



# Learning for Peace

Why and how to use oral histories in classrooms





#LEARNING4PEACE

General objective of the ERASMUS+ funded **Learning for Peace project** was to streamline stories from the past into educational programs with the aim of empowering people to look more critically at history and thus the current populist, aggressive political trends, which have been proven in the past to push societies into war and economic crisis.

<https://learning4peace.foruminst.sk/en/>

Partner organisations:

**Forum Minority Research Institute**, Slovakia

<https://foruminst.sk>

Contact: Andrea Lelovics, Project Manager

[lelovics.andrea@foruminst.sk](mailto:lelovics.andrea@foruminst.sk)

**Sigmund Freud University**, Austria

<https://www.sfu.ac.at/en/>

Contact: Erzsébet Fanni Tóth, Transgenerational

Transmission of Trauma Research Institute

[erzsebet.toth@sfu.ac.at](mailto:erzsebet.toth@sfu.ac.at)

Published by: Forum Minority Research Institute, 2023

Illustrations: made by DALL-E

 CC BY-NC-SA 4.0



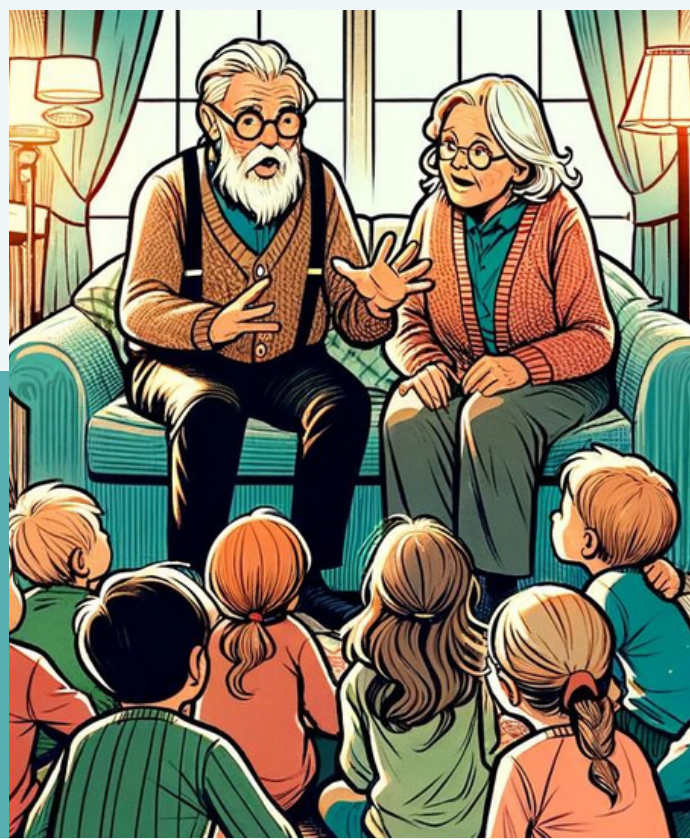
Funded by  
the European Union

“Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or [name of the granting authority]. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.”



# Page of Contents

2	Introduction
3	Learner-centered approach in education
6	Oral history and oral histories
10	Oral histories in secondary analysis approaches
17	How to work with an oral history interview
18	Conclusion
19	<i>Oral history databases recommendations</i>
21	<i>International workshop on using oral histories in education - Cases</i>







# Introduction

The educational landscape is currently undergoing a significant transformation, marked by a departure from traditional pedagogical models to meet the dynamic demands of the 21st century. This transformative journey is vividly exemplified by the clash between the conventional banking model and the progressive learner-centered approach. The former, deeply rooted in a teacher-centric philosophy, perceives knowledge as a one-way deposit into the minds of passive students. Conversely, the learner-centered approach represents a paradigm shift, emphasizing individualized learning experiences and active student engagement. As we navigate this educational evolution, it becomes increasingly apparent that the learner-centered approach, enriched by the integration of oral history, stands as a transformative force that not only imparts knowledge but also equips students with essential skills for navigating the complexities of the modern world.



*“I wish I’d paid better attention. I didn’t yet think of time as finite. I didn’t fully appreciate the stories she told me until I became adult, and by then I had to make do with snippets pasted together, a film projected on the back of my mind.”*

— Jessica Maria Tuccelli, *Glow*





# Learner-centered approach in education

The educational landscape is undergoing a profound transformation, challenging traditional pedagogical models in the face of the dynamic demands of the 21st century. Two divergent paradigms, the conventional banking model and the progressive learner-centered approach, highlight this pivotal shift.

The **banking model of education**, rooted in a traditional, teacher-centric philosophy, conceptualizes knowledge as a commodity deposited into the receptive minds of students. This unidirectional transfer of information emphasizes rote memorization and passive learning, treating students as mere vessels waiting to be filled. In this model, the teacher assumes a role of authority, and individual student needs, interests, and experiences often take a backseat, resulting in a standardized and inflexible educational experience. “In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing.”[1]

An illustrative example from Poland's history education system sheds light on this approach. Traditional education is commonly characterized by a factual approach and by methods of verifying knowledge. Examinations historically involve answering questions such as “What? Who? Where? and When?” In this conventional model, knowing about the Prussian Homage would entail reciting specific details: “Zygmunt I the Old with Albrecht Hohenzollern, on April 10, 1525, in Kraków market square.” The focus is on memorizing precise dates and details, without delving into the deeper significance of the event. The model fails to encourage students to reflect on fundamental questions such as why history is essential, its purpose, and the relevance of learning it in school. This methodical approach is reflected in the examination system where students are seldom prompted to provide narrative or critical analysis. For instance, if someone not professionally connected with history were asked to construct a meaningful 10-sentence narrative about the Prussian Homage and explain its significance, the likelihood of success would be minimal. The reason lies in our approach toward understanding the past, primarily focused on facts and events.[2]

[1] Freire, P. (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th Edition, Bloomsbury Academic, New York  
[2] Kierzkowski, Michał. (2017). *Oral history and historical education in Poland. Possibilities and application*. *Wrocławski Rocznik Historii Mówionej*. 6. 81. 10.26774/wrhm.150.



The limitation of the banking model becomes evident when individuals, educated within this framework, find it challenging to contextualize historical events and understand their broader implications. The emphasis on rote memorization stifles creativity, critical thinking, and the ability to construct a coherent narrative. In this example, the banking model reveals its shortcomings in fostering a deep and meaningful understanding of historical events.

As we progress further into the 21st century, marked by rapid technological advancements and societal shifts, the importance of **core competences** becomes increasingly crucial. The demand for a workforce equipped with skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and adaptability underscores the relevance of an education system that prioritizes these competences. The learner-centered approach inherently integrates and develops these core competences by providing students with opportunities to engage actively, think critically, and collaborate with peers. This approach is not just about imparting knowledge; it's about equipping students with the tools to navigate a complex, ever-changing world.

In stark contrast to the banking model, the **learner-centered approach** signifies a paradigm shift towards a more personalized and interactive educational experience, thus answering the need for the new competences. Here, the focal point shifts to the individual student, acknowledging their unique needs, interests, and experiences. Teachers, in this model, transform into facilitators, guiding students through active exploration, critical thinking, and collaborative learning. Learner-centered education encourages students to take ownership of their educational journey, fostering a dynamic and personalized learning environment.

Moreover, integrating insights from critical pedagogy enriches the learner-centered approach by infusing a critical analysis of power structures and societal norms. Critical pedagogy encourages students not only to question the content of knowledge but also to critically examine the social and political dimensions surrounding that knowledge. By challenging societal inequalities and fostering social justice, critical pedagogy aligns seamlessly with the learner-centered approach's emphasis on empowering students to become active agents of change.

In envisioning the future of education, the learner-centered approach emerges as a transformative force, a departure from the traditional banking model that may no longer adequately prepare students for the complexities of the modern world. This approach, with its emphasis on individualized learning, critical thinking, and collaboration, aligns with the evolving needs of the 21st century. By embracing the principles of learner-centered education enriched by critical pedagogy, and emphasizing the cultivation of core competences, we pave the way for



a more inclusive, socially conscious, and empowering educational experience. As we navigate the intricate terrain of the future, the learner-centered approach becomes a guiding light, illuminating the path towards an education that not only equips students with knowledge but also empowers them to critically engage with the world and effect positive change.





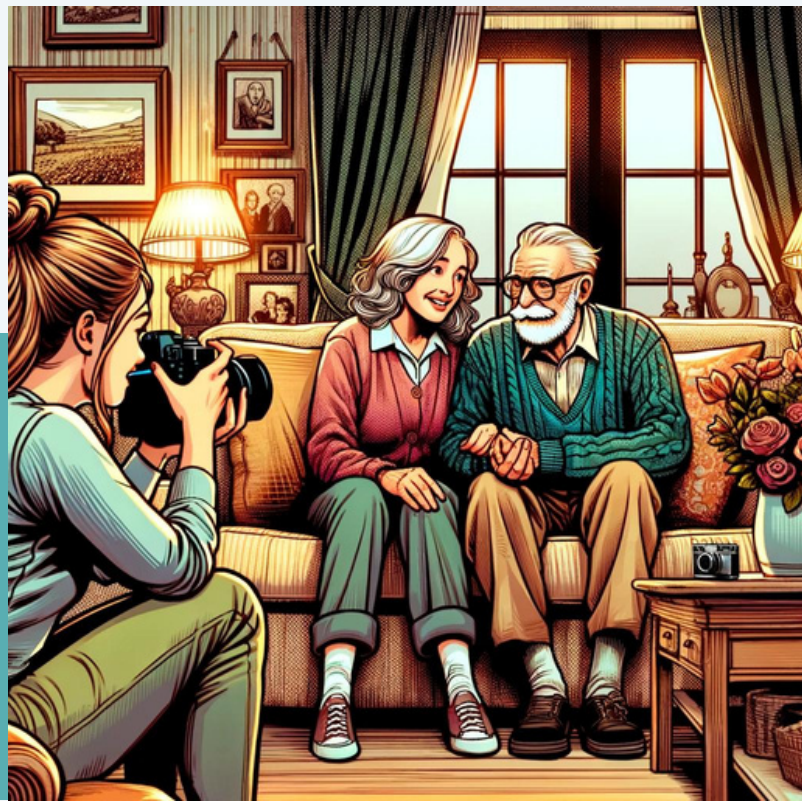


# Oral history and oral histories

**Oral history** is a methodological approach within historiography, principally characterized by the systematic collection and preservation of historical information through recorded interviews with individuals possessing personal knowledge of past events. In contrast to the reliance on written documentation inherent in traditional historiographical methods, oral history seeks to elicit and document firsthand accounts of historical occurrences from individuals who either directly experienced or observed said events.

The fundamental modus operandi of oral history involves the structured or semi-structured conduct of interviews by researchers or oral historians with narrators, individuals furnishing their oral histories. These interviews are methodically recorded, transcribed, and, at times, subjected to judicious editing for purposes of archival preservation and scholarly analysis.

Central to oral history is the acknowledgment of the inherently subjective nature of memory. Narrators impart their personal perspectives, emotions, and interpretations of events, thereby contributing a nuanced and human-centric dimension to historical inquiry. The method is particularly efficacious in capturing the voices and experiences of individuals whose narratives may not be extant in written form, affording historical agency to those traditionally marginalized or underrepresented.





Moreover, oral history is distinguished by its emphasis on diversity and inclusivity, seeking to encapsulate a multiplicity of voices and perspectives. It often serves as a vehicle for documenting the stories of ordinary individuals, communities, or groups, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of historical processes.

Ethical considerations are integral to the practice of oral history. Principally, this involves securing informed consent from narrators, adhering to standards of privacy, and approaching interviews with a sensitivity to the emotional and experiential nuances inherent in personal recollections.

In academic circles, oral history has assumed a pivotal role as a complementary and enriching methodological tool. Its deployment alongside traditional written records contributes contextual depth, affords alternative viewpoints, and facilitates a more holistic comprehension of historical phenomena. Furthermore, oral history has evolved into an instrument of community engagement, empowering individuals to participate actively in the documentation and preservation of their own histories.

**Oral history projects** have become a notable way to bring history to life in classrooms. This approach lets students actively participate in capturing and preserving real-life stories, making historical events more relatable. This exploration aims to break down how oral history projects work in the classroom and why they're valuable for students.

Oral history projects involve students conducting interviews with people who have firsthand experience of historical events. Teachers guide them through the process of creating thoughtful questions, conducting interviews, and transcribing the recorded conversations. This hands-on approach not only teaches practical research skills but also instills a sense of responsibility in students as custodians of historical stories. Ethical considerations, like getting permission and being respectful, are crucial elements of this process.

One significant advantage of oral history projects is their ability to enrich students' understanding of history. By hearing firsthand accounts, students get a more personal and nuanced view of events that may not be fully captured in written records. Engaging with primary sources in this way helps students become better at analyzing and interpreting historical information, leading to a more thorough understanding of the past.

Oral history projects also help students develop critical thinking skills. As they come up with questions and conduct interviews, students learn to navigate through complex narratives and critically evaluate the information they receive. This process encourages them to question existing historical narratives, fostering a sense of curiosity essential for being well-informed.



Beyond just learning facts, oral history projects contribute to the development of empathy among students. The personal stories shared in interviews make historical events more relatable and human. Students start to think about the real experiences of individuals in different historical situations, promoting a more compassionate understanding of diverse perspectives.

In conclusion, oral history projects offer a unique and engaging way for students to connect with history. By actively involving them in the process, these projects not only improve historical knowledge and critical thinking but also foster empathy. As educators continue to seek creative ways to make history come alive in the classroom, oral history projects stand out as a valuable tool for making the past more accessible and engaging for students.

The Oral History Project (OHP) engaged students and teachers at Daraja Academy, Kenya in collecting, documenting, and publishing narrative accounts from elders in their communities. Implemented with 26 students and two teachers from April to October 2011, the project aimed to introduce a learner-centered pedagogy. Initially conceived as an accessible entry into this pedagogical realm, the OHP took an unexpectedly critical pedagogy stance as it demanded active student participation in constructing historical understanding.

With the driving question, "What are the stories of those who come before us?" students interviewed community elders during a month-long break, focusing on experiences during colonialism, independence, the Mau Mau rebellion, and coming-of-age traditions. Upon returning to campus, students shared collected accounts and collaboratively crafted narratives for a book, guided by teachers and models provided. In August 2011, students revisited elders for additional insights, and by September, they made final revisions, selected photos, and submitted materials for publication. The University of San Diego partners facilitated the online publishing, and the printed books were delivered to the school in December 2011.

The OHP significantly impacted both teachers and students. It influenced their conceptualization of learning and teaching, perceptions of community knowledge, and self-efficacy. Despite overwhelmingly positive responses and favorable experiences reported by participants, challenges surfaced, emphasizing the need for structural and training support to successfully implement learner-centered pedagogies more broadly within the Kenyan educational system.[3]

[3] Lattimer, Heather & Kelly Horsley, Maria. (2013). *Engaging Kenyan secondary students in an Oral History Project: Education as emancipation. International Journal of Educational Development*. 33. 476-486. [10.1016/j.ijedudev.2012.05.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2012.05.007).



**Oral histories** are narratives and personal accounts of experiences, historical events, and cultural traditions that are transmitted through spoken communication rather than written records. These accounts are often obtained through interviews or conversations with individuals who have firsthand knowledge or direct involvement in specific events. Unlike written histories, oral histories are passed down verbally, contributing to the collective memory of a community or group.

Key features of oral histories include their emphasis on personal narratives, cultural traditions, and the subjective nature of memory and interpretation. They cover a diverse range of topics, including personal life stories, historical events, cultural practices, and societal changes. The process of collecting oral histories typically involves conducting interviews, recording, transcribing, and preserving these accounts for future reference.

It's important to note the distinction between "oral history" and "oral histories." "Oral history" refers to the broader field or method of collecting and preserving spoken accounts, while "oral histories" specifically denotes individual instances or accounts within that field. The term "oral history" encompasses the broader concept and methodology, while "oral histories" refers to the individual stories and narratives obtained through this method.

In essence, oral histories serve as invaluable sources of information, providing a more personal and intimate connection to the past. They contribute to a richer understanding of cultural heritage, historical events, and the diverse aspects of human experience. Researchers, historians, and communities engage in the collection and preservation of oral histories to ensure that these narratives, often absent from written records, are documented and passed on for future generations.





# Oral histories in secondary analysis approaches

The educational landscape is continually evolving, seeking innovative methodologies to engage and enrich students' learning experiences. In our Learning for Peace project, we delved into a relatively unexplored realm – harnessing the untapped potential of **existing oral history databases** in education. This initiative responds to a discernible gap in research and practice, where the predominant focus has traditionally been on student-led oral history projects. Our exploration is driven by a commitment to uncover new dimensions in education through the lens of curated repositories of rich oral narratives.

It is imperative to acknowledge the existing scarcity of dedicated research and literature on the integration of established oral history databases into educational frameworks. The bulk of available material tends to gravitate towards projects where students actively collect narratives. Even within these projects, the discourse predominantly centers on organizational and technical challenges, leaving an informational void on the broader educational implications.

The Learning for Peace project sought to transcend conventional paradigms by harnessing the *Oral historical thinking framework of Martin, Huijgen and Henkes*[4], the *Learning and teaching about the history of Europe in the 20th century Council of Europe project's results*[5], and *Shope's Making Sense of Oral History*[6] comprehensive online guide. These frameworks became the cornerstone of our endeavor, offering a systematic approach to understanding and incorporating oral histories into educational modules. The methodologies not only addressed the lack of guidance in existing literature but also provided a robust foundation for the Learning for Peace project work.

Teaching history in schools is going through significant transformations, mirroring trends in academic history. One notable development is the recognition that historical education should not only impart a body of knowledge but also foster critical thinking. Students are now encouraged to adopt a discerning attitude toward historical facts and evidence, recognizing the interpretative nature of

[4] Martin, Bridget & Huijgen, Tim & Henkes, Barbara. (2021). *Listening like a historian? A framework of 'oral historical thinking' for engaging with audiovisual sources in secondary school education. Historical Encounters: A journal of historical consciousness, historical cultures, and history education.* 8. 120-138. [10.52289/hej8.108](https://doi.org/10.52289/hej8.108).

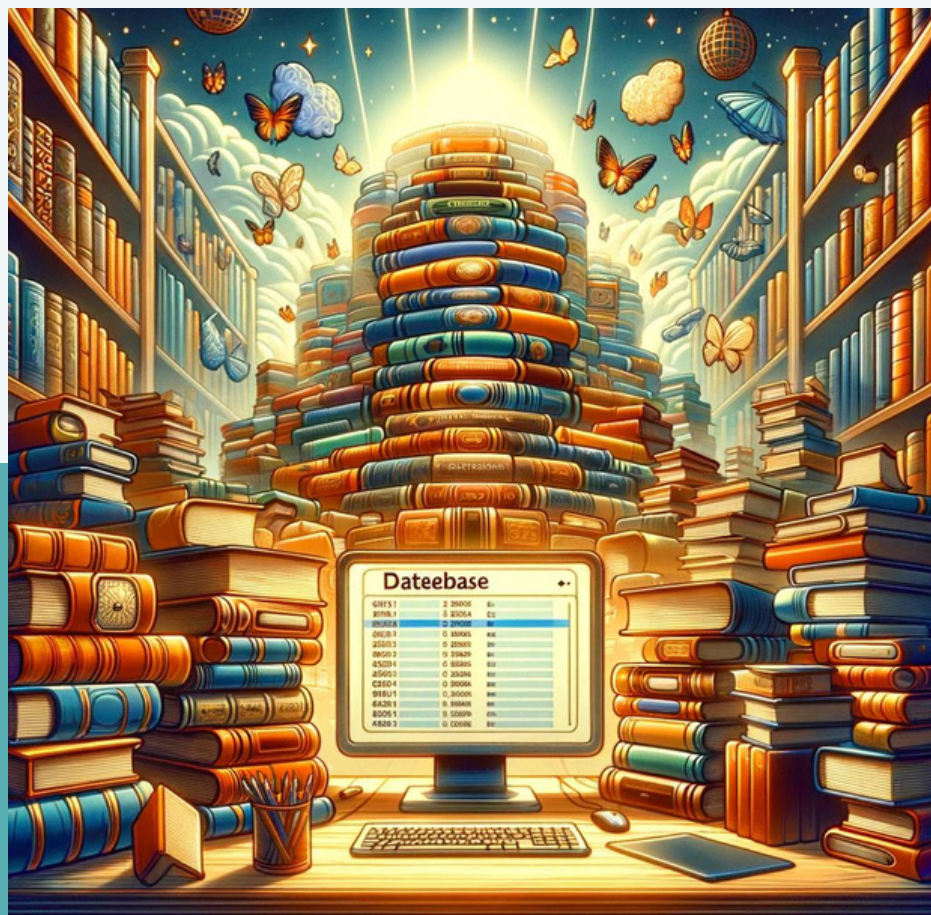
[5] Stradling, Robert. (2001). *Teaching 20th-century European history. Council of Europe Publishing*

[6] Linda Shopes, "Making Sense of Oral History," *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/>, February 2002.



historical narratives. Key elements of this shift include understanding the interpretative role of historians, discerning the conversion of selected facts into evidence, and acknowledging the diversity of perspectives that can exist on any historical event.

The emergence of a three-layered model underscores the comprehensive approach to oral history analysis. The first layer delves into understanding how oral history works, acknowledging diverse individual experiences and perspectives. The second layer introduces concepts aiding in the analysis and interpretation of interviews. The third layer emphasizes relating oral history interviews to other historical sources, narratives, and stories, creating a multidimensional framework.





# Three-Layered model of oral history analysis

## Layer One

### **Understanding the nature of oral history**

At the foundational core layer, the model is dedicated to fostering a profound comprehension of how oral history functions as a dynamic tapestry of diverse narratives. It invites participants to delve into the complexities of personal perspectives, acknowledging that historical events are multifaceted, experienced differently by various individuals. It is a journey into the rich realm of storytelling, where individuals weave unique narratives around shared historical events.

---

## Layer Two

### **Analyzing and interpreting the interviews**

Moving beyond the surface, the second layer introduces key concepts instrumental in dissecting and interpreting oral history interviews. Participants are equipped with analytical tools to navigate the intricacies of these narratives. Understanding the nuances within audiovisual oral histories involves engaging with eight key concepts. In this exploration, students are encouraged to delve into the multifaceted nature of these interviews, recognizing the dynamic interplay between interviewees, interviewers, and external influences such as filmmakers. Each concept sheds light on different facets of the narrative, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these elements. This layer empowers learners to move beyond the anecdotal, fostering critical thinking and a deeper understanding of the human experience.

---

## Layer Three

### **Relating the interviews to other historical narratives and sources**

At the outer layer of the model is strategically designed to bridge oral narratives with broader historical landscapes. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of oral histories with other historical sources, stories, and narratives. Participants are guided to contextualize oral narratives within the broader historical framework, recognizing the symbiotic relationship between individual stories and the collective historical consciousness. Two focal points in this process are accuracy and generalisability, both intertwined with the subjective nature of oral testimony.



# Analysing and interpreting the interviews

## Subjectivity

Students are introduced to the concept that oral history's strength lies in the subjective retelling of events. The narrative is enriched by personal perspectives, lived experiences, and reflections of the narrator. Exploring subjectivity involves understanding the narrator's identity, perspective, experiences, and interpretations, offering insights into the meaning of the past for individuals.

## Orality & Embodiment

The oral nature of these sources adds a layer of complexity. Students are guided to consider aspects such as intonation, rhythm, and velocity, which convey the narrator's attitude. Understanding orality is intertwined with embodiment, acknowledging the impact of the body and facial expressions on vocalization. Students explore how seeing and hearing the narrator contributes to interpreting their testimony.

## Performance

Interviews inherently become performances, shaped by the interviewer's presence and the purpose of recording. Factors like video recording equipment and public accessibility influence how narrators present their stories. Students scrutinize the narrator's surroundings, dress, language, and overall performance, unraveling the implications of these choices on the interpretation of their testimony.

## Narrative

Memory's tendency to construct narratives is explored, particularly in oral history where personal experiences are retold as narratives. Students analyze how oral history interviews, as a specific narrative form, position the narrator as the protagonist. This involves examining how narratives reflect or challenge dominant historical narratives and identifying narrative features like themes, symbols, and motifs.





# Analysing and interpreting the interviews

## Presentation

Recognizing that interviews are shaped by how they are presented, students delve into the impact of framing, editing, and contextual information. This includes understanding the provenance and purpose of the source (website, film, TV program), considering how presentation elements affect the testimony, and evaluating the source's impact.

## Role of the interviewer

Students acknowledge the interviewer's pivotal role in initiating the interview and shaping the source's creation. The intersubjectivity between interviewer and narrator is highlighted, emphasizing how the relationship influences the narrative. Factors like age, gender, and cultural background can impact this relationship, leading to a unique narrative shaped collaboratively.

## Memory-work

Memory is not just a source but also a subject in oral history. Students explore different layers of memory, such as individual and collective memory, and examine how testimonies reflect shared cultural patterns. Understanding memory-work involves considering what has been remembered, why, and how contextual factors shape the narrator's recollections.

## Forgetting & silences

Students critically assess what is omitted or left unsaid in interviews. Exploring forgetting involves understanding individual and collective lapses in memory. Silences, both literal and metaphorical, are examined, with students considering possible causes like trauma, societal norms, or imposed restrictions. Identifying the unspoken enhances the understanding of the narrative's complexities.

In navigating these concepts, students are reminded of their interrelated nature, discouraging a rigid sequential approach. This holistic guide equips students to unravel the intricacies of audiovisual oral histories, fostering a nuanced and critical understanding of historical narratives.



# Relating the interviews to other historical narratives and sources

## Accuracy

Oral histories, often recounted from a distance, pose accuracy challenges due to the subjective nature of memory. Assessing accuracy, especially with survivors of traumatic events, requires respectful evaluation. Caution is advised against dismissing sources with unreliable elements. Oral history sources should be viewed as having "different credibility," where 'wrong' statements may hold psychological truth. Students explore how memory distortion influences inaccuracies and consider factors shaping oral testimony. Internal consistency checks and cross-referencing with other sources help gauge factual accuracy, acknowledging that inaccuracies can provide valuable insights for specific oral historical inquiries.

## Generalisability

Generalisability, influenced by accuracy and representative non-factual elements, raises questions about shared experiences and emotions within a group. Students explore the consistency in oral narratives of an event or period, considering the contextual relevance of the interview compared to similar narratives and historical sources. Acknowledging contradictions in interviews with multiple narrators underscores the diversity within societies. While some argue against the universal pursuit of generalisability, emphasizing the value of delving into individual stories for a deeper understanding of personality, emotion, and detail, students are urged to align their inquiry questions with the desired scope—whether seeking a generalisable conclusion or a nuanced exploration of individual experiences.



The three layers and the concepts within them interact dynamically, creating a multidimensional approach to the analysis and interpretation of oral history sources. These concepts do not provide definitive answers but rather prompt critical engagement, encouraging students to delve into the rich complexities of oral history.

At the heart of the framework lies a focus on the underlying aims, beliefs, and practices of the oral history field. These elements form the foundational bedrock for students' engagement with oral history sources, serving as an epistemological basis that informs and contextualizes the entire framework.

However, this evolution in history education is not without its challenges. Teachers often find themselves contending with neglected topics like cultural movements and technological advancements, requiring innovative approaches to integrate them into conventional syllabi. The emphasis on critical skills and historical understanding has prompted changes in textbook design, moving away from traditional texts to interactive workbooks that engage students with varied sources.

Moreover, the growing recognition that students are exposed to historical narratives from diverse sources, including family members, community members, and digital platforms, highlights the need for a holistic approach. Students must apply critical skills beyond the classroom, necessitating explicit teaching of skills for interpreting films, documentaries, and online content.

In essence, the ongoing evolution in history education seeks a balance between imparting historical knowledge and nurturing critical skills. The dialogue surrounding this evolution often revolves around the purpose of school history—whether it primarily serves to teach historical events or to facilitate the learning of historical skills. Striking this balance requires educators to explore innovative teaching methods, incorporating enquiry-based learning, active participation, and opportunities for independent exploration. Ultimately, the aim is to equip students with the ability to critically analyze and interpret historical narratives, fostering a deeper understanding of the complex tapestry of the past.

“As audiences, when we are exposed to oral history projects not only do we learn but in some ways we also bear witness to that which we have not experienced personally.”

— Patricia Leavy





# How to work with an oral history interview

When working with oral history interviews as historical evidence regardless of their form – written, audio or audio-visual or source – book, magazine, online/offline database, podcast, television, etc. it is recommended analyze these aspects of the stories:

## 1. Understand the narrator

When examining the narrator, consider delving into their identity, relationship with the discussed events, potential biases, self-presentation, and the influence of personal, cultural, and social factors. Explore how societal perceptions and popular culture might impact the narrator's account.

## 2. Explore the interviewer

In the exploration of the interviewer, focus on their background, interests, and how these might shape the interview. Assess the interviewer's preparation, question strategies, and the potential impact of their social identity on both the interviewee and the overall interview dynamics. Investigate any prior relationships between the interviewer and interviewee.

## 3. Analyze the interview content

For a detailed analysis of the interview content, scrutinize the structure of the interview, identify the plot, and examine the narrator's chosen motifs, images, and anecdotes. Investigate areas the narrator avoids or emphasizes and evaluate the internal consistency and potential factual errors. Consider how the interview aligns with other sources and interviews.

## 4. Understand the purpose

To comprehend the purpose of the interview, assess the motivations behind its conduct and how these might have influenced the content, perspective, and tone. Look for cues that indicate the intended outcome or message.

## 5. Consider the circumstances

In the context of the circumstances, explore the impact of the interview location on the narrative. Investigate how the presence of others during the interview may have influenced the dynamics. Consider the mental and physical health of both the narrator and interviewer and their potential effects on the interview.



# Conclusion

In the dynamic landscape of 21st-century education, the clash between traditional pedagogical models and progressive learner-centered approaches has ushered in a transformative era. This evolution is exemplified by the juxtaposition of the conventional banking model with the learner-centered approach, emphasizing the importance of individualized learning experiences. As the education paradigm shifts, oral history emerges as a vital tool, enriching the educational experience and offering unique opportunities for students to connect directly with the past.

The incorporation of oral history into education, especially through existing databases, stands as a beacon of transformative pedagogy. Learning from the voices of those who witnessed historical events provides students with a nuanced and personal understanding that transcends the limitations of textbooks. This method not only imparts knowledge but also fosters inclusivity and diversity in historical narratives, giving voice to individuals whose stories may be underrepresented in written records.

Enriching the educational experience, oral history opens doors to diverse perspectives, cultures, and experiences. Students actively engage with the human side of history, gaining insights that extend beyond facts and dates. The power of personal narratives enhances critical thinking and empathy, crucial skills for navigating the complexities of the modern world.

However, this integration is not without its challenges. Navigating organizational and technical obstacles requires structural and training support for educators. Despite these challenges, the potential benefits are substantial. Incorporating existing oral history databases aligns with the evolving needs of history education, empowering students to actively participate in the exploration and preservation of historical narratives.

In navigating the intricate terrain of the future, the learner-centered approach, complemented by the strategic use of existing oral history databases, becomes a guiding light. It illuminates the path towards an education that not only imparts knowledge but also empowers students to critically engage with the world and effect positive change. As we stand at the intersection of tradition and transformation, oral history becomes a bridge, connecting students directly to the human experiences that shape our collective history.



# Oral history databases recommendations

## ✓ Memory of Nations (online)

<https://www.memoryofnations.sk/sk>

“Memory of Nations is one of Europe’s most extensive collections of life stories. It has been publicly accessible since 2008 as a database of testimonies of witnesses of 20th century events who survived the two totalitarian regimes - nazism and communism. The stories illustrate how these regimes impacted individual lives, and allow for uncovering of their substance.”

## ✓ Príbehy 20. storočia (Stories of the 20th century, printed quarterly magazine in Slovak)

<https://eshop.postbellum.sk>

“The quarterly magazine Stories of the 20th Century deals with themes from the period of former totalitarian regimes and adds the context of contemporary society. It will find its readers among those who like to delve into more challenging texts and know that to understand the present, we need to know our past.”

## ✓ Fórum Filmek (Documentaries of Forum Institute, in Hungarian, some with Slovak or English subtitles)

<https://film.foruminst.sk>

Documentary films and individual interviews of the Forum Minority Research Institute on topics like the life of Hungarians in Slovakia, war prisoners after WWII, the events of 1956, 1968 and 1989 through the lenses of members of the Hungarian minority in (Czecho)Slovakia, etc.

## ✓ Fórum E-shop (Publication of Forum Institute, mainly in Hungarian)

<https://forumeshop.sk>

Results of research work and collections of oral history interviews of the Forum Minority Research Institute in book, research magazine and online formats.

## ✓ Menschenleben (Oral history archive of Austrian people from the 20th and 21st century)

<https://www.mediathek.at/forschen-und-lernen/aktuelle-projekte/menschenleben/>

Results of life story interviews and collections of oral history accounts of the Technical Museum of Vienna and the Astrian Mediathek.



## ✓ **Austrian Heritage Archive (AHA)**

<https://www.memoryofnations.sk/sk>

The Austrian Heritage Archive (AHA) collects video and audio interviews with Jewish Austrian emigrés who fled to the USA or Palestine/Israel during the National Socialist period or immediately afterwards.

## ✓ **YVA (Yad Vashem Archives)**

<https://www.yadvashem.org/>

## ✓ **USC Shoah Foundation**

<https://sfi.usc.edu/>

## ✓ **Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies**

<https://fortunoff.library.yale.edu/>

## ✓ **Open Society Archives**

<https://www.osaarchivum.org/>

## ✓ **Voices of the 20th Century**

<https://20szazadhangja.tk.hu/>



# International workshop on using oral histories in education

The aim of the Learning for Peace project to find ways to reach out to pedagogues for introducing to and motivating for using oral histories in education unfolded as a dynamic workshop, echoing with the voices of participants from Slovakia, Hungary, and Austria. In this immersive exploration, educators and students, representing a spectrum from elementary schools to universities, as well as media professionals, gathered to unravel the potential of existing oral history databases in diverse educational settings.

Through carefully crafted practical exercises, participants embarked on a hands-on journey, navigating the intricate landscape of oral histories. The workshop aimed not only to provide a nuanced understanding but also to illuminate the multifaceted benefits of seamlessly incorporating these rich resources into curricula.

Originating from different backgrounds, the participants coalesced into three distinct groups, each entrusted with a unique story that echoed the nuances of history. The first group delved into the poignant narrative of a Holocaust survivor, conducting their exploration in English. Simultaneously, a second group immersed themselves in the story of a former war prisoner after World War II, presented in Hungarian. The third group navigated the complexities of a narrative from 1980s Czechoslovakia – a tale of a man who fled the communist regime, with their work conducted in Slovak, presented as an article.

This diverse assembly of educators and learners faced a common task – to analyze the intricacies of their assigned stories and craft comprehensive plans. Their objective: to outline how these stories could be woven into educational frameworks, specifying the formats and objectives. The collective efforts of all three groups culminated in enlightening presentations delivered in English, underscoring the universality of the endeavor.

This chapter unfolds the narratives of exploration, analysis, and planning, showcasing the potential of oral history as a dynamic educational tool. The voices of the past, curated in oral histories, echo through the diverse linguistic and historical lenses of Slovakia, Hungary, and Austria, bringing forth a collective understanding of the profound impact these stories can have in shaping the educational landscape.





## Case 1:

### **Between Berlin and Moscow - The difficult fate of a member of the Levente organisation in southern Slovakia. Written summary of an audio-video interview.**

When the front approached Deáki (Diakovce, Sala district), Arnold Merva's home village, at the end of 1944, the forced conscription of the young men in the German Reich began: *"Some chief officer figured out that the Hungarian youth had to be saved from the invading Russian army. That we would be the founders and executors of the future. From Deáki, there were three expeditions of conscripts to Germany, but how many in total, I have no idea. I spoke to some guys who were also on the island of Peenemünde, from where the V2 rockets were launched to London. And it was a terribly dangerous place because the British were fully aware of everything. They never knew at what moment the bombing was going to come and bring the whole thing down. There were people, for example, who had anti-aircraft training on flak, these little four-barrel anti-aircraft guns. And those guys had so much fun when they could turn the cannon around and shoot at the fighter. That's how kids are."*

Arnold Merva went to Germany with the second group from Deáki, but on the train there were also Leventes from the surrounding villages: *"We went to bed on the evening of 5 January 1945, they were beating the drums at midnight. Tomorrow morning at six o'clock, all the Leventes from fifteen years old up to soldier age who are at home must appear at the village hall with three days' rations and fresh underwear, and they will leave for Germany. Of course, as always then, it was added that they were 'under the burden of execution'. Of course, there was a lot of crying in the street, there were several of us so young."* The route took them along the Váh, through the Jablunkai Pass, to Dresden, where the transport turned south and via Ústí nad Labem reached Cheb, where it split. The student body continued north to Berlin. Due to congestion and damage to the railway network, the journey took more than two weeks.

The destination was Schönwald, a military airfield west of Berlin: *"We were working on the airfield, where they were already digging fortifications. Messerschmitts and then Focke-Wolfs landed there, but there were also bigger planes. We dug sloping hatches, but they were so wide that even their wings could fit. So while we were working we still didn't really understand our situation. Because Germany was already, you could say, on its knees, completely overwhelmed."*

In the last days of the war, life in the besieged city took on absurd contours: *"Everything was in ruins and there were hardly any civilians in that part of the city - those who had not*



fled were all living in the cellars. On the top floor, anyone could run riot, it was uninhabited. And again, the German organisation was something to be admired - bombing one day, the next morning the street was cleared. A heap of rubble left and right, but the roads were clear, traffic was maintained until the last days. And even then, crazy things happened. There was a recurring figure. An SS officer. German cap on one side, pulled down, looking tough, knight's cross around his neck, his right eye blindfolded, his left hand was just a hook. His right side was crossed with a machine gun, and he was just walking around, he hadn't put a helmet on his head, because it did protect his head somewhat. He wasn't protecting himself from anything, anything could come at him. The man had the impression that it was looking for death, it was looking for where something could hit it. Once there was a big shoot-out, and he got himself under fire and went across the Heerstrasse. There was gunfire all around him, everything, and he calmly crossed over to the other side, where we saw him go through the trees. And the bullet missed him, even though he was shot there. He may have had no one left. He may have been living alone of his family, and he was going through all sorts of things, because the way he lost his arm and his eye, it was no child's play. They wanted to be everything and they became nothing."

Arnold Merva recalls his first direct encounter with a Red Army soldier as follows: "Suddenly, someone from the bushes called out: 'Stoi! Ruki verch!' At first we only saw a machine gun barrel, then a soldier stepped out because he saw us stop and put our hands up. It was a young guy, a brown, very handsome kid, about our age or even younger, of course he must have been an old front fighter, who knows how long he had been a soldier. He came up to us: 'No, uri máte?' Uhr is in German, he meant watch. We showed him, no Uhr, no watch. He took it from those who had it, because there were about six or seven of us in that group. I had a three-coloured flashlight hanging on my belt, red, green and I don't know what colour you could change, maybe white. I really liked it, I didn't have anything like that at home. He took it, put it on, liked it, put it in his pocket, and that was it."

The first of the ten prison camps in which Mr Merva was held was in a huge cement factory in Rüdersdorf, east of Berlin. It was here that the soldiers began to become prisoners. "Then it was announced that all hair had to be removed, everyone had to shave their heads. With what? And then there were those lifeless razors, Holy Mary! By the time they'd shaved my hair off, half the skin was still there. Then the doctor's visit, that was a miracle. We went in, and the doctor, I can still recall her standing in front of me, was dressed like hell: she had white sandals on her feet, black silk stockings, this big blue skirt that Russian women used to wear, and green gymnast's pants, the kind of shirt you have to wear with three buttons on top. And she had red hair and a cigarette in her pipe, she smoked it, God forbid! Well, the impression I got when I saw her was, is this the doctor? Well, doctor! Anyone who had a bit of teeth left in his mouth was class one, anyone who was already bone and skin was class two or three, and anyone who had to be carried in, was dystrophy, and that was that."

At the end of June, a transport was set up to take the prisoners to Poznań. "As in a fully



*equipped camp, there were two toilets there. And as in the toilets in general, there were graffiti everywhere, I read a Slovak inscription there, it was 'Podľa čistoty záchoda poznáš kultúru národa' - the cleanliness of the toilet shows the culture of the nation. And how true this was was horribly confirmed later, when we were in primitive environments so far below civilisation. What purity means, and the preservation of purity - as long as one can strive for purity, there is hope of return, there is hope of survival. When you have given up, sooner or later you will be destroyed, then only luck can save you, because then you cannot recover from your own humanity. These were terrible situations. And then I often remembered this sentence. There was no culture there."*

*At the end of July, some of the prisoners were loaded into wagons and began the more than two-week journey to the Soviet Union and the subsequent quarantine - and the prisoners had to stay in the wagon: "To be in a wagon for more than a month is an amazing thing. We were squeezed into a wagon, forty or fifty of us, without bunks, so we were just on the ground, lying on the floorboards. And what's more, during the quarantine we were given better food - they didn't know about fat - they gave us oily food. The only thing they forgot was that if they gave you food, you had to go to the toilet there. Then they made a spout like this. I was lucky enough to be at least at the back of the wagon. But for those who were lying right next to it, when they gave me this fatty food and I got diarrhoea - not epidemic, but natural - how it was there is unimaginable. And then at the very end of August, when it was time to get out of the wagon, those who jumped out - 'who am I!' - hiccupped like colts, no strength left in our legs."*

*In early September 1945, the worst months of Mr Merva's life began. The location: Grazdansk (civilian) camp No. 12, Baranavichy, Belarus, Soviet Federative Republic of Belarus. "That was it. Footwear was not distributed, but a pile of everything was thrown off a car. But that was nowhere near what we had. I had two left-footed gym slippers. I put one on my right foot, and the other one was at least five sizes bigger - I put it on my left foot and we went into the winter with it. It came off in two weeks, but because we were working with wood at the time, we made our own wooden soles, thick ones so they wouldn't wear out quickly, and we put some kind of harness, some kind of rope, on them and walked with them. The wounds made by that harness didn't heal for years, because wood doesn't bend, and the step was obviously always on the harness, so it was terrible. And we were like that until the beginning of November. It was only at the beginning of November, when we had got over the big autumn rains, that we were given clothing, the kind of clothing that the Swedish and all the armies had thrown off."*

*Although prisoners had been used for casual labour in earlier concentration camps, it was only in the Soviet Union that regular work began. In an environment where everything is owned by the state, corruption and theft sooner or later develop: "The wood that could be felled was taken and carried to the railway, not to the station. When no trains came, they pushed the train out and then had to quickly load some wagons with the wood. And when we had loaded almost the whole train in ten days, it turned out that we didn't have a permit, we were stealing the wood! Then they pulled us into the station and we had to throw down all the wood, it was terrible!"*



The hunger, which the prisoners inherited from Germany, became more and more severe thanks to hard work. As time went on, food became more and more the focus of the prisoners' attention. *"In the middle of the room, in the middle of the entrance, there was a man from the middle of the hall. He stole somebody's bread. The kid had already fallen down, and they just kept kicking him and hitting him. The next day the kid died because his kidneys supposedly ruptured. So that's what I saw, for a piece of bread! We ate what we were given and it was too little. There, bread was really the only thing that might have kept us going, and if anyone sinned against it, there was no Uncle Peter."*

The other reality the prisoners had to deal with was the lack of hygiene: *"From the beginning of November until February 20, because they took over the camp on the 17th, we didn't have a bath. This also means that we didn't have clean underwear during these almost four months, because the system there was that they gave us underwear in the bathroom. Not clean, but you could change there. The only source of water was in the yard of a dilapidated school next door, and from there water was brought to the kitchen, as much as was needed for cooking. There was no washing or bathing, except for when you rubbed your face with the snow. And in the meantime, there were all kinds of diseases. You can imagine the state of things."*

A combination of bad factors - exhausting work, inadequate nutrition, disastrous hygiene - led to the weakening of the human body and increased susceptibility to various diseases: *"Then we were hit by epidemic diarrhoea. And there was no remedy. We had a doctor, in the eyes of the Russians a doctor was a great authority, it didn't matter what his ethnicity was, as long as he was a doctor. He had a surgery, a small room, this narrow room, with a medical soldier. And he was supposed to be a barber, but it didn't matter, they were the medical staff who had to look after us. But they were absolutely helpless. Without medicine, the best the doctor could say was 'pray that you stay alive', but even that was useless. It was horrible. When the epidemic of diarrhoea began in mid-October, and lasted for a month, the people really fell like flies in autumn."*

The extent to which the fate of the prisoner of war is linked to the character of the prison guard who holds the power has been proven many times. In the second half of February, a new officer with the rank of lieutenant took over Camp 12 from the old, ruthless camp commander. After his arrival, living conditions improved considerably. *"Because the previous administration had stolen everything from us, we had received supplies in vain - what they could, they stole and sold. So they took over about five hundred and twenty people on 5 September, on 17 February they were able to hand over one hundred and seventy, one hundred and seventy-five people. The rest were taken away, either as patients or simply buried in the snow behind the camp. Those who survived could count themselves lucky. If I hadn't been young or somehow tougher than average, I wouldn't have survived either, because I could have died of any of my diseases."*

At the new camp in Kavpenica, construction began on the long-distance road linking Moscow to Berlin. Again, because of the lack of equipment, the task of moving the huge quantities of earth was left to the masses of prisoners. *"That was the big nonsense. The*



*Russians didn't like us because of that, they even said 'you'll go home, but you'll raise the norm here, and then it will stay here for us, and we'll have to do it all the time'. They were right, they were 100% right. But we just had to be encouraged, 'you'll make half a cubic metre more and then you'll have ten decilitres more bread'. When we started in Kalpenyica, the norm was 1.2 cubic metres for two people with the noodles, and in two months we had two and a half cubes."*

Mr Merva discovered that the prisoners were not the only ones who had a hard time in the camps: "One of the guards was called *Aristol*, and we used to talk to him. It wasn't that I was on good terms with him, it was just a way of chatting a little, to understand each other's relationships and situations. 'When did you leave home?' - he asks me. 'Oh, it's been two years.' - 'What?, It's been four years since I left.' - 'You haven't been home?' - 'No, no', he says. The war had been over for more than a year. He says: - 'I get ten days. I won't even make it home in ten days, not even to come back' - because he was from somewhere in Eastern Siberia. - 'If I don't come back, I'm a deserter' - and there's no *Uncle Peter* there, he can go to the gulag. That was life at that time, so those on the other side, those who were guarding us, were just as much prisoners because they were just as helpless as we were."

The prisoners were given the opportunity to write home in the autumn of 1945, but there was no reply. Mr Merva received his first letter in November 1946, in which his mother wrote briefly that she was alive and well. "Ferenc also receives the letter, goes over and receives it, his hand was almost trembling. He unfurls it there beside his friend *Géza*, fades away, collapses. It said: 'Dear Ferenc, I received your letter, but it went to the wrong place, I'm sorry, I don't live there anymore' - he was living somewhere in the *Alföld*, on some farm in the *Kishunság* region -, 'because they brought us the news of your death, and I met one of the soldiers who fled, and now I live here. If you want to come and see me when you get home". They were like that. Perhaps that was the first time I thought, the first time I felt, that it was not for us that the hardest thing was. We young people somehow managed it, because most of us, people my age, were independent. We had family, but it was our parents, not our own family. But there were people who left three or four children at home, even their wives, and now for years they didn't know if they are alive, dead, what about them, is it worth living at all? Even before that, he had left them behind at the age of thirty or thirty-five, and for three or four years he knew nothing about them. What were those people going through?"

A few days before returning home, the prisoners were asked to provide an address where they intended to go after their return from the Soviet Union. Mr Merva changed his mind at the last minute: instead of his birthplace, *Deáki*, he gave the address of his relatives in Budapest. When they were waiting for the train, a military jeep arrived at the station: "Suddenly a military jeep came. 'I'm going to read out names', he said. He started, read out about twenty names, including *Horváth Andris*, a *Peredite*. I had already guessed what was going to happen, because we knew roughly who belonged where, who was from the Highlands and who was not. Well, he read out the ones from the Highlands, the ones from Czechoslovakia. Now either we don't go home or they don't. But everything pointed to us



going home. Then later we were in contact with Andris Horváth, who told us that they had also come home about three weeks later, and got home in May. In Malacka, or wherever there was a camp like that, where they took these people who had been to the Soviet Union."

With short stops at the transit camps in Maramaros and Debrecen, Arnold Merva reached Budapest on 3 May 1948. A few weeks later he returned to his home village. After three and a half years he was reunited with his family.

---

Collected and edited by Zoltán Kőrös, Fórum Institute, 2012-2018

"I made 13 interviews with Uncle Arnold (1925-2019), which is 30 hours of material; the war and prisoner of war theme is published in the book *In the Land of Muzka* (90 pages), he is one of the main characters in our film *In the Land of Muzka*, here is a 40 minute excerpt from the more than 5 hours of footage:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d16qIZSftUc>"

The material will be available for research in 2024.





# Summary of the results of the group work

## **Text interpretation**

The group's understanding of the text was centered around a narrative set in 1944, towards the end of World War II. The protagonist, originating from Southern Slovakia, embarks on a journey to Germany. The story emphasizes the impact of war on individuals, particularly highlighting the initial perception of war as a game by young participants and the subsequent harsh reality they faced.

---

## **Target group**

The primary target group for the group's educational program is 9th-grade students. This choice is based on the relevance of the Second World War topic in the school curriculum for this grade. Additionally, the group identified university students as a second target group, aiming to take the content to a more theoretical level and explore deeper perspectives.

---

## **Educational program**

For 9th-grade students, the group intends to convey the message that war is a tangible and real experience, dispelling the notion that it is a distant past with no impact on current lives. They aim to differentiate between video games and real-life war experiences, emphasizing the harsh realities faced by individuals. Learning objectives include focusing on tangible ways of personal involvement, introducing critical thinking, and incorporating practical aspects of the story into the educational program. Methods involve activities like family tree exercises, interviews with family members, and creative exercises such as drawing and writing letters.

For university students, the group plans to explore the theoretical aspects of the content. They aim to highlight that the stories shared are often success stories, as those who didn't survive cannot tell their tales. The program aims to delve into the relationship between personal stories and historical narratives, questioning binary perspectives and incorporating a role-playing method where students assume characters and make decisions.



## **Additional points**

The group underscored the responsibility of the teacher in designing the text for educational use, deciding on the portions to be covered, and providing concrete tasks for guidance. They also stress the importance of questioning binary perspectives and recognizing the complexity of historical narratives. The use of role-play, surprising for university students, is highlighted as a method to deepen understanding.

Overall, the group's presentation demonstrated a thoughtful approach to translating the historical narrative into meaningful educational content for their identified target groups.







## Case 2:

### Hannah Fischer - Escaping to England

“The time from March 1938 until the end of the 1938 school year is unforgettable. Those were my last months in Vienna before emigrating. A lot of students were coming to the school who had been expelled from other schools for being Jewish. At that time, I think there were over 50 children in the class. The children who arrived made a deep impression on me. They were all very depressed because some of them didn’t even know that they were Jewish. They were often from baptized families, raised Christian, and suddenly they were Jewish. I won’t ever be able to forget that. The whole class looked after these children; we took them in completely. But there was already an atmosphere of dissolution; several knew they were going to emigrate. I was just a ‘school for the time being’ for many of the students. My Latin teacher, Dr. Klein-Löw, was able to flee to England where she worked as a maid. Lydia made it to America. Nelly Szabo, also a friend from school, also fled to America. We were in contact for a good while, but when you don’t ever see each other, you lose touch at some point. Many from my class were able to successfully flee, but not all. Mostly it was better-off families that made it. The poorer families often couldn’t flee. Sometimes they were able to at least send their children away. Like all Jewish children, my brother was also expelled from his school and then had to go to a ‘collection school’ [Sammelschule] for Jews in the 14th district. My father had bought and worked a piece of property near the Aspanger Airport – this airport has been around since 1912. He bought it there because it was cheap. So, every weekend we went from one side of Vienna to the other, to Essling – that was a long trip. We had to transfer at Schwedenplatz; the wonderful ice-cream parlour that still there was also around back then. Each time we received an ice cream for around 10 groschen. At the end of March 1938 my father was arrested. The neighbour of the property in Essling was a Nazi – we knew that. And this neighbour wanted our property. My father was thus summoned and asked to sign off that he was giving his property to the neighbour. My father refused to give his signature with the argument that he had purchased the property and was on the deed and didn’t see any reason to hand it over to the neighbour. He thought that as a former front-line soldier he would naturally be respected by the Nazis. The Nazis respect nothing. They arrested and interned him in the 20th district, in a school on Karajan-Gasse. That’s where Jews were collected and deported to Dachau. My father was on the so-called “Prominent Transport” to the Dachau concentration camp on 1 April 1938. Among the 150 prisoners there were well-known politicians and opponents of the National Socialist regime, as well as Christian Socialists, Monarchists, Social Democrats, Communists, and around 50-60 people of Jewish faith or background. Starting in 1936 my mother began placing Jewish girls in England as maids as part of an organization set up in cooperation with the Jewish Community. In 1938, a few days after the German invasion, our house was searched again. This search differed from the one in 1936 because it was much more brutal. They didn’t hold back slicing open our feather beds and destroying many objects. All the books were pulled out and partly torn. My brother and I were there. That was an important political education for us. My mother put a packet of paper in my hand and sent



me to the toilet. Those papers would have been dangerous for her. I tore up everything and threw it in the toilet; it was gone. So, they didn't find anything that could have been really dangerous for my mother, but they did find the suitcase with all the documents for the England Action. They confiscated the suitcase because they thought they could make a case for spying or something out of it. Those were Nazi younglings who couldn't speak English and weren't very educated anyway. Approximately 14 days after the search my mother was summoned to the district office on Hietzinger-Brücke. She took me along because she thought the Nazis would behave a bit more moderately towards her in the presence of a child. She was afraid, since my father was already imprisoned at this time. We went to the Superior Nazi, and he shouted brutally at my mother: 'The more of them you place, the better.' He behaved the way you would expect from a real Nazi. At the end he said, 'And it would be best if you just take one of these permits for yourself.' My mother took this remark seriously. She immediately applied for a permit, took one of the maid positions for herself, and applied for our exit permits. Today I am convinced that this Nazi wasn't so malicious and wanted to give us a tip with his last remark. But since there were about two or three other SA officers present in the room, he could only do it in this brutal way. Afterwards my mother asked me to write down what I had experienced there, and somewhere I still have it. My brother and I never saw our father again. When he was released from the concentration camp we were no longer in Austria. My father's letters from the camp were an upsetting experience for us, since they sounded like this: 'Dear Liesl, dear children!' Then a large portion would be cut out and at the bottom it would say: 'Greetings and kisses from your father, Bela'. I can't imagine what my father could have written conscious of the fact that he was imprisoned in a concentration camp, what he wouldn't have been allowed to write. We sent packages to him in the concentration camp in Dachau. Maybe he wrote that he received the packages. I don't know. But in any case, it was something that very powerfully demonstrated the nature of the new regime. When I went to school, I saw Jews in the city centre that had to wash the streets, I experienced the population's reaction and took the open threats seriously. It was a clear signal for everyone that wanted to know. It wasn't difficult to see that fleeing was necessary, even if we didn't leave the country readily and happily. There was also a drop of melancholy and fear. Fear of what they future may bring and, of course, fear for our father. Rafael and I left for London shortly before our thirteenth birthday. Our mother brought us to the Westbahnhof train station. I can remember, I still have this feeling very strongly within in, I knew very well back then: I am coming back! We knew our mother was coming two, three weeks after us, but we didn't know that she sent us earlier because she was afraid the war would break out and we'd be doomed. Many children went on the Kindertransports to England without their parents and never saw them again. Luckily, we weren't as clever as we are now. My mother dismantled the apartment but didn't along take any furniture, only linens and such things. She distributed some of the things from our apartment amongst friends, since it was clear my father wouldn't be allowed to enter the apartment if he got released. My mother came two or three weeks after us, after depositing a permit for my father at the English Embassy. Maybe my father was released from Dachau because of the permit, but when he was back in Vienna – that was in July of August 1939 – the British Embassy didn't officially exist anymore. Officially they were on holiday – since that was time for holidays – but they never returned since war was



foreseeable. For some time, my father stayed in Budapest illegally, but was then deported and returned to Vienna. In Vienna he lived with other Jews in a so-called 'collection apartment' [Sammelwohnung]. Since the Jews had their apartments taken from them, many Jewish families lived together in one apartment. I think my father was in the 2nd district. In September 1940 he was able to board one of four ships attempting to reach Palestine illegally. In the Romanian Danube port of Tulcea the passengers were relocated to three ocean steamships. Instead of the envisaged 150 passengers, there were – on the "Atlantic" for example – 18,000 fleeing passengers. The journey was very dramatic. The crew went on strike, demanded more wages, but nevertheless, after more than three months, my father reached port at Haifa. But after a short stay in the Alith internment camp near Hafia, the British transported the refugees – who had narrowly escaped death – to Mauritius by ship. Mauritius was horrible. The people had lost everything and knew nothing about their relatives. Many died of tropical diseases. On Mauritius my father made a piece of land arable, dug a garden, and cultivated plants he found there. He at least knew we were in England and therefore in relative safety. In London we were picked up by the 'Jewish Committee For Refugee Children' and brought to Deal. Deal is a small city on the coast near Dover. There was a children's home run by a Mr. Howard. Mr. Howard was the headmaster of a single-grade rural school. He had a large house with a big garden. He lived in the house, which was called 'The Glack,' with his wife, his two children, and he took in refugee children whose parents were paying, as well as ones like us, who were sent by the committee. He made a big difference between those children whose parents were paying and those who were from the committee. Those of us from the committee had to help around the house and in the garden; the others were relieved of this duty. I did laundry, made beds, and occasionally helped in the kitchen; Rafael worked in the garden. That annoyed us, of course. Mr. Howard was a very authoritarian figure. He took delight in bringing us to his school to demonstrate how he reigned over a horde of children there. He hit children on the finger in front of us, also to show us what happens when we don't obey. Mrs. Howard was a somewhat friendlier woman, who tried to fulfil our wishes, like in terms of food, for example. In the children's home there was also a dance class, which Mr. Howard organized with the dance director for the local youth. Because more boys than girls came, we girls from the home also had to go to the class. We didn't want to, we were still too young. But the worst was when Mr. Howard would do us the "honour" and ask us to dance. He was a heavy pipe-smoker and stank of smoke, so I have the worst memories of dancing with him. That cast out any desire to dance for the rest of my life. My brother never had any English lessons in school in Vienna. I had had three years of English and could communicate. My brother, who in England took on his second name, Erwin, because instead of Rafael he was always called Ralf, which annoyed him, didn't speak for two months. He spoke German but didn't say a single English word. After two months he spoke perfect English. Exactly at this point we started going to the 'Central School,' the main school in town. My brother went to the boys' school, and I went to the girls' school. The English school system in those days was arranged so that they taught much less in the girls' school than in the boys' school. For example, girls didn't learn any algebra in Math, whereas Erwin was plagued with algebra. But I was able to help him since I had learned well in Vienna. My German and History teacher, Miss Billings, took an interest in



me and took me under her wing. She gave me books and I still have one from her today. She made my stay there more bearable since we were really unhappy in that house. Our mother was in London, but she worked in a household and couldn't visit us. We of course complained to her in our letters, but it didn't do anything, she couldn't have us with her; it would have been impossible. On our thirteenth birthday my brother came to me and said, 'So, Hannah, we're 13 now, I'm not going to hit you anymore.' After a year, our stay in Deal came to a dramatic end. One day my brother had to help in the garden again and something happened that didn't satisfy Mr. Howard, so he took him to task. Mr. Howard was furious and slapped my brother. We weren't used to anything like that. Mr. Howard was a small man and my brother, rather large and strong, hit him back. In the end this was very fortunate, since it was the reason, we were sent very quickly to London. However, it was also the end of our life together, since Rafael went to a home for boys and I to a home for girls. Of course, my mother spent her free afternoons with us. She would pick us up from the homes, we'd get something to eat or go for a walk in the park, and then she'd bring us back. It was easy for us children to learn English, but for older people, like my mother, it was a problem. Once, for example, my mother, my brother, and I went out on the street. My mother could speak a little English and had learned more in the meantime, but we could speak it much better. We annoyed her with curse words and she wanted us to stop and said with full conviction, 'Oh, pipe up!' That, of course, added to our amusement since it should have been 'Pipe down!' The so-called Emigranto developed among immigrants. That was a mix of German and English. Mrs. Dr. Gellner, a German, the director of the girls' home in London, had a mentally disabled son. Michael couldn't go to school. I became friends with him and began to tutor him. That was the beginning of my pedagogical career. I decided to work with children professionally after having given up my actual wish of becoming a doctor on account of the emigration. After I passed the entrance exams for a public school in Bristol – the Badminton School for Girls and left London, I gave Michael over to my former Latin teacher from Vienna, Mrs. Dr. Klein, who saved herself in 1939 by becoming a maid in London, and she continued to support him. In 1946 she went back to Vienna and became a grammar schoolteacher and a high school principal in Floridsdorf. She was a member of the SPÖ [Social Democratic Party of Austria] party delegation, a member of the SPÖ central committee, a member of the SPÖ district board of the SPÖ Vienna/Leopoldstadt, was the spokesperson of schools in the parliament, and I remained friends with her until her death in 1986. These public schools are not actually public, but rather very expensive schools for the children of the well-off. My school was a renowned and very progressive school. There were several immigrants there, of whom I was initially the youngest. We had many opportunities to play sports; there was a swimming pool, tennis courts, hockey fields, and much more. When the bombings of Bristol became dangerous, the school was evacuated to a former hotel on the north coast of Devonshire, in Lynmouth, a small fishing town."

---

*Date of Interview: July 2004*

*Source: Menschenleben*



# Summary of the results of the group work

## Introduction exercise

The group introduced the topic of the Holocaust through a dynamic exercise. They asked participants to form groups based on various criteria, such as favorite color, gender, and religion. This exercise aimed to illustrate how people naturally form groups and can experience discomfort or prejudice based on certain characteristics. The interactive activity engaged participants and set the stage for discussing group dynamics.

---

## Target group

The target group for their educational program appeared to be a diverse audience, likely students, or individuals in a learning setting. The presentation did not explicitly specify the age or background of the target audience, but the content suggested it was suitable for participants with a basic understanding of historical events and human behavior.

---

## Educational program

The program revolved around discussing the Holocaust, with a focus on a specific case of a girl named Hannah who escaped from Austria. The group encouraged participants to consider the feelings and perspectives of both offenders and victims in instances of bullying or discrimination. The key message emphasized the importance of recognizing behavioral patterns, understanding the complexity of individuals, and promoting respect for everyone's identity.

---

## Key points

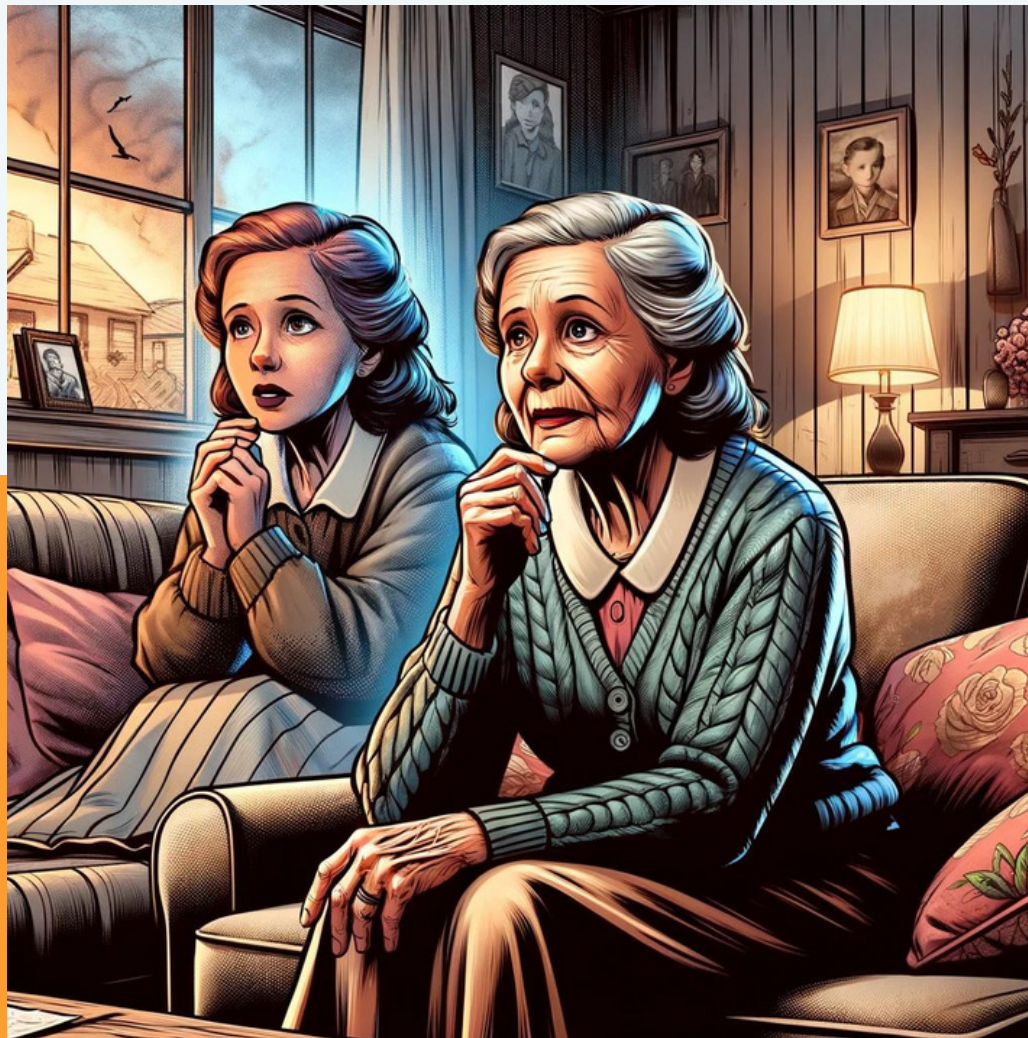
- The presentation emphasized the inherent tendency of people to form groups in various aspects of life.
- It drew parallels between historical events like the Holocaust and contemporary issues, encouraging participants to recognize patterns of discrimination and prejudice.
- The role-playing exercise aimed to foster empathy by asking participants to consider the emotions of both offenders and victims.
- The group underscored the idea that both offenders and victims may have experienced harm, highlighting the need for understanding and support.



## Conclusion

- The conclusion emphasized the importance of respecting each person's identity, even as individuals naturally form groups based on similarities.
- The presentation advocated for recognizing and addressing harmful patterns, promoting empathy, and fostering understanding and respect among individuals.

Overall, the group's presentation effectively blended an interactive exercise with a thoughtful discussion on the Holocaust, bullying, and the importance of empathy and respect in understanding complex human dynamics.





## Case 3:

### Escape on a hang-glider (article)

*"When they took me there for the second time, I knew that I had no more dream to live in this republic, to have my home in it anymore. That's when I decided to get the hell out of here. I didn't know how yet, but I speculated."*

Vladimír Príslupský (\*1948)

#### **He rescued hotels, finally escaped across the border on a hang-glider**

Prepared by: Pavol Jakubčín

**He was not allowed to go to the hotel school in Vienna, finally Vladimír Príslupský escaped to the West on a hang-glider. After the fall of the regime, he returned to open his own guesthouse in Slovakia.**

Vladimír Príslupský was born on 22 January 1948 in Klokočov (Michalovce district) in eastern Slovakia. He grew up as a "proper socialist boy," hearing at school about how nice socialism would be and how capitalism would liquidate honest people. He was active in various village organizations and in the Czechoslovak Youth Union. In 1968, impressed by the enthusiasm of Dubček's reforms, he joined the Communist Party out of his own conviction. After his secondary school studies, he completed basic military service. During this period, the Czechoslovak Communist Party was also undergoing party purges. Although Príslupský openly admitted during interviews before the party bureau that he was against the entry of "allied troops", his membership in the party was not withdrawn.

After completing his basic military service, he worked in various junior positions in the catering and accommodation services sector. At the age of 23, he had the opportunity to work as a manager of the Drienica - Lysá mountain hotel (Sabinov district). He accepted the offer and in the position of hotel manager, which prospered under his leadership, Príslupský gained a good reputation and many contacts. For this reason, the State Security tried to oblige him to cooperate. However, he refused the offer to cooperate: "I am not the type to inform on anyone. I have never done that and I will never do it. I want to remain friends with you [the StB - State Security (transl.)] but I don't want to cooperate with you." Because of his refusal to cooperate, it was almost impossible for him to get permission to go on holiday to a capitalist foreign country. During this period he completed his education in his field and graduated from hotel school. As he wanted to learn German, he also enrolled at the newly opened hotel school in Vienna. Although he was accepted, the security did not let him go to Austria.

In 1978 he started to work as a manager in the facility Salaš Veľký Slavkov near the High Tatras. During his tenure, he managed to create a great team of employees in the hotel and renovate the entire facility. Soon the salaš became one of the best rated facilities



within the company. "I gained a name and popularity. By having both a name and popularity, one has both friends and enemies. That's the way it is everywhere and that's the way it was then." Subsequently, Príslupský, as a highly rated manager, was given the party's task of running the poorly performing Lipa Hotel in Kežmarok. After six months of his tenure, the hotel came out of negative figures and started to be profitable.

Príslupský was actively involved in small football and it was during his time in Kežmarok that he and his team became Slovak champions. Together with the championship team from Ostrava, in 1982 they had the opportunity to represent Czechoslovakia at the European championship in small football in Rome. After some problems, he managed to get a travel clause to Italy, but on the condition that he would be personally responsible for making sure that everyone from his team returned. At the championships, the combined Czechoslovak team managed to take 4th place. This, considering the fact that all of the team were amateurs, was a great success. On the way home, the whole group celebrated on the train, adequately to the achievement. In Žilina, Vladimír Príslupský, together with a few friends, jumped off the train for a drink. However, their train, in which they had all their luggage with documents, left them. Their luggage was taken care of by their friends who stayed on the train and they travelled on the next train.

After arriving home to Kežmarok, the group sat down in the castle wine bar belonging to the Lipa Hotel. Here, while the celebration was going on, a state security officer tried to legitimize him. As Príslupský had no documents on him, a conflict broke out between him and the officer, which escalated into a brawl: "He immediately bit me. I got such a fine one, I banged my head on the arches that were there. That's when I went crazy - you know, when somebody attacks you...I jumped on him and started hitting him. He started running away and ran towards my kitchen." There, however, sat a group of other state security people celebrating something. They run after Príslupský. "My waiters, when they saw that they were coming after me, stopped them and *davaj*, brawl...We fought there 'decently', as we should." As a result of this brawl, Vladimír Príslupský began to have security problems. The very next morning, the following day, he was detained and taken into custody (one of the officers falsely accused Príslupský of assaulting him with a bottle, which was classified as an assault on a public official). In the end, the case was not investigated by security but directly by the prosecutor's office due to bias. The investigation found that the charge of assault with a bottle was fabricated, Príslupský was released and received a sentence for only a misdemeanour. Although the matter appeared to be settled, the State Security officers concerned did not forget about it and began to "take a closer look" at Príslupský.

After a year, he was arrested and charged with theft of socialist-owned property. The accusation was fabricated by the StB with the help of agents deployed from among Príslupský's employees. He spent nine months in detention and was subsequently released. However, he could no longer work as a manager, so he took a job as a waiter in a tavern. After three months, however, he was arrested again, on the grounds that he might influence witnesses. "When they took me there the second time, I knew that I had no chance to live, to have my home in this republic anymore. That's when I decided I was





going to run away from them. I didn't know how yet, but I speculated." After his release, he tried to obtain a fake passport in Poland, but was unsuccessful. So he thought of another way to escape behind the Iron Curtain.

While still working in Velký Slavkov, Príslupský took part in a hang-gliding course. However, during the course he dislocated his shoulder and did not complete the course. He did not continue flying. In a situation when he wanted to get abroad in any way, he had the idea to fly across the border on a hang glider. He therefore bought an older motorised hang glider from a friend. However, when he wanted to try it out for himself, he damaged the hang glider on landing, breaking the propeller and the wing. The broken hang glider had to be repaired, and just obtaining spare parts would normally have taken several months in the circumstances of the time. However, Príslupský did not have that much time, as he was due to go back to prison in a few days. Thanks to the many contacts he made as a supervisor, he managed to get all the parts to repair the hang glider in four days. Together with the original owner, the sledge was quickly repaired. After a few days, he borrowed a car from a friend, loaded the sledge into the car with another friend and set off for western Bohemia, towards the border with the Federal Republic of Germany.

However, the original place that Príslupský had reserved for the start had overgrown with grass within a few weeks of his first inspection, which made it impossible for the sledge to start safely. "There is such tall grass there, uncut. I tried to take off on it... my friend and I put the sled together, but it wouldn't take off, it wouldn't take off on that grass because the grass was holding it back." So they disassembled the sled and looked for another suitable place to start. They finally found it near the village of Mrakov (Domažlice district), on the road by the pond. However, a cooperativer with a tractor was ploughing a field near the new place, so they decided to wait for the tractor driver to leave. They waited all afternoon until finally, at about quarter to eight, the cooperativer finished ploughing. He and his friend reassembled the sledge, and in the early evening of May 18, 1987, Vladimír took off on his flight to freedom. The friend set off back to Slovakia with the borrowed avia (Czech automotive brand, synonym for truck here - transl.). (On the way back, when Príslupský was already in the Federal Republic of Germany, he was detained and arrested with the car near the Devět křížů motor inn.)

During the flight to the Folmava border crossing, Vlado flew past *Spálený vrch* (spot of the national air defence system), whose crew immediately reported his movements after spotting him. He knew that he had about seven minutes to get to safety, because after spotting him, fighter planes providing air defence of the state immediately took off from the base in Žatec. As he did not want to get higher with the hang glider, he tried to fly through the valleys. However, after several changes of direction in the hilly terrain, he soon lost his orientation and was not sure where he was exactly. "One valley, another valley, switchbacks, all kinds of flying and I didn't know where I was anymore." After a few minutes, high above him, he heard fighter jets fly by, "they turned around and flew back. So when they didn't come down, I was 100 percent sure I was on the German side." Consequently, Príslupský decided to land in a nearby meadow. While descending, however, he noticed camouflaged tanks and soldiers. He assumed they were Soviet troops



guarding the Czechoslovak state border. (In reality, however, they were American troops already stationed in the German border area). So he took off again and, worried, tried to find a town. He dropped again over the nearest major town and checked to see if it was already in Germany. When he spotted the German signs, he was satisfied. (It was the town of Cham). Nevertheless, he decided to fly a little further. Soon he flew over the town of Roding, beyond which he found a larger meadow where he decided to land. After landing safely on the ground, after about five metres, his engine died because he ran out of petrol. "Only once in a lifetime can a man be so lucky." He ran to the nearest house (it was near the village of Unterlintach) where he met an elderly woman. From the tension and excitement, he started to speak to her in his native language, the East Slovak Zemplin dialect: "Cetko, ta co tu za valal dole?" The woman just asked him uncomprehendingly, "Was?" Vlado spoke to her again, his heart pounding, now in German: "Das ist Bundesrepublik Deutschland?" After her affirmative answer "Ja, das ist Bundesrepublik Deutschland", I knelt down and kissed the ground. She thought I was crazy because she didn't know who I was, she hadn't even seen the hang-glider, she didn't find out until the next day when the newspapers were full of it."

With the help of local people, Príslupský got to a nearby pub, where he got in touch with a friend who had been living in Germany for a long time. The latter gave him instructions on how to proceed, reported to the police, and they agreed that his friend would come to see him the next day. After the phone call, he wanted to pay the innkeeper for the call. The latter asked him for a mark and sixty fenigs. "I didn't have any, just the whole five hundred. Then the newspapers were full of it: 'The fugitive paid with a five-hundred-mark!...' I gave him the five hundred mark, he just grabbed his head."

At the police station in Roding, Príslupský formally applied for asylum. However, the police did not want to believe he had arrived on a hang glider. After two hours of phone calls and verification, the policeman said: "It's true, they found out that someone flew over Furth im Wald and they don't know where he landed. So it's probably me." Other policemen came to Roding to pick him up and took him away in a car for further questioning. During the journey, he noticed that they were heading for the state border, which made him fear that the police wanted to extradite him back to Czechoslovakia. He therefore considered jumping out of the car and running away. However, the police, who noticed his unease, assured him that they would not extradite him back. However, according to official procedure, he had to be questioned at the police station in Furth im Wald, where he had crossed the border. In the following days, Vladimir also had to undergo interrogation by the Americans and the French.

After staying in the asylum for a few weeks, he started working as a waiter in a restaurant. Thanks to the media coverage of his story and the sale of the hang glider to the Checkpoint Charlie museum in Berlin, he earned money with which he opened his own restaurant after living in Germany for about a year. Longing for home, he returned to Czechoslovakia in 1992. Nowadays he runs his own guesthouse called Rogalo in the village of Mengusovce in the Tatra foothills. "Rogalo, because the rogalo (hang-glider transl.) took me to freedom."



# Summary of the results of the group work

## Introducing the topic

The group introduced the topic by presenting a unique story set in 1987 in Czechoslovakia. The speaker acknowledged the complexity of their task, emphasizing that the story was less tragic compared to more well-known historical events like the Holocaust or World War II. They expressed the challenge of making the 1980s, a time they personally lived through, relatable and significant to today's teenagers.

---

## Target group

The target group for their educational program was secondary school students, particularly those in the eighth or ninth grade. The decision was influenced by the belief that the story's setting, in the late 1980s, might not be perceived as tragic by the current generation, and thus, it might be more challenging to engage them. The group aimed to create a Project Day for the students.

---

## Educational program

- Duration and Format: The group decided that a 45-minute session was insufficient and opted for a Project Day spanning several hours. The extended format allowed for more in-depth exploration and engagement.
- Activities they planned
  - Timeline Formation: They planned to start with an activity where students would create a timeline to contextualize the events of the 1980s in communist Czechoslovakia.
  - Educational Videos: The group intended to use educational videos to provide context and discuss lesser-known aspects like the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and secret agents.
  - Guest Speaker: Considering the protagonist of the story was still alive, they explored the idea of inviting him as a guest speaker to share his personal experience.
  - Dramatization: A dramatization or role-playing activity was proposed where students would act out parts of the story, enhancing engagement and understanding.
  - Surveys and Questionnaires: The group considered incorporating surveys or questionnaires to gather opinions before and after the session, potentially involving older generation teachers or family members who lived during the 1980s.



## Key points

- Challenges: The group recognized the challenge of making a less tragic story from the 1980s impactful for contemporary teenagers.
- Engagement Strategies: To address potential disinterest, the group planned interactive activities, videos, a guest speaker, and dramatization to actively involve students in understanding the historical context.
- Motto: The overarching aim was to make students understand how a totalitarian regime functioned, and their motto was stated as "Freedom is not a state, it is an act."

In conclusion, the group strategically planned a Project Day with varied activities to engage secondary school students in understanding a unique historical story set in 1987 Czechoslovakia. They aimed to bridge the generational gap and make the historical period relevant and impactful for today's teenagers.



