



NÄR RÖSTERNA TYSTNAR

Photo: Andreas Gejke, Skaparkraft Film och Musikproduktion

A FILM THAT IS PART OF THE

Holocaust Education Initiative

AN EDUCATIONAL PACKAGE FROM
THE SWEDISH NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR HOLOCAUST
EDUCATION



The Swedish National Organization for Holocaust Education offers all schools the drama documentary *When the Voices Fall Silent*. The film is part of an educational package entitled *Holocaust Education Initiative* which is directed at teachers as well as high-school and senior-high school students. Teachers get an entirely new and unique pedagogic tool for preventing and countering anti-Semitism in schools.

The film is based on the book *Escape from Genocide* by Maria Vajta Klamer and it is available at www.riksff.se/english and in Swedish from [The Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company](#) (UR), which from the very outset showed considerable interest in the film.

THE BASIC IDEA BEHIND THE FILM

One of the consistent themes throughout the film is that it is primarily through “the individual person’s destiny that we can understand our collective history” and that history is about a whole lot more than just “statistics and dates”. The Holocaust impacted vast numbers of people and it is vital that the scope of this disaster is made clear in its entirety to students. The problem is that it is difficult to properly grasp the reality behind the statistics and the generalisations if we do not at the same time examine the events from the close-up perspectives and personal experiences of the individuals actually involved.

The film aims to motivate students to learn more about values, and also to promote opportunity for discussion. With the teacher’s help and guidance, students gain increased awareness of how important it is to constantly be on the alert to ensure that democracy is maintained and defended. The film emphasises the importance of having the courage to leave the comfort of one’s own group, to take responsibility for people who may be perceived as different or as outsiders. A democratic society requires that we can see past cultural, linguistic and ethnic differences and instead see other people as our fellow human beings. We all carry both an individual and a shared responsibility in this regard.

THE PLOT IN BRIEF

In the film a fictional Maria visits a school to talk about her book and the people who have unfolded their stories to her. Maria tells the students about Deborah whom she meets at a funeral in a Jewish chapel. Deborah has just buried her son Adam. During the Nazi occupation of Poland she lived in the Warsaw Ghetto together with Adam and her husband Wladyslaw. During the war, Deborah and Wladyslaw manage to smuggle their son out to a Polish woman named Helena, who takes care of him and keeps him hidden. Deborah later succeeds in following him and since Helena also takes her in, the two manage to survive the Holocaust. Deborah has witnessed horrific tragedies in the ghetto, including starvation and mass executions, and these images stay with her all her life.

Leon and Ester were just children when they were forced into some of the most notorious concentration camps. They lost everything. They would never again see their families or their home, their country; they lost both their freedom and their youth.

One of the students is captivated by Maria’s words and studies the issues in depth. The film triggers a dialogue among the students about the issues it brings up. The youngsters’ reaction and the narrator’s voiceover forge a link to today. The documentary transports the viewer between then and now and blends drama, historic archival material and animation, and draws keen parallels to the situation today.



TEACHER GUIDES

The film is accompanied by teacher guides that contain a brief description of the film's plot, links to the school's policy document, and a historical background to the Holocaust. There are five different themes with which to work. The main skill that the students will develop is to "use a historical framework of reference that encompasses various interpretations of time periods, events, individuals, cultural interactions and directions of development" (Swedish National Agency for Education).

Theme 1: Jewish Identity in Poland

The first theme offers the teacher a unique opportunity to teach about Jewish identity, history, language and culture. In Sweden Jews are one of the country's recognised minorities.

Theme 2: Anti-Semitism – Hatred of Jews

The second theme examines the roots, ideas and characteristics of anti-Semitism.

Theme 3: The Warsaw Ghetto

In this theme the students delve into the situation and environment depicted by much of the film. The theme describes oppression and human suffering, as well as the life and the survival instinct that characterised the ghetto.

Theme 4: The Value of Democracy

The aim is to show the students that democracy must constantly be protected, that rights can be taken away if they are not defended, that political freedom should never be taken for granted.

Theme 5: The Rescuers

This last theme deals with a small but vital group from the Holocaust – the Rescuers. The students learn about key terms such as *perpetrator*, *bystander* and *rescuer*.

FILM FACTS

Target group: students and teachers at senior-high school

The film can also be used in high-school, but is recommended from 15 years and up.

Subject: The Holocaust, anti-Semitism, human rights

Duration: 38 minutes

Languages: Swedish, English

Subtitled: Yes

Production year: 2021

The film was produced by Skaparkraft Film & Musikproduktion in cooperation with the Swedish National Organization for Holocaust Education (RFF).

CONTACT

The Swedish National Organization for Holocaust Education

Email: kansli@riksff.se

www.riksff.se