

Lesson
Duration:
One 50-minute class period

Read and Reflect: Identity and Faith in Moshe Flinker's Diary

Learning Objectives

In this lesson students will explore and reflect on Moshe Flinker's struggle to find religious meaning in the persecution he experienced during the Holocaust. Educators and students are encouraged to read the introduction to Moshe Flinker's diary in *Salvaged Pages*, pages 90–98. It provides valuable information about the writer's life and historical context for a reading of the diary.

Overview

This lesson was initially drafted by Holocaust educator Bonnie Sussman.

Core diary entries from *Salvaged Pages* used in this lesson: Moshe Flinker, November 26, 1942; [November 30, 1942](#); [December 2, 1942](#).

Many diarists during the Holocaust struggled to make sense of their circumstances and to understand why they were experiencing such persecution. Some of these writers approached this question from a religious perspective, grappling with the theological problems posed by the unprecedented persecution of the Jewish people.

Moshe Flinker was one such writer. In his diary, he expressed his strong Jewish faith and his unwavering belief in God despite the suffering he witnessed and experienced throughout the Holocaust. He struggled to reconcile the conflicting realities he faced: a belief in a benevolent, all-powerful God and the brutal suffering of the Jews, who are considered to be God's "chosen people."

Focus Questions

The Holocaust raised (and continues to raise) many theological questions for Jews and non-Jews. For some, the events seemed to suggest that there was no God, for how could a loving and benevolent God allow such suffering to occur? For others, their faith in God's purpose remained unbroken.

- Does having faith make suffering easier? Why or why not?
- How do we reconcile our deepest beliefs (in God, in humanity, in nature, in science) with experiences that challenges those beliefs? What do we do when we confront a reality that doesn't align with beliefs we have always had?
- Is religious faith static and unchanging? Can it evolve in light of the world around us? How?

Activities

Opener: Read a Diary Entry from Moshe Flinker

In his November 26, 1942 diary entry Moshe writes:

We are in a very bad situation. Our sufferings have by far exceeded our wrongdoings. What other purpose could the Lord have in allowing such things to befall us? I feel certain that further troubles will not bring any Jew back to the paths of righteousness; on the contrary, I think that upon experiencing such great anguish they will think that there is no God at all in the universe, because had there been a God He would not have let such things happen to His people. I have heard this said many times already—and indeed what can God intend by all these calamities that are happening to us in this terrible period? It seems to me that the time has come for our redemption, or rather, that we are more or less worthy of being redeemed. (Tomorrow I shall continue further in a search for an answer to this last question, because now I am very sleepy, and it is after midnight.)¹

Ask students to discuss their understanding of this diary entry. What questions and issues is Moshe seeking to understand? What words or sentences convey this quest? What further questions does this entry raise? If theological questions in relationship to the Holocaust are new and unfamiliar to students, there is extensive scholarship available to explore on Holocaust theology. Yad Vashem's bibliography (search "Philosophy and Theology") serves as a place to begin.

Main Activity: Identity and Faith - Close Reading of Moshe Flinker

Doing a close reading is one way to help students of all abilities work with diary entries, so they can understand the complexity of the content and its emotional weight. As the term is used in many state standards, close reading allows students to purposefully and slowly reread text to deepen their comprehension. They can focus their attention on the meaning of the individual words and sentences. They can also give attention to the overall development of events and ideas.

Close reading usually includes text-dependent questions that call on students to analyze the text so they can draw meaningful inferences and find important evidence. This sort of careful attention to the text allows students to synthesize their learning. They gain important content knowledge. Then they can communicate their understanding to their peers or an outside audience.

The [Close Reading Protocol](#) can be used (and adapted) to facilitate the close reading of the diary entries.

Complete a first read of excerpts from [Moshe Flinker's Diary Entry on Understanding the Holocaust, November 30, 1942](#). This entry includes some difficult vocabulary and ideas that may be very unfamiliar to students not exposed to Judaism or Jewish teachings. Take the needed time to discuss, clarify, and if possible, provide further background information to assist in student understanding.

Have students complete their individual read. In small groups, students can discuss the portions they selected and share a synopsis of their discussion with the larger class.

Complete the same exercise as above with [Moshe Flinker's Diary Entry Envisioning the End of World War II, December 2, 1942](#).

In small groups have students discuss the following text-dependent questions:

- What are the questions that Moshe Flinker seeks to answer in his November 30, 1942, entry?
- What are his answers to these questions?
- Through these questions, Moshe is trying to determine whether the current suffering of the Jews under German authority is a continuation of their history or is somehow different. Based upon his writing, what are his conclusions?
- What does he think Jews need to do in light of his conclusions?
- How does Moshe explain and express his devotion to his Jewish faith?

Citations

1 Alexandra Zapruder, ed., *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust*, 2nd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015) 100–101.

Assessment

Drawing from the three entries included in this lesson, have students choose one of the Focus Questions and write an essay responding and expanding upon the question posed. How did Moshe answer the question? What is their response to his answer?