



FORGING FREEDOM

by Hudson Talbott

Discussion questions provided by Hudson Talbott

What We Can Learn From The Holocaust

By using a true adventure story such as **Forging Freedom**, students are given a solid introduction to the times in which the Holocaust took place while following the daring course of action taken by a true-life hero. While Jaap Penraat's story stands as a candle in the darkness, and the moral reasons for his actions are self-evident, the more practical reason of "the golden rule" gives a stronger, easier-to-understand argument for shifting from the role of "bystander" to "doer." The goal would be to lead students to the understanding that by helping to make the world safer for others we are making it safer for ourselves as well.

Language Arts

Forging Freedom contains four classic character archetypes of both literature and history: hero, bully, victim, and bystander. By writing the four words on the blackboard, the teacher and students could talk about them and then list characteristics of each type underneath the appropriate word.

1. Students can create a day in the life of each of the types, using at least three of the characteristics listed for that type.
2. Have students write about their own experiences (real or imagined) of being each archetype. What caused them to be that type? How did it feel?
3. Going from "bystander" to "hero"—How? Why? Character development is essential in both fiction and non-fiction writing. In life, we may want to do the right thing but are afraid of being hurt ourselves. The urge to be true to one's principles has to be weighed against the risks involved. Jaap Penraat was an ordinary man who did extraordinary things. Have students talk about what might have taken place in Jaap's mind before he decided to take action.
4. Writing assignment: You are Jaap's younger brother or sister. You are coming home from school when you see the Nazis taking away your neighbors—except for Solomon, the boy your age, who has run out the back door and is desperately trying to hide. Neither he nor the Nazis have seen you, so you are free to go into your house and pretend you've seen nothing. Describe what you do next, why, and how you felt doing it.

Social Studies

How did Hitler come to power and why did he pick on the Jews? Consider these observations:

- On page 6 of **Forging Freedom**, Jaap's neighbor says the Germans are angry "because they lost the big war and their money is worthless" and "they need someone to blame."
- The German people were shocked to lose World War I. Their economy was ruined and their money lost its value. They wanted a strong leader to lead them out of the mess.
- Hitler blamed the Jews because they were an easy target; there was a long history of anti-Semitism in Germany.
- The world was a bystander. Other countries did nothing as Hitler became more powerful, seeing him as "someone else's problem" until it was too late.

The illustration on pages 18-19 shows Hitler as a barbed-wire octopus clutching Europe. He spurred the Germans to invade their neighbors to the east, saying they needed and deserved "lebensraum"—more living space. They invaded their neighbors to the west because they needed an Atlantic seaport. Refer to a map and discuss how geography played a major role in World War II.

The English Channel and the North Sea formed a natural barrier, keeping the German forces contained on the continent, but also keeping the Allied forces (Britain and the U.S.) out. Discuss the D-day invasion: why it was so important but also so difficult due to geography?

The maps on page 34 show the route of the Jewish refugees Jaap rescued from the Nazis. Discuss the similarities with and differences from the Underground Railroad system that helped African-Americans escape slavery in the American South prior to the Civil War.

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