



The Elie Wiesel Living Archive
JEWISH ADULTS - LESSON #1: Storytelling and Silence (1967)

GOALS

- Deepen participants' understanding and appreciation of storytelling and its power
- Remind participants that their words – oral and written – have power and can make an impact
- Inspire action and advocacy rooted in Jewish values

OBJECTIVES

Participants will be able to...

- Understand Elie Wiesel's perspective on stories and their relation to truth
- Articulate the impact of truth – whether literal or figurative
- Consider the potential of stories in conveying truth

MATERIALS

- Access to Elie Wiesel's 1967 Lecture (speakers loud enough for the whole class to hear!)
- Pen/pencil/paper for notes
- Stories & Truth handout
- Power of Words handout
- Silence transcript and handout
- Print out of Psalm 23

Introduction & Ice-Breaker/Warm Up – 15-20 minutes

- Share that today we're going to address the importance of storytelling, words, and truth. We'll explore what Elie Wiesel says about truth in this context.
- Invite participants to share a story (that was heard or read, remembered from a movie or a television series) that helped them better understand a real-life experience. For example, have they heard or read a story about a historical event that helped them appreciate and understand its larger meaning?
 - Consider: how do stories or legends help us make sense of the world we live in?

Stories & Truth – 30 minutes

- Distribute the Stories & Truth handout and transcript
- Discuss the first two prompts listed below the transcript and invite participants to consider these questions as they listen.
- Listen to the clip from Elie Wiesel.
- After hearing his piece about storytelling and truth, divide the class into groups (depending on the size of the overall group). Each should present on one of the prompts on the handout.

After about 10 minutes, they should present their talking points to the whole group. If the class is small, the whole group can discuss everything together.

The Power of Words – 45-60 minutes

- Distribute “power of words” handout and follow the prompts with the participants.
- The aim is for participants to contemplate their own views in response to those of Elie Wiesel.

Silence – 20 minutes

Please note – this piece includes graphic depictions of murder and may be disturbing or, upsetting for participants to listen to. Please read carefully in advance of using this material in your class!

- Elie Wiesel uses stories to explain meaningful, beautiful and also difficult events.
- Before playing the audio, let students know this story may be upsetting. Those who need may excuse themselves.
- Tell the group that at the end of the story, you’ll all remain silent for at least 10 seconds.
- Listen to the final story in Wiesel’s lecture – participants may follow along with the transcript if they’d like.
- When the story is over, remain silent for at least 10-15 seconds.
- What is the message of this story? What role does silence play in this story?
- Re-read or re-listen to the first paragraph of the story. What do his eyes tell us? Why is that important to know?
- How can stories like this help us be more compassionate people?
- As time progresses, there are fewer living survivors of the Holocaust. How does a story like this enable the faithful transmission of the **meaning** of this historical tragedy?

Optional Reflection – 10 minutes

There is an evolving movement in which individuals who were not alive during the Holocaust learn to tell the stories of survivors in the first person. In some instances, they tell the stories by memorizing the account given by survivors of their wartime experience. In other instances, they tell the story in their own words. What might be the strengths and weaknesses of these kinds of storytelling and of this approach to learning about and transmitting history?

Closing Exercise – 3 minutes

As a group, invite participants to stand or sit according to their custom and recite Psalm 23 together. Explain that we will then hold the silence that follows the recitation as participants depart from the room, as an additional way of honoring those whose stories can no longer be told.

