



Liberation: Was the Holocaust Really Over?

Grade 10 Canadian History | 60 minutes

Inquiry Question:

What did liberation mean for Holocaust survivors, particularly children and young people?

Anticipating Liberation | 5 minutes

Before introducing any historical evidence, write **LIBERATION** on the board.

Ask students to imagine that they have survived years of Nazi persecution, separation, forced labour, hiding, ghettos or concentration camps and that Allied soldiers have finally arrived.

Ask: **What might you expect liberation to feel like? What might you expect to happen next?**

Record student responses. These might include **joy, relief, safety, freedom, food, returning home, finding family, or beginning life again.**

Do not evaluate their answers at this point. Tell students that they will return to their predictions later in the lesson.

Encountering Liberation: The Liberators | 8–10 minutes

Show the liberation sequence from *Band of Brothers*, Episode 9, “**Why We Fight.**”

Explain that *Band of Brothers* is a dramatization, not primary-source footage, but that the scene allows students to consider liberation initially from the perspective of Allied soldiers encountering a concentration camp.

Ask students to consider:

- **What do the soldiers seem to expect liberation to accomplish?**
- **What problems remain even after the prisoners have been freed?**

Briefly discuss their observations.



Encountering Liberation: The Survivors | 8–10 minutes

Show the selected [Yad Vashem film on liberation](#).

Before viewing, tell students:

We have just seen liberation largely through the eyes of those arriving at a camp. Now consider liberation from the perspective of those who had survived.

After viewing, return to the predictions from the beginning of the lesson.

Ask:

- Which of our predictions about liberation were accurate?
- Which now seem too simple?
- What problems did liberation not solve?

Students should begin identifying issues such as severe illness and malnutrition, psychological trauma, uncertainty about family members, loss of home and community, displacement and the difficulty of imagining what came next.

Children Remember Liberation | 10–15 minutes

Give students **Student Handout 1: Children Remember Liberation**, containing three short survivor accounts.

In pairs or small groups, ask students:

What does each account reveal about why liberation was more complicated than simply becoming free?

Then bring the three accounts together as a class. Students should see that there was **no single experience of liberation**. Freedom could coexist with relief, numbness, illness, hunger, grief, uncertainty and hope.



From Liberation to Rebuilding: Ted's Story | 15 minutes

Introduce the video of [*Ted's Story*](#), a child survivor who survived in hiding and later came to Canada as an orphan. (You do not need to watch all of it; preview and decide where to start given your students' background knowledge).

Make clear that Ted's story is **not being presented simply as an account of the moment of liberation**. Instead, it allows students to follow the story forward and consider what rebuilding meant for a child survivor.

Before showing the video, ask students to consider:

What did rebuilding a life require after survival?

And explain the Jewish War Orphans Project:

Explain that some Jewish children who survived the Holocaust eventually came to Canada through the **War Orphans Project**. Either have them research it or tell them what it was:

At the end of the Second World War, thousands of Jewish children and teenagers had survived the Holocaust but had lost parents and other family members. Many were living in displaced persons camps or children's homes in Europe, with no home or family to return to. Canada's immigration policies had been highly restrictive toward Jewish refugees before and during the Holocaust, and entry remained difficult after the war.

In 1947, after lobbying by the **Canadian Jewish Congress**, the Canadian government approved the **War Orphans Project**, allowing Jewish young people who had survived the Holocaust to immigrate to Canada. The Jewish community agreed to take responsibility for their care and settlement. Between 1947 and 1949, **1,123 Jewish war orphans and young survivors came to Canada** through the program; about 70% were teenage boys. They were placed with Jewish families or otherwise supported by Jewish communities in cities across the country.

After viewing the video, briefly identify what Ted's experience adds to what students have already learned: survival did not restore the life that existed before the Holocaust. For many children, rebuilding meant dealing with the loss of family, finding somewhere to live, establishing new relationships and, eventually, creating a life in a new country.



Consolidation | 5 minutes

Return to the word **LIBERATION** and to the students' predictions from the beginning of class.

Ask:

At the beginning of the lesson, we imagined liberation as an ending. Based on what you have learned, how would you now explain what liberation meant for a Holocaust survivor?

As an exit response:

“Liberation ended _____, but it did not end _____.”

Use evidence from at least one source from today's lesson to explain your answer.

Key Understanding

Liberation ended Nazi captivity and persecution, but it did not restore survivors' families, homes, communities or childhoods. For many survivors—particularly children—liberation marked the beginning of another difficult stage: recovering, searching for family, confronting loss and displacement, and rebuilding their lives.

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STUDENT HANDOUT 1

CHILDREN REMEMBER LIBERATION

The following accounts describe different experiences of children and young people in the period immediately after liberation.

Zvi-Hirsch Peld, age 17

Zvi-Hirsch Peld was seventeen when he was liberated at Buchenwald. He was in a group that travelled to France. He relates:

I didn't harbor lust for revenge against the Germans. ... We didn't feel the destruction, so we certainly didn't feel the liberation. In order to feel the liberation, it was necessary to feel, but we did not feel anything. We were not people. ... at that point we were sick. Sick in body and spirit. Everything hurt – our hands, our feet, our whole bodies hurt, and our souls hurt too.

Source: Yad Vashem, *The Children's Home in Écouis, France: The OSE Home for "Buchenwald Boys."*

Mordechai Philip

Mordechai Philip, one of the boys on the train, recalls:

When we alighted the train, it was full of children accompanied by Rabbi Marcus of the US Army. He came with us. ... And he warned us not to cause damage. But we were children, and we liked wreaking havoc. We stopped the train more than once and went down into the fields. The fields were full of good things, like cherries and all kinds of things that we hadn't seen for a whole year. So we ripped up the trees and took entire trees onto the train with us so that we could eat.

Source: Yad Vashem, *The Children's Home in Écouis, France: The OSE Home for "Buchenwald Boys."*

Shimon Dickmann

Shimon Dickmann recalls:

Mother was in a bad way. Every knock on the door, every man in the street, filled her with hope that perhaps it was Father or one of the boys, and each time, she was disappointed anew. The anticipation and expectation drove us all crazy.

Source: Yad Vashem, *András-Shimon Dickmann: A Young Boy at the Religious Youth Village in Deszk.*



Video testimony: Finding two child survivors after liberation

[Herbert A. Friedman describes finding two child survivors after liberation](#)

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Holocaust Encyclopedia

As you read and watch, consider: What does each account reveal about why liberation was more complicated than simply becoming free?