

The 19th Window

educator guide

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SUMMARY *The 19th Window* is a choose-your-own-pathway mystery, set in modern-day Poland, that connects Jewish and Roma Holocaust histories.

AUDIENCES *The 19th Window* is recommended for ages 13 and up. The feature is suitable for students and the general public.

TIMING *The 19th Window* takes approximately 25 minutes to complete. If discussion is integrated within the experience, more time will be needed.

CONTENT OVERVIEW **Themes**
Investigation of Holocaust history; Hidden and marginalized histories; Emotional responses to atrocity; Suicide and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); Family history and inter-generational memory and trauma; Architecture and symbology in Judaism; Holocaust tourism; Jewish and Roma resistance during the Holocaust

Connections to Today

While *The 19th Window* is centered around Holocaust history, analysis of the story can lead to conversations about historical research, how we navigate our emotional responses to atrocity, suicide and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among genocide survivors, and inter-generational memory and trauma.

Story Structure

As we experience the story, we get to decide the actions of Lydia, our fictional protagonist visiting her grandmother's country of birth for the first time. But follow certain paths and we hit dead ends where the mystery terminates, unsolved. On the surface, these decision points serve as motivators; as readers we have a sense of control. On a deeper level, the decision points and dead ends – following no particular pattern or logic – represent how chance and luck, including bad luck, play a role in our investigation of history.

Why Fiction?

The 19th Window is a work of historical fiction. While the central characters - including Lydia, Adam, Essie, and Andrzej - are all fictional, the locations and historical events described in the story are all real. In writing about his personal experiences of traveling to former sites of Nazi atrocity in Poland, the author of *The 19th Window* found it difficult to talk directly about his own experiences. As he explains: "I was struggling to come to terms with my family's Holocaust history. By fictionalizing my experience, I was able to express my own hidden emotions. I was also able to use fiction to draw attention to the very real connections and historical overlaps between Jewish and Roma Holocaust narratives, connections that are often overlooked." – Danny M. Cohen

Author Statement

The author of *The 19th Window* explains: “At the ruins of the synagogue in Dzialoszyce, I found myself solving a mystery of architecture and memory. I was Lydia, once. As a teenager searching for my grandfather’s murdered family, I was scared of what might be uncovered. What I found were dead ends, but also unexpected connections to hidden histories. Yet learning about history isn’t enough. We need to explore and question how we’ve come to remember (and misremember) the past, even when the answers might be frightening or, worse, forever lost.” – Danny M. Cohen

ACTIVITY IDEAS

Suitable for in-person and distance learning

Large Group Experience

The 19th Window can be implemented as an interactive large group activity where the group votes at each decision point. Each decision point and ‘chapter’ serves as a natural moment for discussion.

Pairs & Small Groups

The 19th Window can be completed in pairs or small groups, or given as a homework assignment for students to work on with their families. *The 19th Window* can also be completed alone.

Writing Assignments

To support deep engagement with historical content, students can reflect on their experiences of completing *The 19th Window* through written reports. Students can write about the interactive testimony experience as a whole or focus on certain parts of the story to develop essays, written projects, and focused presentations. For writing prompts, see Lesson Plan & Guiding Questions, below.

LESSON PLAN & GUIDING QUESTIONS

Suitable for in-person and distance learning

Part 1: SOLVE THE MYSTERY

Assign *The 19th Window* as homework, or set aside a class session or two for students to complete the mystery. Students can work to solve the mystery alone, in pairs, or in small groups. (Note: The larger the group, the more time will be needed to allow for discussion and debate.) Students can be encouraged to write an informal reflection or report on their experience of solving the mystery.

Part 2: PROJECT TASKS

Split the class into small teams. Assign one of three tasks to each team (see Task A, Task B, and Task C, below). While completing its project task, each team should use the accompanying 'Guiding Questions' (see below) and prepare a short presentation for the class.

Part 3: PRESENTATIONS

Each team presents its findings (for example, in-person, live expo, by live video, recorded video, slide show, edited video, and so on).

Part 4: CONCLUSION

End the unit with a full class discussion on the experience of solving *The 19th Window*. Questions: Why was *The 19th Window* written as a choose-your-own-pathway mystery, rather than as a linear tale? How did the choices and road blocks within the story alter the reading experience? What is the reader trying to solve? (For answers to these questions, see Content Overview, above.)

TASK A: GEMATRIA & ARCHITECTURE

Create a story map that shows every moment Lydia counts or finds herself thinking and learning about numbers and *gematria*.

Guiding Questions for Task A:

What is *gematria*?

What is the significance of *gematria* to the story?

How does Lydia's necklace become connected to her family's history?

How does Lydia's birthday change the story's development and outcome?

Why does Lydia become interested in the windows at the *Dziadoszyce* synagogue, and why does she want to prove Joanny wrong?

In what way is architecture - of synagogues, of Nazi camps, and of Holocaust memorials - important to the story?

TASK B: INVESTIGATION OF HISTORY

Create a timeline of Lydia's discoveries, including a timeline of Essie and Andrzej's love story.

Guiding Questions for Task B:

How are the mysterious envelopes important to the story?

In what ways does Lydia uncover new historical information?

What new information does Lydia learn about her grandmother?

What is Adam's process and experience of studying Holocaust history?

How does Adam's identity as Roma affect Lydia's understanding of her grandmother's story?

What are the differences and similarities between Jewish and Roma experiences during the Holocaust?

We learn that Lydia's grandmother took her own life. Why do we rarely hear stories about suicide among Holocaust survivors?

TASK C: INTER-GENERATIONAL TRAUMA

Create a story map of Lydia's emotional responses throughout her journey.

Guiding Questions for Task C:

When Lydia arrives in Poland, why does she become physically sick?

Why is Lydia so afraid to visit the sites of Nazi atrocity?

Throughout her trip, why does Lydia reject the urge to cry?

At Chmielnik, the tour guide, Joanny, tells the group, "It's okay to feel anything - even nothing." Why does Lydia respond to this statement with relief?

Once she discovers her grandmother's hidden past, why does Lydia no longer feel like a tourist?

What is inter-generational trauma?

Is Lydia experiencing inter-generational trauma, or something else?

MAP & LOCATIONS



The 19th Window Map of Poland, with present-day borders, is included here for education purposes only, courtesy of *The Holocaust in History and Memory*, published by University of Essex, UK (2015, p.45).

Cities, Towns, and Sites of Atrocity in *The 19th Window*

Imperial War Museum, London UK

Bevis Marks Synagogue, London UK

*Płaszów, Poland

Chmielnik, Poland

Działoszyce, Poland

Oświęcim, Poland

*Auschwitz I, Poland

**Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland

**Treblinka, Poland

*former site of Nazi concentration camp

**former site of Nazi killing camp

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FEATURE INFO

The 19th Window is a work of fiction written by Danny M. Cohen. While all characters are fictional, efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy of historical context and content. An adapted, linear version of *The 19th Window* was published in the journal *The Holocaust in History and Memory*. Copyright 2014. Danny M. Cohen. All Rights Reserved.

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