

Educator's Guide and Student Activities

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Champaign, Illinois

The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners

Educational Activities

Introduction

The description of this exhibit from the Auschwitz Museum explains the nature and purpose of the exhibit:

The exhibition titled, "The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners," presents the fate of victims of the largest German concentration and extermination camp KL Auschwitz, presented through the works of those who survived. Terrible living conditions, worrisome starvation, and continuous tiredness due to exhausting, long-lasting work were the inherent element of the camp experience, accompanied by beating and constant humiliation. In their works, the former prisoners, who were artists, decided to make an attempt at presenting this hell on earth created by the German Nazis. (<http://auschwitz.org/en/education/exhibitions/the-auschwitz-experience-in-the-art-of-prisoners/>)

This exhibit is a useful resource to complement a study of the Holocaust, illustrating the experience and life of the prisoners in Auschwitz-Birkenau. The works in the exhibit were created by former prisoners after World War II and reflect their unique experiences from the depths of their trauma and memory. Through art, the viewer can gain an insight into the horrors of the camp; the daily struggle for life; and survival as depicted in the various pieces. Each of the twelve artists, whose work is featured in the exhibit, experienced life in Auschwitz at various times, yet similarities in their experiences can be observed in their work.

The activities in this booklet assume that students have a basic understanding of the Holocaust and a general understanding of the concentration camps. The activities presented in conjunction with the exhibit guide will provide students an opportunity to increase their knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust in general and, more specifically, life in the Auschwitz camp complex. The purpose of the activities is to encourage students to examine various pieces of the exhibit in detail and consider what the works reveal about life in the camp and the experiences of the individual.

Some of the activities provided in this guide have been modified from the website “Learning About the Holocaust through Art” (sponsored by World ORT and Beit Lohamie Haghtaot (www.art.holocaust-education.net)) to apply specifically to this exhibit and "The Auschwitz Experience through the Eyes of the Prisoners." Other activities were created by HEC team members specifically for this exhibit. Teachers should use the activities as they deem appropriate for the grade and age of their students as some of the images depict the horrors of daily life in the camp in graphic detail. Using at least one activity is recommended, and teachers should be aware that several of the activities are very similar. Teachers may also want to consider allowing students to choose which activity or activities they want to do.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum's website is an excellent resource for teachers and students to learn more about the camp; the life of the prisoners; and many other details related to the Holocaust as they relate to Auschwitz-Birkenau. (<http://auschwitz.org/en/>).

Other Useful Websites

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – www.ushmm.org

Yad Vashem – www.yadvashem.org

Simon Wiesenthal Center – www.wiesenthal.com

Cybrary of the Holocaust – www.remember.org

Art/Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust, Florida Center for Instructional Technology – www.fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/arts/art.htm

**The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners
Activity One: Pieces of Impact**

Many people have strong emotional reactions to certain pieces of art. Some individuals are impacted by the subject matter and others by the artist's style or use of color. Others may connect to a single object, person, or act in the picture. Many people also find that some works of art simply make a strong impression on them and that they remember a certain piece for a long time. Please respond to three pieces below.

Title of Work: Name of Artist:	Title of Work: Name of Artist:	Title of Work: Name of Artist:
Explanation of why you had a strong reaction to the piece or why the piece made an impression on you:	Explanation of why you had a strong reaction to the piece or why the piece made an impression on you:	Explanation of why you had a strong reaction to the piece or why the piece made an impression on you:

**The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners
Activity Two: Faces**

Faces of victims are often very clear in many of these pieces. In other pictures, the faces of the perpetrators are quite clear. Carefully examining the faces can reveal a lot about what is happening and help viewers understand the story the artist is telling with their work. Select three pieces and specifically discuss whose facial expressions you observe, what emotions they are showing, and your reaction to the expressions.

The faces in the work called:

By:

The faces in the work called:

By:

The faces in the work called:

By:

Whose faces?

What emotions they are showing:

My reaction:

Whose faces?

What emotions they are showing:

My reaction:

Whose faces?

What emotions they are showing:

My reaction:

**The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners
Activity Three: The Message Beyond the Picture**

Many artists create pieces that are thought-provoking and have messages that go beyond what is actually seen in the picture. In the exhibit there are three pieces in particular that have messages that go deeper than what is simply seen. You may need to access your prior knowledge of the Holocaust to address or explain what is happening and why there may be something that does not seem to fit what the picture seems to be on the surface or why there is something else that viewers may need to really think about. Please discuss them below.

Christmas Eve
by Wladyslaw Siwek

Children's Prams
by Francis Reisz

Returning from Work
by MIECZYSLAW KOŚCIELANIAK

Your reflection:

Your reflection:

Your reflection:

**The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners
Activity Four: Barracks and Railroads**

Throughout the exhibit there are many pictures of people in the barracks and of people or objects with railroad tracks. Reflect on them below.

Barracks

Railroads

Title of Picture 1:

Artist:

What is happening in the picture?

What does this picture teach about barracks?

Title of Picture 1:

Artist:

What is happening in the picture?

What does this picture teach about railroads?

Title of Picture 2:

Artist:

What is happening in the picture?

What does this picture teach about barracks?

Title of Picture 2:

Artist:

What is happening in the picture?

What does this picture teach about railroads?

**The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners
Activity Five: Portrayals of People**

As you look at the pictures in the exhibit, you will notice that there are different kinds of people in the pictures. Tell what you see and then discuss your observations.

Female Victims	Male Victims	Child Victims	Nazis
What I see:	What I see:	What I see:	What I see:
What I Think about What I See:	What I Think about What I See:	What I Think about What I See:	What I Think about What I See:

The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners
Activity Six: People in the Camps

Piece # ___ Title of piece: _____ Artist: _____

<p>Clothing: What are they wearing?</p>	<p>Consider: What condition is the clothing in? Is it torn, dirty, ragged, etc.</p>	<p>Answer: (be descriptive and detailed)</p>
<p>Environment: Where are they?</p>	<p>Consider: What are their surroundings? Are they in a building or outside? If outside, what time of year is it?</p>	<p>Answer: (be descriptive and detailed)</p>
<p>Activities: What are the people doing?</p>	<p>Consider: Are they performing work or some kind of task? Are they sitting? Are they standing? Do they seem to be experiencing an emotion? Are they experiencing an event?</p>	<p>Answer: (be descriptive and detailed)</p>
<p>Objects: What else is in the picture?</p>	<p>Consider: Which objects are close? Which are far away? Why is the object there? Are people interacting with the object? Is anyone using the object to do something?</p>	<p>Answer: (be descriptive and detailed)</p>
<p>Overall impression: What do you think about this picture?</p>	<p>Consider: What do you think the artist is trying to convey? How does the artist do this? How does this piece make you feel?</p>	<p>Answer: (be descriptive and detailed)</p>

How does this picture relate to the others you chose?

The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners
Activity Seven: Common Themes and Topics Environment

Artistic Considerations for the Pieces	Artwork #1 Title: Artist:	Artwork #2 Title: Artist:	Artwork #3 Title: Artist:
Use of Techniques How does the artist use line, form, color, etc.?			
People How do the people interact with their environment?			
Objects: Are there buildings, plants, or other objects in the picture? Where are they? Describe some of their details.			

Artistic Considerations for the pieces	Artwork #1	Artwork #2	Artwork #3
Foreground and Background: What differences can you see between the foreground and background in each picture?			

Reflection:
From among the works you have examined, is there a common theme or topic portrayed in the pictures? Is there something else that the pictures have in common? It could be the subject matter or the way the works are drawn or painted. Please reflect on the theme or similarities below.

The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners
Activity Eight: Way of Life in the Camp

<p>Activities – <i>What are the daily life activities portrayed in the picture? Is it food, work, personal hygiene, etc.? What are the people doing? What does the picture tell us about everyday life in the camp?</i></p>	<p>People – <i>Are the people young or old? Healthy or sick? What can you deduce is their mental state—are they worried, sad, concerned, frightened, etc.?</i></p>	<p>Objects – <i>What objects or things that are depicted in the picture contribute to making their life easier or more difficult? What are people using as tools?</i></p>	<p>Place – <i>Are they inside or outside? What is the state of the facilities and/or buildings? Do they contribute to making their life easier or more difficult?</i></p>
Picture 1:	Picture 1:	Picture 1:	Picture 1:
Picture 2:	Picture 2:	Picture 2:	Picture 2:
Picture 3:	Picture 3:	Picture 3:	Picture 3:

The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners
Activity Eight: Way of Life in the Camp

Comparing Picture to Picture	Similarities	Differences
Picture One to Picture Two What is interesting about these similarities and differences?		
Picture One to Picture Three What is interesting about these similarities and differences?		
Picture Two to Picture Three What is interesting about these similarities and differences?		

**The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners
Activity Nine: Human Rights**

The following human rights have been extracted from the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

[\(https://www.youthforhumanrights.org/what-are-human-rights/universal-declaration-of-human-rights/\)](https://www.youthforhumanrights.org/what-are-human-rights/universal-declaration-of-human-rights/).

We are all free and equal - We are all born free. We all have our own thoughts and ideas. We should all be treated in the same way.

Don't Discriminate - These rights belong to everybody, whatever our differences.

The Right to Life – We all have the right to life, and to live in freedom and safety.

No Slavery – Nobody has any right to make us a slave. We cannot make anyone our slave.

No Torture – Nobody has any right to hurt us or to torture us.

No Unfair Detainment – Nobody has the right to put us in prison without good reason and keep us there, or to send us away from our country.

Freedom to Move – We all have the right to go where we want in our own country and to travel as we wish.

The Right to Seek a Safe Place to Live – If we are frightened of being badly treated in our own country, we all have the right to run away to another country to be safe.

Food and Shelter for All – We all have the right to a good life. This includes mothers and children; people who are old, unemployed or disabled; and all people have the right to be cared for.

A Fair and Free World – There must be proper order so we can all enjoy rights and freedoms in our own country and all over the world.

What are the five most important human rights? If there are important rights not listed above, you may include them in your list below.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Examining the artwork from a human rights perspective: Artist portrayal of human rights violations

Name of Piece and Artist	Right or Rights Violated	How the Artist Portrayed the Violations
1.		
2.		
3.		

Reflection

Consider and address one or more of the following:

1. How did different artists portray the violation of the same right(s)?
2. What right(s) was/were most commonly depicted? Why do you think this happened?
3. Which picture really stood out to you for how it showed a human rights violation? Why?

**The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners:
Activity Ten: Way of Life in the Ghettos and Camps**

Choose three works that reveal aspects of everyday life in Auschwitz. Some examples include: food, work, personal hygiene, etc. Write the names of the pieces you select in the space provided below.

Piece 1:

Artist:

Piece 2:

Artist:

Piece 3:

Artist:

Think about or discuss these questions as they relate to the pieces of art that you selected.

Consider:

Write your answers below

What surprised you in these pictures?
(Consider: food, work, personal hygiene, etc.)

What did you notice that you expected to see
based on your knowledge of the Holocaust?
(Consider: food, work, personal hygiene, etc.)

Do you feel that life was the same for all
prisoners, or was it easier for some and
harder for others?
(Consider: food, work, personal hygiene, etc.)

Writing Assignment	
In the space below, write a series of text messages between you and a friend or relative on what you have observed about everyday life in Auschwitz from these pictures.	

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The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners
Activity Eleven: Reactions to the Art

Choose two pictures that had content that made you have a strong emotional reaction and respond below

Work	Title and artist	Give specific details about what the content was and why you responded strongly to it.
1		
2		

Choose two pictures that had a style or visual aspect that made you have a strong emotional reaction and respond below

Work	Title and artist	Give specific details about why you responded strongly to the style or visual aspect of the picture.
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1		
Work	Title and artist	Give specific details about why you responded strongly to the style or visual aspect of the picture.
2		

Of the pieces you selected, which one do you feel would be the best to show someone else to help them understand the Holocaust?
Explain why you feel this way.

Title and Artist:

Your Explanation:

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**The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners
Activity Twelve: Artists and Their Work**

Choose two artists and record the requested information.

Information	Name: Artist #1	Name: Artist #2
Basic information - date of birth, location of birth, age when arrived at Auschwitz, when the art was created (shortly after liberation? Years later?)		
Education and training before Auschwitz		

Experiences at Auschwitz		
Education and training after Auschwitz		
Life after Auschwitz		
What do you expect their artwork to be like? Style? Subject matter? People portrayed? Location?		

After seeing their pieces at the exhibit, discuss how the artist met or did not meet your expectations of what their art would be like.

Artist 1:	
Artist 2:	

**The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners
Activity Thirteen: Pictures to Educate**

Pick the three pictures that you feel together would best educate people about the Holocaust and explain why.

Title of picture: Artist: Why did you pick it?	Title of picture: Artist: Why did you pick it?	Title of picture: Artist: Why did you pick it?
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**The Auschwitz Experience in the Art of Prisoners
Activity Fourteen: The Skill of the Artist**

Everyone is entitled to their opinion. Based on what you see at the exhibit, who do you think are some of the most skilled artists?

Artist's Name	Artist's Name	Artist's Name
<p>Explain your choice by discussing the artistic aspects of their work and any other reasons that you feel they are highly skilled.</p>	<p>Explain your choice by discussing the artistic aspects of their work and any other reasons that you feel they are highly skilled.</p>	<p>Explain your choice by discussing the artistic aspects of their work and any other reasons that you feel they are highly skilled.</p>

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