

# Why Use Testimony?

## What Is a Testimony?

Testimony is a personal retelling of memories by someone who witnessed the events described.

## Testimony provides

- First-person accounts of survivors and witnesses
- Authentic stories that promote civic engagement and critical thinking
- A reminder of our responsibility to remember, react, and understand

## Why Use Testimony?

Integrating testimony across the curriculum is a compelling way to engage students with the individuals who lived through and observed the events leading up to, during, and following genocide.

## What Can Testimony do for my Students?

- Boost critical thinking
- Improve understanding and empathy when combined with the use of other primary source documents and texts, Provide an opportunity to learn a moral message expressed in a personal manner.
- Help connect witness memories to student lives
- Make human that which is inhuman and make tangible that which is inconceivable
- Safely bring students to what may be an uncomfortable learning experience
- Inspire students to bear witness and be more responsive to prejudice, hate, and injustice in their lives
- Use personal stories to teach the difficult topics of hate, racism, and intolerance

## Testimony and Learning Outcomes

Testimony is a powerful tool that can be used in any subject area. The central themes—prejudice, hate, and intolerance, as well as the importance of family, personal and group identity, justice, heritage, and standing up for the oppressed and against the oppressors—provide many opportunities for inquiry-based lessons. The following are just some examples of learning outcomes that are supported by the use of testimony in instruction:

Subject	Learning Outcomes
History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Make connections between people and events</li> <li>■ Use historical evidence to create and answer questions</li> <li>■ Ask and explore questions about changes that impacted people in the past or had enduring consequences</li> </ul>
Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Understand and evaluate information</li> <li>■ Design inquiry using observation, data interpretation and analysis, and critical thinking to examine testimony</li> </ul>
Media and Digital Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Empower students by providing them with 21st century learning tools and resources</li> <li>■ Promote technological thinking and inquiry</li> <li>■ Advance student learning, creativity, and innovation</li> </ul>
World Languages and Cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Explain the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the cultures studied</li> <li>■ Evaluate information and diverse perspectives</li> </ul>
Visual and Performing Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Safely bring students to what may be an uncomfortable learning experience</li> <li>■ Inspire students to bear witness and be more responsive to prejudice, hate, and injustice in their lives</li> <li>■ Use personal stories to teach difficult topics of hate, racism, and intolerance</li> </ul>
Sociology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Investigate patterns of social inequality and how they impact people</li> <li>■ Examine the social construction of groups and its impact on the life chances of individuals</li> </ul>

\*After you are done exploring [Teaching with Testimony](#), [IWitness](#) is an excellent resource to extend the learning. IWitness is an educational website developed by the USC Shoah Foundation—The Institute for Visual History and Education that provides access to more than 4,000 full life histories and testimonies of survivors and witnesses to the Holocaust and other genocides for guided exploration.

## USC Shoah Foundation

Best Practices for Using Testimony

### Overview

Testimony is a personal retelling of memories by someone who witnessed the events described.

Through powerful, thought-provoking engagement with first-person stories from survivors and witnesses of genocide, students can develop empathy, understanding, and respect while deepening their learning across a variety of subjects. Testimony also provides:

- A human face sharing emotions and giving voice to historic events
- Authentic stories that promote civic engagement and critical thinking
- A reminder of our responsibility to remember, react, and understand

### Questions to Consider Before Using Testimony

It is important to prepare carefully when using testimony with students. The following questions and considerations will help you maximize the impact of testimony in your lessons and activities:

- **Why am I using this testimony?**

Before showing a testimony clip, be sure you have clear purpose for showing the clip to students.

- **Do my students know what testimony is?**

Explain that testimony is based on the memory and perspective of the witness and may not always be 100% accurate. This does not diminish the power of the testimony or its importance but may help students understand why witnesses may recall the same events differently.

- **Have I established clear communication expectations?**

Reiterate your rules for discussion and the importance of being respectful of others' opinions and the witness clips.

- **How will I activate students' prior knowledge and context building?**

Begin with an activity that helps students develop and apply academic and emotional connections to the testimony.

- **What will students do after viewing the testimony?**

Follow up with a reflection to allow students to share the connections they have drawn between the content matter they are learning, the testimony, and their personal experiences.

## Supporting Testimony Before, During, and After Watching

There may be topics that are challenging for students when engaging with testimony about prejudice, antisemitism, racism, discrimination. It is important to help them understand why they are viewing testimony and to facilitate conversations and activities that support and enhance the academic as well as emotional connections they are building to the eyewitness clips.

Before	During		After
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Provide an opening activity that helps students build a connection to personal narratives and experiences with stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination</li> <li>■ Explain terms used in the testimony that may be challenging for students</li> <li>■ Establish historical context and background on people, places, and events</li> </ul>	<p><b>Students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Pay attention to the speaker's tone of voice and body language</li> <li>■ Consider the context and perspective of the witness</li> <li>■ Focus on the personal story of the testimony as opposed to facts and figures</li> <li>■ Create connections to their own lives and personal experiences</li> </ul>	<p><b>Educators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Pause clips to allow time for students to reflect and/or record thoughts, questions, and ideas</li> <li>■ Engage students in investigations using active inquiry</li> <li>■ Be flexible to the needs of the students</li> <li>■ Promote interdisciplinary thinking and learning through common, recurring themes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Engage students in free writing and writing in response to prompts</li> <li>■ Use time after viewing to help debrief on the speaker's tone, words, and experience</li> <li>■ Follow up with a reflection activity to allow students to share the connections they have drawn between the content matter they are learning, the testimony, and their personal experiences</li> <li>■ Refer to the testimony if possible throughout the lesson, unit, or course to help reinforce important themes</li> </ul>