</li> <li>○ How do they think a specific character or scene will be portrayed? Do they think it will be similar to or different from the book?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>STUDENT INTERACTIVE: If the film is historical fiction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Remind students:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Fictional films use literary elements.</li> <li>○ Review the basic plot structure definitions in the student interactive.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Ask students:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How can you tell when a work of fiction presents accurate historical facts?</li> <li>○ What do you already know about the history shown in the film?</li> <li>○ What questions do you have about this history?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>STUDENT INTERACTIVE: If the film is a documentary</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Define with students:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Documentaries are storytelling that explores factual stories and issues using film or video.</li> <li>○ Documentaries often make an assertion and then present reasoning and evidence to support this claim.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Ask students:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Can documentaries contain fictional elements?</li> <li>○ What do you already know about the history shown in the film?</li> <li>○ What questions do you have about this history?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

5. Share that the [Timeline Activity](#) and [Holocaust Encyclopedia](#) are produced by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and provide accurate historical context. They are reliable sources to confirm historical information for the film. **Ask:** Why is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum a trustworthy source?
  - Sample answer: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is America's national institution dedicated to teaching how and why the Holocaust happened. The Museum creates historically accurate resources for all people to use based on the Museum's collection that holds primary sources and evidence from the time period of the Holocaust.
  
6. Turn to the *During Viewing* section of the student interactive. Tell students they are gathering three concrete examples of historical events from the film. **Preview this together as a class, answering questions and providing any necessary scaffolding to integrate the student interactive into the film viewing.** You can share one example with the class to help students understand. Let students know that after viewing the film, they will assess its historical accuracy by evaluating one of the examples they gathered while viewing.

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## PART TWO: DURING VIEWING

### TIME VARIES ACCORDING TO FILM

7. Students use the interactive to list three examples of historical events.
  - o Additional options:
    - i. When the film references events on the timeline, place a sticky note next to the timeline card with the corresponding event from the film.
    - ii. Students react in real-time with a backchannelling tool, combining the film screening and discussion. Backchannel options include digital tools like Padlet or sticky notes shared on classroom walls.
    - iii. Students follow along on a transcript and annotate as they watch.
8. After students have finished viewing the film, review the historical events collected by students on the student interactive in whole class or group discussions.

## PART THREE: AFTER VIEWING

### Approximately 60 minutes

#### HISTORICAL FACT-CHECKING

9. Students select one of the historical events they listed on the student interactive and cross-check the information using the [Timeline Activity](#) and the [Holocaust Encyclopedia](#). This activity can be completed independently, in groups, or as a whole class.

Additionally, students can fact-check using additional sources found in the [Museum's online collections search](#), which includes artifacts, primary source archival footage, and survivor testimony. Discuss student research as a class or in groups.

#### ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

10. Select any of the questions below. These can be incorporated into class discussions, writing prompts, or other exercises.

<b>STUDENT INTERACTIVE:</b> If the film is based on a book they've read	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● What were the similarities and differences between how the protagonist(s) and antagonist(s) were portrayed?</li><li>● Name one scene in the film that differed from the book. Why do you think this change was made? How does it impact the story?</li><li>● Who was the narrator of the story? How did the narrator's perspective affect the story?</li><li>● Which did you find more historically accurate, the book or the film? Provide evidence to support your answer.</li><li>● How does this film help you understand the Holocaust?</li></ul>
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<p><b>STUDENT INTERACTIVE:</b> If the film is historical fiction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who were the protagonist(s) and antagonist(s)?</li> <li>• Who was the narrator of the story? How does the narrator’s perspective affect the story?</li> <li>• Who and what does the narrator’s perspective include? Who and what does it exclude?</li> <li>• Did you identify places where the film was accurate to the history? Were there places where the film was inaccurate?</li> <li>• According to this film, how and why did the Holocaust happen?</li> </ul>
<p><b>STUDENT INTERACTIVE:</b> If the film is a documentary</p>	<p><b>If the film is a documentary:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What was the main assertion of the film?</li> <li>• Did you identify places where the film accurately portrayed history? Were there places where the film was inaccurate?</li> <li>• Did the director use re-enactment, live-action footage, or both? How do those choices impact the historical accuracy of the film?</li> <li>• Did the director use stock or historical footage, images shot by the filmmaker, or both? How do those choices impact the historical accuracy of the film?</li> <li>• How does this film help you understand the Holocaust?</li> </ul>

## CONCLUSION

### For all types of films:

- To explore how voice-over, lighting, camera angles, and character development impact visual media, students examine all elements of a single scene to create an “anatomy of a scene.” They can also create paper-and-pencil or computer-generated storyboards of a movie sequence and annotate how the elements impact the film.
- Discuss perspective. Whose point of view is presented in the film? Why do you think that point of view was chosen? What is unique about this perspective? How does this perspective affect the story? Who and what does this perspective include? Who and what does it exclude? How does this perspective help you understand the Holocaust? How would the film change if it was told from a different perspective?
- What responsibilities does a director have to represent history accurately?

### For films based on books they’ve read:

- Students create [Venn diagrams](#) to compare and contrast their film versus their book.
- Students write suggestions for changes to the film to make it more historically accurate, additional scenes or storylines they would incorporate, etc.