



**The Elie Wiesel Living Archive**  
**Middle School - 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

**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.
- Introduce and play the game "two truths and a fib" in which each participant shares three alleged "truths" about themselves, with one being false. Each participant shares their three "truths" and the class works to discern which is false. Depending on the class size, this can be done in smaller groups or as a whole class.
  - Guide the class to share "truths" (true and false pieces) that relate to their personal histories or experiences. E.g. information about where family is from, past experiences, etc.

**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?

### **Closing Exercise – 10 minutes**

Invite each student to reflect on the day’s lesson by writing a haiku about today’s lesson on stories and their relation to truth. Invite them to share if they’d like.