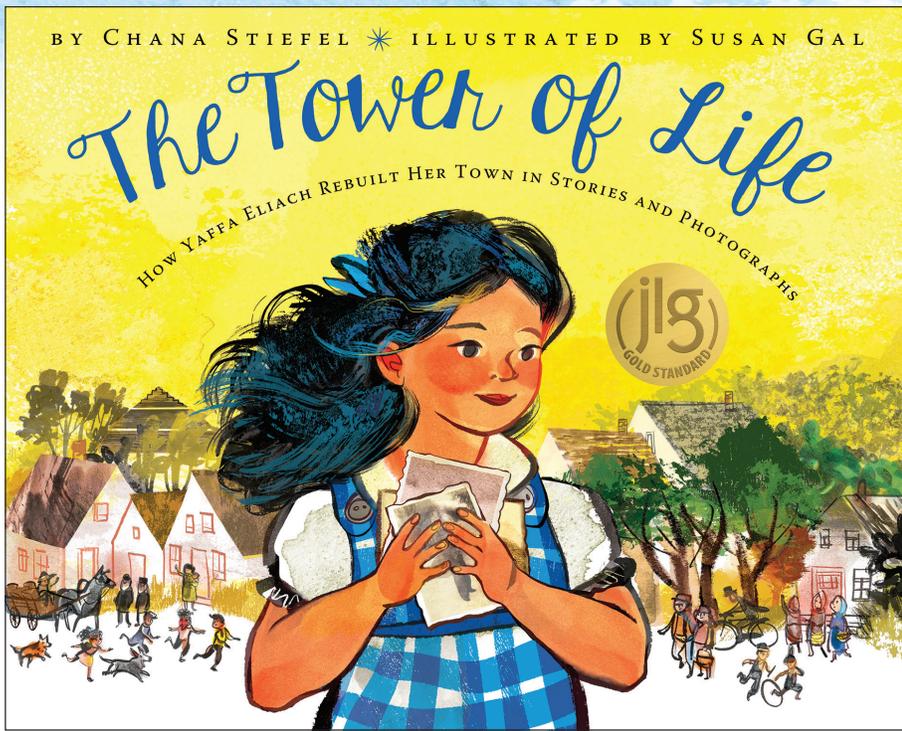


CURRICULUM GUIDE



The true story behind the Tower of Life, a permanent exhibit at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

THERE ONCE WAS a girl named Yaffa. She loved her family, her home, and her beautiful Polish town that brimmed with light and laughter. She also loved helping her Grandma Alte in her photography studio. There, shopkeepers, brides, babies, and bar mitzvah boys posed while Grandma Alte captured their

most joyous moments on film. And before the Jewish New Year, they sent their precious photographs to relatives overseas with wishes for good health and happiness.

But one dark day, Nazi soldiers invaded the town. Nearly 3,500 Jewish souls—including family, friends, and neighbors of Yaffa—were erased.

This is the stunning true story of how Yaffa made it her life's mission to recover thousands of her town's photographs from around the world. Using these photos, she built her amazing Tower of Life, a permanent exhibit in the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, to restore the soaring spirit of Eishyshok.

★ “There are many picture books about the Holocaust, but this one stands out with Gal’s beautiful watercolor pictures and the true account of one woman’s goal that her community never be forgotten. A beautiful tribute. . . . Highly recommended.”

—*School Library Journal*, STARRED REVIEW

“A loving testament to light and hope and the vision of a remarkable woman.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“A truthful portrait appropriate for those just beginning to learn about the Holocaust. . . . An invitation to look at Eliach’s life with compassion and awe.” —*Jewish Book Council*

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A Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection
Recommended for Grades 4–8, or at the discretion of parents and educators.

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Discussion Questions



- * Look closely at the opening spread of *The Tower of Life*, where a young girl in a blue gingham dress runs in a field. What tone does the author set in the beginning of this story? What specific words, colors, and images help to set this tone? If you were to close your eyes and imagine the sounds that would accompany this illustration, what might you hear?
- * What makes the tradition that the Jewish residents of the shtetl, or town, of Eishyshok follow during holidays special? What do you think is the significance of this tradition? Compare and contrast the images of Eishyshok and the people living there to your own community. What are the similarities and differences?
- * How does Yaffa connect with each of her grandmothers? What are ways that you connect with older relatives in your family? Why is it important to connect with them?
- * Many years earlier, Yaffa’s grandfather brought back a new invention, a camera, after a visit to America. How does this camera become significant and important to Yaffa’s family?
- * On one spread in the book, we see a photograph of Yaffa feeding chickens. When we turn the page, there is a dramatic change. How does the illustrator use colors and images to show emotion on the next few pages? How do these pages contrast with the pages that came before them?
- * The author notes that all 3,500 Jews in Eishyshok were “erased” through gunfire, and with their deaths 900 years of Jewish history in the village is erased as well. How do the photographs Yaffa stores in her shoes help her while she’s in hiding? Why do you think they were valuable to her? What might be the longer-lasting significance of these photographs? What specific family pictures are important to you? If you had to flee, what would you take with you? For inspiration, read *The Only Thing You’d Save* by Linda Sue Park.
- * Yaffa’s family seeks refuge in the forest and in a shelter from a kind farmer. What does Yaffa’s family do to hold onto their pride and spirit? Why is it important that they do that? How can “a glimmer of light chase away the darkness”?
- * Why does Yaffa not return to her village after the war? Where does her journey as a refugee take her?
- * Why does President Jimmy Carter contact Yaffa for help with a new project? What does Yaffa choose to be the focus of her project?
- * What actions does Yaffa take to make her project come to life and become a reality? Where does she travel? How long does it take her to collect all 6,000 photographs and stories?
- * After reading the story of Yaffa’s childhood and life’s work, what do you feel might be the most powerful and/or important part? If you could describe Yaffa’s life story in one sentence, what would it be?

The discussion questions and activities in this guide were created by Leigh Courtney, Ph.D. She teaches in the Global Education program at a public school in San Diego, California. She holds both masters’ and doctoral degrees in education, with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction. Thank you to Holocaust educator Sari Sheinfeld and Rabbi Jeremy Hellman, Holocaust Curriculum Coordinator at Yeshivat Noam in Paramus, NJ, for reviewing this guide.

Activities for Students

Yaffa's Life's Work

Today, most people take pictures with their smartphones. In Yaffa's time, they had no cell phones. But some people, like her Grandma Alte, had cameras. Research how a camera works. Discuss why the author describes a photograph as "light—and life—captured in time." Why were photos so important to the people in Yaffa's town? View some photographs from the collection amassed by Yaffa at this link: <https://tinyurl.com/y88u7css>. Why do you think she calls her collection the Tower of Life? Do you feel a connection to these images or those in the book? Explain.



A Journal of Family Stories

On holidays, the Jewish residents of Eishyshok would walk down Eternity Lane to the Old Cemetery where elders would share stories of their ancestors: "Their stories swirled around one another, keeping their faith and traditions alive." Interview an older member of your family and record stories important to your family's history. Write these collected stories in a journal. Meet with a partner in class to share one story from your journal. Discuss why you selected this particular story to share and any new information that you learned about your family from the interview process. If family members live locally, create a "living museum" in which students rotate through "exhibits" and interview each other's family members.

Post-War Jewish Diaspora

After the war, Yaffa realized that her life in Eishyshok no longer existed; no Jews remained in the town. Yaffa became a refugee and moved several places before settling in America. Research where European Jews who survived the Holocaust migrated after World War II. Visually represent your findings on a world map. Create a bar graph to show the number of displaced Jews who relocated to various places to illustrate how many people settled in which countries after the war. Reference links:

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/displaced-persons>

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-harrison-report>

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/american-jewish-joint-distribution-committee-and-refugee-aid#jdc-activities-after-world-war-ii-3>

Our Community

- Look at the illustrations and photos of Eishyshok before the war and draw connections to your own community today. As a class, create your own Tower of Life using photographs, paintings, and drawings of people, businesses, schools, parks, libraries, places of worship, and other important aspects of your community.
- When she was in hiding, Yaffa's precious photos gave her comfort. "Sunshine and smiles and chickens. They reminded her of home." Picture your own community and write down three words that remind you of home. Compare them with your classmates.

RESOURCES FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATION & FURTHER READING

Facing History and Ourselves: <https://www.facinghistory.org/>

US Holocaust Memorial Museum: <https://www.ushmm.org/teach>

Yad VaShem: <https://www.yadvashem.org/education.html>

I Witness (Shoah Foundation): <https://iWitness.usc.edu/home>

Association of Holocaust Organizations: <https://www.ahoinfo.org/membership>

Name: _____

3-2-1 Reading Response

After reading or listening to *The Tower of Life*, record your responses below. Meet in a small group to discuss and compare your responses, including how you might answer your one question.



3 Things I Learned:

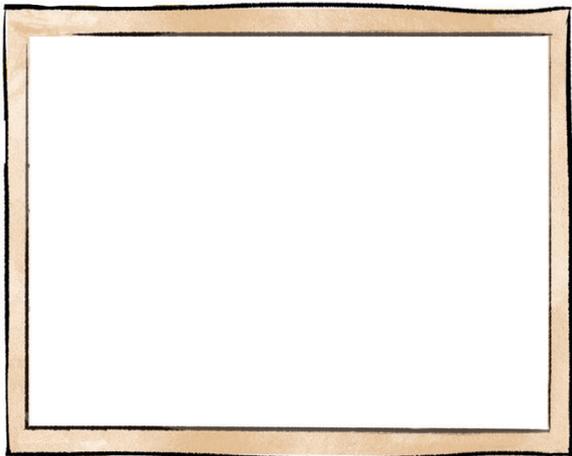
2 Interesting Facts I Noted:

1 Question I Have About the Story:

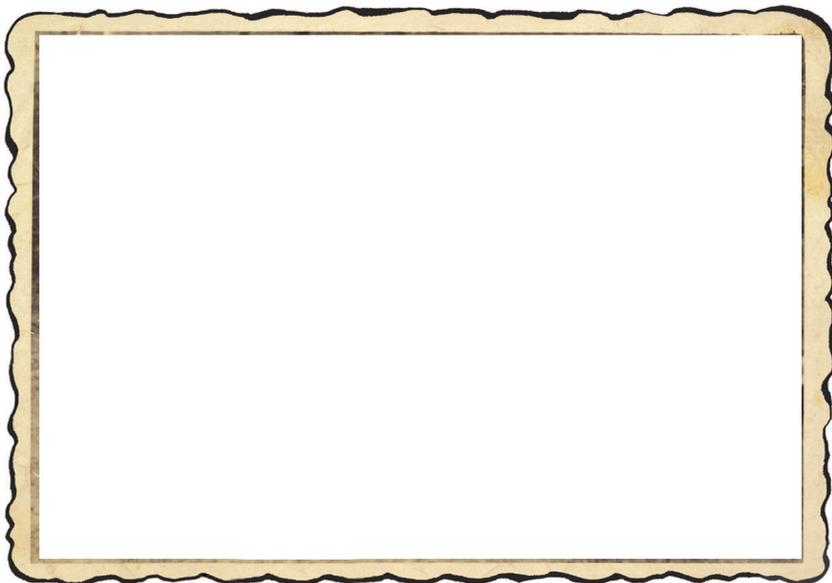
Name: _____

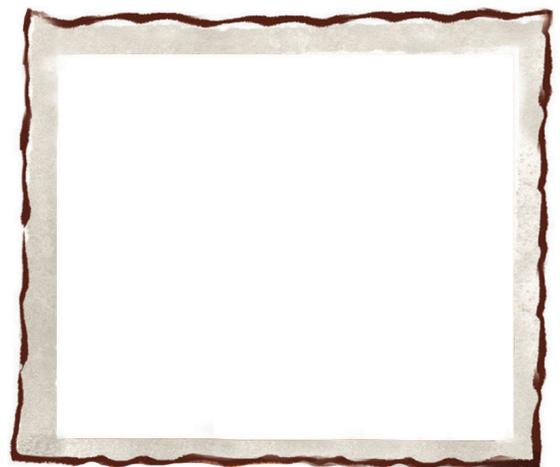
Capturing Important Moments

Yaffa had the foresight to stash some prized family photographs in her shoes when she and her family fled her village during the Nazi invasion. Think about important events in your life that may or may not have been captured in a photograph. Draw these events, one in each photo outline. Caption each photo with a description of its significance in your life story.









Name: _____

What Made You Think? What Made You Feel?

Look back through the story and select three parts of the text to which you reacted strongly. Copy these important sentences from the story, then describe your reaction to each selection.



Text Selection:

My Reaction:

Text Selection:

My Reaction:

Text Selection:

My Reaction:
