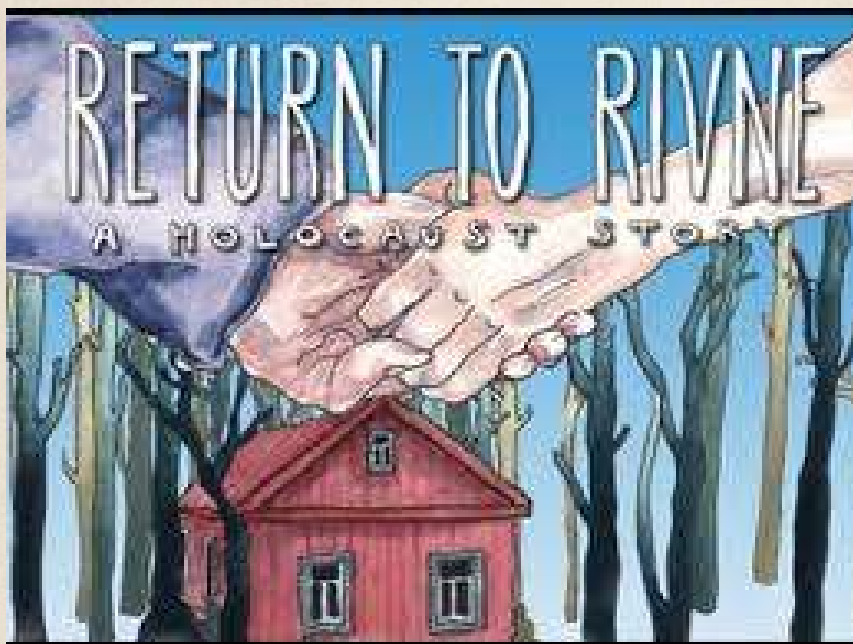


Return to Rivne

A Lesson Plan using Centropa Materials



Submitted by Hadar Vitman Baram

Date of Submission: April 30th, 2026

Lesson Plan

Return to Rivne – A Holocaust Story A Lesson Plan using Centropa Materials

Teacher's name: Hadar Vitman Baram

Grade level: 6th graders, EFL Band 1 (English as a Foreign Language)

Participating school: Plagim School – Kibbutz Hazore'a

Subject: English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

Total time to teach this lesson: Two single lessons (approx. 45–50 minutes each)

Introduction

This lesson plan is based on the Back to Rivne film from the Centropa archive, because a picture is worth a thousand words – and a film is even more powerful. The film makes the horrors of the Holocaust accessible to students in an age-appropriate way, enables them to identify with the characters' emotions, and creates a deeper connection to a subject that is not simple to grasp. I paired the film with the song "Afer ve'Avak" ("Ashes and Dust"), written by a second-generation Holocaust survivor, which tells the story of the poet's mother returning to her birthplace – a place that was once full of joy and life, and became a place of death and horror. This mirrors the story of the two cousins, Shelly and Raya, in the film.

The film and its follow-up activities enable:

1. Making the Holocaust accessible to children – the heroines of the film are young girls, which creates closeness to the characters and fosters identification with their feelings.
2. Enabling a deeper understanding of history – moving from dates and numbers to a human, personal story.
3. The medium of film, the song with its sand-art animation that deepens the emotional experience, and the interactive activities are all media that speak to students and allow a more natural connection to a sensitive and complex subject.
4. The activities address different areas of learning and enable teamwork, differentiated instruction, expression for all students – including those who struggle – and personal expression through a variety of creative channels.

Aims:

To help students develop an interest in history within an EFL class through:

- Learning vocabulary connected to the Holocaust and historical information.
- Developing listening comprehension and critical thinking skills by watching the documentary film "Back to Rivne" and discussing it using WH questions.
- Engaging in a digital tasks map (accessed by QR code) that includes vocabulary tasks, a short reading text, writing activity, understanding time lines and a creation task.
- Demonstrating understanding through a creation task: poster, comic strip, or written response.
- Reflecting on the lesson content through a verbal exit ticket.
- Students will be given homework to reinforce the vocabulary learned in class.

Assessment Statements:

By the end of these lessons the students will be able to:

- 1. Recall and use new vocabulary from the film in speaking and writing tasks.
- 2. Answer comprehension questions about the film using WH question structures.
- 3. Complete digital tasks in groups, including the mandatory creation task.
- 4. Reflect on the themes of the lesson and express their personal response verbally.

Materials Needed:

Teacher:

- A computer or laptop connected to the internet and a projector
- Dry erase markers and whiteboard
- Vocabulary slides (word – image – meaning) prepared in advance
- QR code linking to the digital activity map (projected on the board in Lesson 2)
- Presentation with information and data about the Holocaust victims – including a world map, which will have a more visible impact.

Students:

- One laptop per group (groups of 3-4 students) or mobile phones (for individual or pair work) for Lesson 2

Primary Source:

Back to Rivne – Centropa Cinema (English audio, Hebrew subtitles) -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOICFuKxBXY>

Opening Activity:

Song: **אפר ואבק** – Yehuda Poliker & Yaakov Gilad (March of the Living, Auschwitz)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbifqWOWzSk>

Reflection

Opening

Teaching the Holocaust is one of the most profound responsibilities an educator can undertake. It calls for sensitivity, authenticity, and the ability to bridge between past and present—between knowledge and emotion. In this lesson, I sought not only to teach history, but to design a meaningful and transformative learning experience—one that would resonate with my students beyond the boundaries of the classroom.



Reflective Teaching Statement – Holocaust Lesson (6th Grade EFL)

From a very young age, I have felt a deep personal connection to the subject of the Holocaust. My grandparents, of blessed memory, immigrated to Israel before the outbreak of the war. However, their extended families remained in Poland and were tragically murdered.

My mother grew up in a very small family unit—just four members: her parents, her older brother, and herself. Holidays and birthdays were intimate, shaped as much by absence as by presence. In our home, the families who perished were rarely spoken about; the silence itself bore witness to the depth of the pain.

I grew up with the knowledge that entire branches of my family had been erased from the world—yet I never asked questions. I feared reopening wounds that had never truly healed. Today, as an adult, I carry a sense of regret. I am left with questions that will remain unanswered. This realization has profoundly shaped my identity as an educator: a commitment not only to teach history, but to cultivate memory, empathy, and responsibility in the next generation.

I chose to open the lesson by sharing this personal narrative with my students. Their attentive listening reflected a deep and authentic engagement. This entry point established an immediate emotional connection and set the tone for meaningful learning. I then introduced the lesson through the song “Ashes and Dust” (“אפר ואבק”), explaining that its creators are second-generation Holocaust survivors and that the story it conveys is real—a mother returning to Poland in search of closure. This theme of return served as a conceptual bridge to the film the students were about to watch.

The song, filmed during the March of the Living at Auschwitz-Birkenau, incorporates sand art that visually expresses the pain embedded in the lyrics. This multimodal experience deepened students’ emotional engagement and prepared them for the learning process that followed.

Pedagogical Design and Use of Centropa

A central pillar of this lesson was the integration of materials from Centropa, whose work I consider indispensable in Holocaust education. Centropa's digital archive preserves personal stories, photographs, and testimonies, offering a deeply human and nuanced perspective on historical events. In preparation for the lesson, I engaged in an in-depth exploration of the archive. This was not merely a search for suitable materials, but a process of inquiry and discovery. During this journey, I encountered the film *Return to Rivne*, which immediately resonated with me.

Its pedagogical value was clear:

- A coherent and accessible narrative appropriate for young learners
- Emotional depth conveyed in an age-sensitive manner
- A compelling focus on memory, identity, and return

This moment of discovery was pivotal. It informed the structure of the lesson and reinforced my belief that the careful selection of content is, in itself, a critical pedagogical act.



Innovative Pedagogical Approach and Lesson Structure

The lesson was deliberately structured to move from macro to micro—from historical context and collective knowledge to a personal, human story.

The presentation I designed functioned as a carefully scaffolded learning journey. It integrated:

- Core historical concepts
- Visual and cognitive scaffolding
- Contextualized vocabulary (e.g., ghetto, concentration camp, hope, remember)
- A gradual transition toward narrative engagement

Vocabulary instruction was embedded within meaningful contexts, supporting authentic language acquisition and deeper retention.

Following the presentation, students viewed the film in attentive silence, demonstrating respect and emotional presence. At key moments, I provided mediation to support comprehension while preserving the integrity of the viewing experience.

A reflective discussion followed, in which students articulated their emotional responses, identified challenges faced by the characters, and explored the film's central messages. Their insights were documented on the board, affirming each student's voice as part of a shared meaning-making process.



Interactive Digital Learning and Differentiation

To extend and deepen learning, I designed an interactive digital activity, accessible via QR code or direct link. This component transformed students from passive viewers into active participants.

The activity included:

- Comprehension tasks
- Vocabulary reinforcement
- Reflective prompts
- Creative expression opportunities

Students were given autonomy to choose how they worked—individually, in pairs, or in groups—thus fostering a sense of ownership and supporting differentiated instruction within a heterogeneous classroom.

The inclusion of both required and optional tasks allowed for flexibility while maintaining clear expectations and pedagogical coherence.



Creative Processing and Student Outcomes

Task 6, a creative assignment, was a mandatory component of the activity, as I viewed it as essential for emotional and cognitive processing.

Students responded through writing, drawing, and symbolic representation. The outcomes were deeply moving and demonstrated a high level of engagement and reflection.

The classroom display of student work reveals:

- Emotional depth and empathy
- Thoughtful interpretation
- Personal connection to themes of fear, hope, survival, and resilience

Expressions such as *"Stronger than fear," "Never give up,"* and *"Hope"* reflect not only comprehension, but internalization.

These outcomes mark a significant shift—from acquiring knowledge to constructing meaning.



Extended Impact and Future Implementation

This lesson was implemented across four 6th-grade classes, reaching over 120 students. Across all groups, students demonstrated a consistently high level of engagement—they were attentive, curious, and deeply responsive to both the content and the learning activities.

Despite the sensitive and complex nature of the topic, students exhibited remarkable empathy, emotional awareness, and maturity. Their ability to engage respectfully, articulate their thoughts, and participate meaningfully was especially noteworthy. I felt a profound sense of pride in the way they approached the lesson—with openness, sensitivity, and genuine interest.

The consistency of these responses across multiple classes underscores the effectiveness of the pedagogical design. It demonstrates that when complex historical content is mediated through personal narratives, structured scaffolding, and interactive engagement, even young learners are capable of meaningful and responsible engagement.

This experience has further strengthened my commitment to continued use of materials from Centropa. Beyond Holocaust education, I see significant value in integrating their resources to explore broader themes of Jewish life, heritage, identity, and culture. Such integration enriches both language learning and value-based education, positioning history as a living and relevant narrative.

Conclusion

This lesson represents a holistic approach to Holocaust education—integrating emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and ethical dimensions into a unified learning experience.

Through the integration of personal narrative, music, authentic materials from Centropa, and interactive digital learning, students engaged in a process that was both meaningful and enduring.

They used English not merely as a subject of study, but as a medium for expressing empathy, reflection, and understanding.

The convergence of:

- Personal storytelling
- Carefully curated historical resources
- Innovative pedagogical design
- Student autonomy and choice
- Creative expression

resulted in a learning experience that was both powerful and transformative.

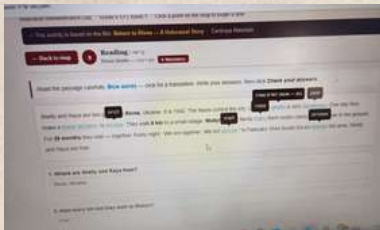
Most importantly, students did not remain passive recipients of knowledge—they became active participants in remembering.

This, ultimately, is the essence of meaningful education:

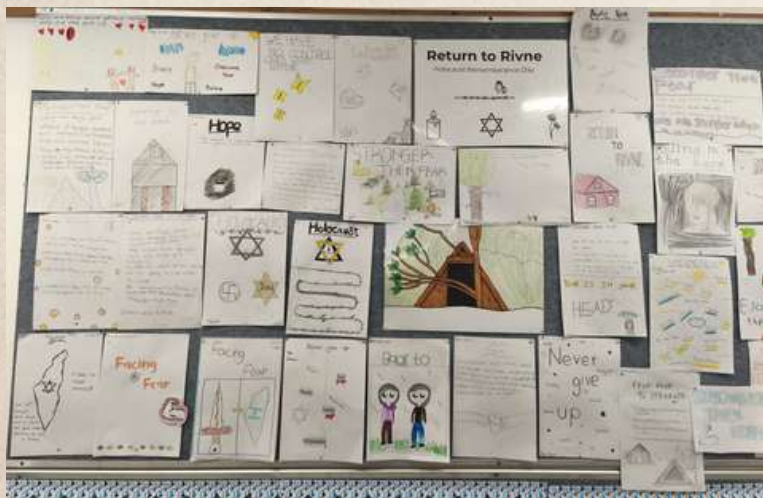
not only to teach the past,

but to shape the moral consciousness of the future.





Turning Learning into Meaning



**We remember not only to honor the past,
but to shape a more humane future.**

Thank you for being part of this journey.

