



# Holocaust Education Companion Guide

## The Brick Factory

An Excerpt from *Reflections: Auschwitz, Memory, and a Life Recreated*

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL CENTER  
ZEKELMAN FAMILY CAMPUS



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## The Brick Factory

The Germans came at holiday time—it was Passover, 1944, when they marched into Munkacs. Now things happened quickly. Schools were closed. We had to wear the yellow star. A small ghetto of two or three streets was created. Many had to move. For a brief time, a German officer lived in our own home. He was friendly and polite, our holiday guest.

After two weeks, most of the Jewish families were forced to pack up—we were allowed five kilos—and we were marched to a brick factory on the outskirts of the city. For a month this was our home. We slept outside, under the stars, trying to create whatever protection and privacy we could. We used the bricks themselves, piling them together, to make a kind of fence. My aunt found an old sled that we turned into a shelter. We still had some of our own bedding. We held on to each other.

We almost got used to it. I remember we young people throwing bricks from one to the other as part of a work team. My mother said, “If you can throw bricks here, you can go to Palestine and build things there. You can build a new country when all of this is finished. I will let you go.” My mother was not an ardent Zionist. But she must have already realized that our life in Munkacs was over.

One day a young neighbor, a Ukrainian Christian boy, came up to the fence around the factory. Our families had been neighbors; he and I had been playmates. He used to play the harmonica and serenade me. I don’t recall his expression or exactly what he said; only that he came and was looking at us through the fence. I was not happy to see him, and I called out: “What did you come for? To pity us? We don’t need your pity. We don’t want it.” Looking back, I don’t know why he came. Perhaps it was pity. Perhaps he was actually trying to help. Perhaps he was saying good-bye, a last serenade. Whatever it was, he was the only one who came. From all of the town of Munkacs, that was sometimes Mukačevo, he was the only intentional witness.

– Agi Rubin



# Holocaust Education Companion Guide

## Primary Source Information

**Title of the Source** "The Brick Factory," from *Reflections: Auschwitz, Memory, and a Life Recreated*

**Date** 2006

**Creator (author, photographer, artist, etc.)** Agi Rubin and Henry Greenspan

### Background information on the creator

Agi Rubin

In April 1944, after the German occupation of Hungary, Agi, her mother, six-year-old brother, and aunt were forced into the Munkacs ghetto. Before deportation to Auschwitz, Agi was forced to work in the ghetto's brick factory. At Auschwitz, Agi, then 14 years old, was chosen as part of a Sonderkommando. This forced-labor detachment had to sort the clothing and possessions of inmates and victims at Auschwitz. In January 1945, Agi and other prisoners were forced on a death march from Auschwitz. She was liberated by Soviet forces in April/May 1945.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Personal Histories: Agate (Agi) Rubin." [https://www.ushmm.org/exhibition/personal-history/media\\_oi.php?MediaId=2924&th=survival](https://www.ushmm.org/exhibition/personal-history/media_oi.php?MediaId=2924&th=survival).

Henry Greenspan

Henry Greenspan is a psychologist, oral historian and playwright at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor who has been interviewing, writing about, and teaching about Holocaust survivors since the 1970s. Rather than one-time "testimony," Greenspan's approach has been multiple interviews with the same survivors over a period of weeks, months, years, and--with a few people--even decades. His work demonstrates how and what survivors retell is different in the context of sustained acquaintance and deepening conversation than in single "testimonies."

Henry ("Hank") Greenspan, Ph.D.. "Biography." <http://www.henrygreenspan.com/index.htm>.



# Holocaust Education Companion Guide

## Primary Source Information (continued)

**Source** Rubin, Agi, and Henry Greenspan. "The Brick Factory." In *Reflections: Auschwitz, Memory, and a Life Recreated*, 16-17. Saint Paul: Paragon House, 2006.

**Source Description** Told from the perspective of Agi Rubin, this source describes the 1944 arrival of Nazi forces to Munkacs, Hungary, one of the last Jewish communities in Hungary to be impacted by the Holocaust. Dehumanization, ghettoization, and forced labor occurred at a rapid rate for the city's Jewish community.



# Holocaust Education Companion Guide

## Lesson Planning Information

### Recommended Grade Levels

- 6-8
- 9-12
- Post-Secondary

### Holocaust Topics

- Nazi Germany
- The Ghettos

### Themes

- The Human Story
- Dehumanization
- Indifference - How we view others

### Connections to Standards and the C3 Social Studies Framework

- MI WHG 7.2.3 - World War II
- MI WHG CG4 - Causes of and Responses to Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide
- C3 Framework Dimension 1:  
Developing Questions & Planning Inquiries
- C3 Framework Dimension 3:  
Evaluating Sources & Using Evidence
- Common Core State Standards - Reading
- Common Core State Standards - Writing
- Common Core State Standards - Speaking and Listening
- Common Core State Standards - Language
- Common Core State Standards - Reading in History / Social Studies



## Contextualizing the Primary Source

**Information/knowledge  
needed for students  
to understand this  
primary source (Context)**

1. Prewar Jewish life and culture in Hungary, specifically in Munkacs.
2. Nature of relations and non-Jewish communities in Hungary.
3. Preexisting antisemitic attitudes and policies in Hungary, prior to the arrival of the Nazis.
4. Mechanisms by which the Nazis implemented the “Final Solution.”
5. Dehumanization brought about by the Nazi occupation of Hungary.
6. Rapid implementation of the ghetto system in Hungary, and the life and work conditions inside the ghettos, and subsequent deportations.
7. An understanding of Zionism, its aspirations, and its place in East European Jewish life.
8. An understanding of Passover, and its place in Jewish religious life.



# Holocaust Education Companion Guide

## Recommended Contextualizing Resources

### Echoes and Reflections

- The Ghettos:  
<https://echoesandreflections.org/unit-04-the-ghettos/>
- “The Final Solution”:  
<https://echoesandreflections.org/unit-5/>
- The Children and Legacies beyond the Holocaust:  
<https://echoesandreflections.org/unit-10/>

### United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM)

- Bystanders:  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/bystanders>
- Hungary before the German Occupation:  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/hungary-before-the-german-occupation>
- Jewish Community of Munkacs: An Overview:  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-community-of-munkacs-an-overview?parent=en%2F7627>  
(See additional sources on the right side of the screen concerning Munkacs.)
- Hungary after the German Occupation:  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/hungary-after-the-german-occupation>



# Holocaust Education Companion Guide

## Recommended Contextualizing Resources (Continued)

### Yad Vashem

- Prewar Jewish Life in Munkács: A Brief History:  
<https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/prewar-jewish-life-in-munkacs.html>

### Facing History and Ourselves

- The Jewish Ghettos: Separated from the World:  
<https://www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior/chapter-8/jewish-ghettos-separated-world>

### My Jewish Learning

- Passover (Pesach) 101:  
<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/passover-pesach-101/>
- Zionism 101:  
<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/zionism/>



# Holocaust Education Companion Guide

## Additional Lesson Plan Information

**Recommended Length** One class period

**Questions to provide more context**

**Prior to reading:** Utilizing the above resources, introduce students to Hungarian Jewish life prior to World War II, especially prior to the Nazi occupation, to establish a sense of normalcy. Then, utilize the Echoes and Reflections’ “Ghettos” and “The Final Solution” units to provide students context for how the Holocaust was implemented.

**While reading:** Ask students to consider some of the following questions while reading “The Brick Factory.”

- What emotions does the narrator convey? How can you tell?
- How does the Nazi occupation of Munkacs compare to others that we have come to know?
  - What is similar?
  - What is different?
- What is significant about Nazi forces arriving during Passover? Why would the narrator refer to the German officer quartered at her home as a “guest”?
- What were the living conditions like for the narrator and her family in the brick factory?



# Holocaust Education Companion Guide

## Additional Lesson Plan Information (Continued)

### Questions to provide more context

- Why do you think that the narrator's mother suggests that the children go to Palestine?
  - Do you think that she believed this to be feasible?
- What do you think is significant about the narrator's interaction with the Ukrainian Christian boy?
- Why did no one else visit? What might have been some barriers?
- What did the Ukrainian Christian boy witness?
- What information is missing, or would be helpful to provide more context?

**Reflection:** Following the reading, allow students five to ten minutes to answer some of the above questions in a journal session. Then, allow students time to share their observations about the selection with their fellow classmates in pairs or small groups. Consider using the following stems for the talk-and-turn activity:

- "I think the author is trying to ..."
- "I noticed that..."
- "I'd like to go back to what the author said about..."
- "I wonder..."
- "Do you think that..."
- "The lesson we can learn is..."
- "I predict that..."

Then, discuss the selection as an entire class. Ask students why they consider this selection to be significant, and how it impacts their understanding of the Holocaust.



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This guide is a joint product of the Social Studies Teacher Advisory Group and the Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus.

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