PRISONER of HER PAST

FILM STUDY GUIDE
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Though “Prisoner of Her Past” has been shown around the world and has aired on PBS in the United States more than 510 times in 140 markets, its greatest power may be in the classroom. I say that because of so many experiences I’ve had speaking to college, high school and middle-school students across the country. Let me tell you about one of them.

A couple of years ago, I was showing the film to high schoolers attending a special summer session at Northwestern University. It was a wonderful gathering of youngsters of many races and ethnicities, yet I wondered whether “Prisoner of Her Past” would mean anything to them. Could kids in 21st Century America really relate to the story of my mother, who is reliving traumas she experienced in Eastern Europe during WWII?

It all seemed a bit remote. But the young men and women who crowded into the classroom gave me a swift education in their sophistication, sensitivity and wisdom.

We were screening “Prisoner of Her Past” for journalism students at Northwestern’s National High School Institute, famously known as the “cherubs” program. Bringing the film here was going to be particularly meaningful for me, because I had been a journalism “cherub” myself – in 1971!

But as the students settled into their seats – talking, laughing, joking – I feared they might feel that “Prisoner of Her Past” belonged to some distant time and place. Once the screening began, their silence seemed to confirm my suspicions.

As the story progressed, however, they gasped at particular passages, laughed at others, then – at the film’s end – burst into shattering applause. The house lights went up, and they proceeded to shower me with savvy questions. How did it feel to switch from being a lifelong print journalist to working in film? (Thrilling and scary.) How did I deal with the emotion of telling such a personal story? (With some difficulty.) How did I get people in Poland and Ukraine to open up to me? (They seemed eager to talk.) How did my family respond to the idea of making the film? (With tremendous support.)

The questions kept coming for over an hour.

Then something even more startling happened. After the Q-and-A session ended, a large group of kids surged to the front of the room to tell me their own stories, one-on-one. Many wept as they recounted what happened to their grandparents in Europe, and how similar their family narratives were to mine. Others told me about relatives who experienced horrors in Japan during World War II … and only reluctantly told their grandchildren the tale. Over and over, I was struck by the maturity of these students, their awareness of the suffering of their elders and their own heroism in sharing this information with me. Many said they were determined to tell these stories through the course of their careers, to keep the memories alive, to try to help others.

This session was not unique. I’ve seen it repeated uncounted times as I’ve spoken to students across the United States.

The students tell me how much the story of “Prisoner of Her Past” means to them and how much it applies to the traumas they see around them, whether in person, via friends or on the TV news.

To me, that’s the ultimate value of “Prisoner of Her Past” – its ability to enlighten students about the world they live in, and about themselves. --- Howard Reich
On the night of February 15, 2001, Sonia Reich fled her home in Skokie, Illinois, insisting that someone was trying to kill her -- to “put a bullet in [her] head,” she told anyone who would listen. It would take a year for her son, Chicago Tribune journalist Howard Reich, to understand why she was running the streets of Skokie, fearing for her life.

Prisoner of Her Past tracks Howard’s journey across the United States and Eastern Europe to discover why his mother believes - to this day - that the world has conspired to try to execute her.

As Howard eventually learned, Sonia has late-onset Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, a little-known but extremely debilitating illness that has pushed her into the realm of delusion. At the same time, however, Sonia remains fully aware of her surroundings, totally alert to the world, thoroughly cognizant of the present.

She has no hints of Alzheimer’s disease or any form of dementia. On the contrary, as one doctor told Howard, “Dementia would be a relief for your mother, because then she wouldn’t remember.”

Unfortunately, Sonia’s horrific childhood fleeing the Nazis -- about which she told Howard virtually nothing when he was growing up -- has come back to haunt her. She believes that yellow Stars of David have been sewn to her clothes, that doctors and nurses are trying to poison her, that her grandchildren have been taken away.

Past and present merge in Sonia’s perceptions, and Howard sets out to discover why. He locates the few experts in the world who can explain the obscure phenomenon of late-onset PTSD, and he travels to the city of Sonia’s birth, in Ukraine, to uncover the horrors that now haunt his mother.

But Prisoner of Her Past ventures beyond Sonia’s story, to show what can be done to help traumatized children today. The film looks in particular at the victims of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, an area of special interest to Howard, who’s the Chicago Tribune’s jazz critic. Some are benefiting from psychiatric awareness and techniques unavailable when Sonia and children of her generation were shattered.

Prisoner of Her Past makes it clear that if childhood trauma victims, from New Orleans to Darfur, are not helped, they will be retracing Sonia’s steps 60 years from now.

Goals for Using This Guide:
This guide attempts to bring the story of one family’s struggle with trauma into current contexts and creates a relatable platform for students to examine history and their own family stories. Through written exercises, classroom discussions and media tools, students will make connections from The Holocaust to present day conflicts and disasters, look objectively at their own journeys, find empathy and strengthen coping mechanisms to deal with a sometimes inhospitable environment.

Selected Individuals Featured:
- Howard Reich – *Chicago Tribune* journalist, author of *Prisoner of her Past: a Son’s Memoir*
- Sonia Reich – mother of Howard Reich
- Leon Slominski – cousin of Sonia Reich
- Peter Slominski – son of Leon Slominski
- Irene Tannen – aunt of Sonia Reich and Leon Slominski
- Barb Reich-Abramovitz- sister of Howard Reich
- Shirley Fadim - Sonia’s cousin (who met her at the boat when she arrived in the USA)

Topics and Issues Relevant:
- The Holocaust
- Childhood Trauma
- PTSD and late-onset PTSD (also called Delayed-onset PTSD)
- Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma
- Aging & Mental Health
- Women and War
- Effects of War on Civilian Populations
- Surviving Disaster
- Child survivors of Hurricane Katrina
- Journalism
The Holocaust

The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately 6 million Jews and other groups including the Roma (Gypsies), the disabled, and some of the Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians, and others) by the Nazi regime of Germany during World War II. These groups were killed because they were perceived by the Nazis as racially inferior. Other groups were persecuted on political, ideological, and behavioral grounds, among them Communists, Socialists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and homosexuals.


The Holocaust in Poland

Poland had the largest Jewish population in Europe, with 3.3 million Jews living in the country on the eve of the Nazi occupation. Poland also suffered the deaths of more Jews than any other country during the Holocaust, estimates ranging from 2 to 3 million. Following the military defeat of Poland by Germany in September 1939, German police units shot thousands of Polish civilians and required all Polish males to perform forced labor. Most of the Jews remaining within the area occupied by Germany – approximately 1.8 million – were imprisoned in ghettos. As Holocaust survivor Valentina Marcuk attests in Howard Reich’s book Prisoner of her Past: A Son’s Memoir, “In this area, nobody will tell you that the war began in 1941...Everybody will tell you that the war began in 1939, when the Russians came.” (154). In June 1941, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the Germans began to imprison the rest of Polish Jewry in ghettos and to deport them to concentration and slave labor camps.

Between 1939 and 1945, at least 1.5 million Polish citizens were deported to German territory for forced labor. Hundreds of thousands were also imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps. It is estimated that the Germans killed at least 1.9 million non-Jewish Polish civilians during World War II. In addition, the Germans murdered at least 3 million Jewish citizens of Poland.

At the end of the war, approximately 380,000 Polish Jews were still alive in Poland, the Soviet Union, or in the concentration camps in Germany, Austria and the Czech territories.

Sources:

Einsatzgruppen

As the German army swept east across Ukraine, special mobile killing squads, called Einsatzgruppen, were assigned to carry out “The Final Solution” of killing all Jews. By the summer of 1941, they had killed approximately 600,000 Ukrainian Jews. Most notorious are the killings at Kiev and Babi Yar on September 29th and 30th, 1941, in which 33,771 Jews were killed in less than two days, a rate unequaled in Auschwitz or any other death camp.

Describing the killings in Dubno, in his book Prisoner of her Past: A Son’s Memoir, Howard Reich writes that:

The carnage was orchestrated by the Einsatzgruppen, the German ‘special action groups,’ mobile killing squads designed to execute as many Jews as possible in the shortest amount of time. Compared to western Poland, where Jews were sent by rail and foot to be killed in concentration camps, the methods in the east were more immediate.

In essence, Hitler considered the Soviet Union and its occupied territories to be symbols of a competing political system that had to be eradicated as quickly as possible, and the first step was the execution of its Jews. (157-158)
While the *Einsatzgruppen* included only Germans, there is still debate about the role Ukrainians played in the extermination of the Jews. Some claim that it is more accurate to classify Ukrainian collaborators as victims, and that they were recruited by the Nazis from POW camps by means of blackmail. Others claim that a significant portion of the Ukrainian population voluntarily cooperated with the invaders of their country and voluntarily assisted in the Holocaust. It is estimated that 100,000 Ukrainians volunteered to serve with the Nazis. What is unknown is how many of these were coerced and how many cooperated willingly. According to reports of the *Einsatzgruppen*, there were Ukrainian mayors and militia commanders who were punished for not cooperating with the Germans. The fact that there were many Ukrainians who resisted the Nazis and assisted the Jews is not debated. However, the reports of the Einsatzgruppen operating in the Ukraine frequently mention the cooperation of Ukrainian militia and populace. There was rampant anti-semitism in Ukraine before the war and evidence suggests there was, in fact, a pool of willing Ukrainian volunteers who assisted in the Holocaust.

**Sources:**
http://www.infoukes.com/history/ww2/page-25.html
http://www.holocaust-history.org/questions/ukrainians.shtml


**Dubno and the Jewish Ghetto**

After the outbreak of WWII, Dubno was occupied by Soviet forces. The Soviet armies liquidated all Jewish institutions, arrested all Jewish leaders, and nationalized all Jewish economic enterprises. When the German-Soviet war broke out in June 1941, hundreds of young Jewish men escaped to the Soviet interior. The Germans entered Dubno on June 25th, 1941. Howard Reich describes this event in a passage from *Prisoner of Her Past: A Son’s Memoir*,

> At exactly 4 A.M. on June 22, 1941, the first German bombs fell on Dubno... Three days later, when the Nazis arrived, “there was a terrible panic - anyone venturing out into the street was shot on the spot,” wrote survivor Yitzhak Fisher in a *Dubno Memorial Book...* On this first day of the occupation, the Germans began rounding up Jews and executing them... Jews immediately were machine-gunned [by the Einsatzgruppen] at the old cemetery (157).

A ghetto was established in Dubno in April of 1942, it was later divided among workers and their families and all other Jews. On May 26–27, 1942, the Germans murdered all the Jews in the second ghetto, burying them in mass graves on the outskirts of the city. On October 5, 1942, about 4,500 inhabitants of the ghetto were shot in mass graves. By October of 1942, nearly all the Jews of Dubno were killed. However, these are just examples of the executions that occurred in Dubno, as the city became a regional killing center, with executions continuing into 1944 (Reich 161-171). According to a war crimes report of December 1944, when the war was over only about a dozen Jews from Dubno survived (Reich 171). No Jewish community was reestablished after the war.

**Sources:**
http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/efeld_0002_0006_0_05436.html
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1942graebe.html


**What is PTSD?**

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can occur after experiencing a traumatic event in which the person feels like her or his life is or others’ lives are in danger, as well as a loss of control over what is happening. Anyone who has experienced a life-threatening event can develop PTSD, although such an experience does not always result in PTSD. Among the events that can bring on PTSD are combat exposure; terrorist attacks; sexual or physical assault; serious accidents; and natural disasters such as a fire, tornado, hurricane, flood, or earthquake. About five million Americans suffer from PTSD at any given time.

These trauma sufferers are often divided into two groups, those who have participated in combat, and unarmed civilians. These two types of trauma incite vastly different reactions. Howard Reich identifies this distinction in
While Vietnam veterans with PTSD developed a ‘warrior syndrome’ that often expressed itself in ‘belligerence, violence, suspiciousness, poor work history, severely disrupted interpersonal relationship, drugs and alcohol abuse, risk-taking behaviors, psychopathological disorders and self-destructive, marginal lifestyles,’...the Holocaust survivors appeared to blend in with their new worlds (115).

He cites researchers as attributing this difference to “the fact that veterans had faced trauma on the battlefield as uniformed combatants armed to kill,” while Holocaust survivors “were unarmed civilians who had no comparable outlet for expressing their fears” (115-116).

Some of the signs of post-traumatic stress disorder are

- flashbacks to the traumatic event
- feeling jittery, always alert and on the lookout for danger
- trouble sleeping
- being easily startled or frightened
- emotional numbness
- irritability or anger

Source: National Center for PTSD

Late-onset PTSD, Delayed-onset PTSD, or Late-onset Stress Symptomatology
Delayed-onset PTSD describes a situation where a person does not develop a PTSD diagnosis until at least six months after a traumatic event. In some cases, people may not begin to experience symptoms consistent with a PTSD diagnosis until years after the experience of a traumatic event. Delayed-onset PTSD of this type has mostly been observed among the elderly, who may develop PTSD stemming from a traumatic event that occurred when they were much younger.

Late-onset PTSD is usually triggered by the occurrence of stressful life events or losses associated with aging, such as retirement, loss of loved ones, and increased health problems, and can develop in people who have otherwise functioned well throughout their adult lives. A significant date such as a birth date or an anniversary can also be a trigger of late-onset PTSD, as in the case of Sonia Reich (Reich 85).

In one study, most of 100 WWII survivors had either delayed-onset PTSD or a worsening of PTSD symptoms in mid to later life. 36% of POWs from both WWII and the Korean war reported delayed onset PTSD symptoms in later life, after having initially functioned well.

In a study titled “Delayed-onset post-traumatic stress disorder among war veterans in primary care clinics”, authors write:

A recent systematic review of delayed-onset post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) concluded that there is “no consensus emerging as to its prevalence” and that studies demonstrating delayed-onset PTSD in the absence of prior symptoms are quite rare, although delayed onset defined as an exacerbation or reactivation of prior symptoms is relatively common (38.2% of military and 15.3% of civilian cases of PTSD). Limitations of the literature include the fact that most studies only look at respondents’ PTSD rates 1 or 2 years after the index traumatic event, which sheds little light on onset that may occur 20 or 30 years later. Further empirical studies are needed to advance our understanding of the concept, prevalence and phenomenological features of delayed-onset PTSD.

An extensive discussion on late-onset PTSD can also be found in Howard Reich’s book Prisoner of her Past: A Son’s Memoir on pages 109-116.

Sources:
Late-Life PTSD
http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/pages/ptsd_symptoms_older_adults.asp
http://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/stressful-events-late-onset-ptsd-linked/
http://bjp.rcpsych.org/content/194/6/515.long
DISCUSSION IDEAS

Resiliency and Survival
Shirley Fadim, Sonia’s cousin, says of Sonia “[She was] a very stubborn little girl, and that’s why she survived”. Do you agree? What other attributes and personality traits do you think might help someone get through a disaster?

Telling Your Story
In *Prisoner of Her Past*, Howard Reich placed much emphasis on the importance of telling your story when something painful or traumatic has happened to you. What elements of your own life can you see in the film? Do you know someone who has experienced trauma that would benefit from telling their story? In what way does telling the story help a trauma survivor to heal?

Escape
Howard Reich used immersion in music and the piano to escape the fighting of his family. Do you have something you use to escape when you are feeling stressed? If so, talk about what it is and why you think it helps.

Talking Back
If you could ask any character from the film a question, who would you ask and what would it be? Think about any unanswered questions the film left you with. What are you curious about now that you did not think about before watching the film?

WRITING PROMPTS

Sonia’s Journal
What if Sonia Reich had kept a journal her whole life? What personal stories, emotions, or secrets would it hold? Pick any point of Sonia’s life, be it her escape from the Nazis, running away from her home in Skokie, or her stay at the nursing home. Write a journal entry as if you were Sonia Reich during this point in her life. Think about how she must have been feeling at the time that she may have written in a journal, but may not have revealed to Howard Reich or the movie cameras.

Current Events
Bring Sonia Reich’s story into the present by writing about a current event in which people experienced trauma – similar to how Howard showed modern-day trauma in New Orleans in the aftermath of Katrina. Write about what happened, who it affected, and how those people may have experienced trauma. If you can, find out what the people affected are doing to cope with their trauma. Discuss which social services they should have access to and how these services might aid their recovery process.
Activity 1: River of Life  
(1 to 1.5 hours)  

Essential Question:  
How do the obstacles we encounter shape the course of our lives?  

Purpose of the Lesson:  
Rivers do not follow a straight, deliberate course, but instead ebb, flow and change direction as they encounter obstacles and forge pathways. In *Prisoner of her Past*, Sonia Reich’s life follows a path much like the course of a river. This activity allows students to think about what obstacles shaped their lives, what skills allowed them to overcome these obstacles, and how they ended up where they are today. Students are given the opportunity to examine the effects of major decisions and events on their lives – whether simple or challenging.  

Objectives:  
● Visualize the progress of life events.  
● Reflect on obstacles and their outcomes, including the skills required to overcome these obstacles.  
● Use a visual schematic to piece together the events of Sonia Reich’s life from *Prisoner of her Past* and to analyze the relationship between the hardships she has overcome, the skills she used to overcome them, the ways in which they have affected her life and the lives of those close to her.  

Skills:  
Analyzing relationships and patterns, using a visual diagram to organize events, critical thinking, group participation, presentation in front of a class.  

Subject Areas:  
Women’s Studies, Social Studies, Global Studies, Media Studies, English, Language Arts  

Materials:  
● Large pieces of butcher paper, tyvek, or other type of paper  
● Markers, colored pencils, crayons  
● Magazines, scissors, and glue/tape for cutting out pictures (optional)  

1. The River of Sonia Reich: As a group, have the class create a river of life for Sonia Reich. This will function as a way to better understand the chain of events of Sonia’s life, as well as to give an example of what the students’ rivers will look like. On the board or a large piece of paper, draw a line starting from Sonia Reich’s birth in Dubno, Poland and ending with her life in a present-day nursing home in Skokie, Illinois. For each of the events that occurs in her life, (e.g. the Soviet occupation of Dubno, running and hiding from the Nazis, moving to America at age sixteen, etc.) have students come up and choose to draw a tributary, turn, or branch in the river, accompanied by an image of what this deviation represents and a list of the skills used to bypass it. This should give students an idea of how the metaphor of the river can compare to their life.  

2. Interpret and Predict: Now that you have diagramed the river of Sonia Reich’s life, use this as a tool for discussion and analysis. Have the students talk about what they think is most striking about Sonia’s river, what this diagram helped them to learn about her, how they think their rivers may differ from or resemble hers, and any other related topics you wish to discuss. Then use these conclusions to predict what course Sonia’s river will take in the future. You can use questions like “How will Sonia’s life change as a result of late-onset PTSD?” and “Do you think Sonia’s ability to overcome obstacles in her past will help her to overcome the obstacle of late-onset PTSD? Why or why not?”. As students answer these questions, have them come up and add future changes, turns, dams, branches, and tributaries to the drawing of Sonia’s river.  

3. Draw Your Own River: Using the example of Sonia Reich’s river, give each of the students their own piece of paper on which to draw their own river of life. Students may draw pictures or cut them out from magazines to
represent significant events in their lives that have brought them to where they are today. Encourage students to be as specific as they would like in identifying their events and decisions. Make sure that for each obstacle or pathway they include, they list the skills that allowed them to overcome it. When the students are done tracing back from today, have them analyze their rivers and make predictions for their futures. What obstacles will they overcome to achieve their goals? What skills do they possess that will allow them to do this? Once each student has completed his or her river of life, have them present them to the class, explaining what course their has taken.

A good example for a river of life activity can be found here: http://www.kstoolkit.org/River+of+Life

Activity 2: Compare and Contrast: Sonia Reich vs Leon Slominski
(45 minutes to 1 hour)

Essential Question:
Why is Leon well and Sonia sick even though they both lived through the Holocaust and were both orphaned?

Purpose of the Lesson:
Sonia and Leon are both Holocaust survivors who were orphaned by the Holocaust and forced to spend their childhoods fleeing from the Nazis. Despite their similar experiences, there are extreme differences in the ways these two characters face their trauma. Leon embraces the chance Howard gives him to revisit the past, while Sonia completely rejects it. Leon is eager to return to Dubno, while Sonia refuses to even look at pictures of her hometown. Due to her late-onset PTSD, Sonia is only able to revisit the past through flashbacks and nightmares. While it is important to note that Leon does suffer some symptoms of PTSD and has been diagnosed with “survivor syndrome,” a disorder resulting in heart disease, high blood pressure, and various anxieties, he is still holding his life together, unlike Sonia, whose life has unraveled. This activity is designed to examine the reasons behind Sonia and Leon’s contrasting reactions to their trauma. Students will compare and contrast the two characters’ experiences during the Holocaust and attempt to parse out which skills, events, or resources were responsible for these differing reactions.

Objectives:
● Identify causes and effects of PTSD
● Analyze the role of gender in Holocaust survival
● Reflect on the various skills necessary for surviving and overcoming trauma

Skills:
Comparing and contrasting experiences, using a visual diagram to organize events, critical thinking, group participation, presentation in front of a class, analyzing information to form conclusions

Materials:
● Whiteboard/chalkboard, markers/chalk

1. Group Conversation: Have students separate into groups and give each group a copy of Student Handout A. The handout has two questions and a Venn diagram for each question. The student should discuss their answers to the questions and fill out the Venn diagram as a group. (If you want to try a useful, interactive online version of the Venn diagram, you can find one here: http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/venn_diagrams/)

2. Class Diagrams: Draw two Venn diagrams on the board. One will be for Sonia and Leon’s experiences during the holocaust (question 1 from the handout) and one will be for their responses to trauma (question 2 from the handout). Have a volunteer from each of the groups present their answers to the questions and use these answers to fill out the diagrams on the board.

3. Discuss: Looking at the two diagrams, notice how Sonia and Leon share many similarities regarding their experience during the Holocaust, but have many differences in their reaction to it. Use the diagrams to discuss the following questions:
What differences can you pick out in Sonia and Leon’s experience during the Holocaust that may have caused their differing reactions to it?

Based on Sonia and Leon’s differing reactions to the Holocaust, what can you tell about the role of gender in Holocaust survival?

What do you think are some of the causes of PTSD? How can it be helped or avoided?

**CLASSROOM EXERCISES**

**“But Why?”**

The “But Why?” exercise allows students to probe deeply into the root causes of problems by examining cause-and-effect relationships. The facilitator starts with a question, for example “Why did Sonia Reich run away from her home in Skokie?” and the students give the answer, “Because she was afraid someone was trying to kill her.” The facilitator then continues to ask “but why?” questions until the students arrive at the root cause of the problem. Here is an example of how this activity works:

Facilitator: “But why was she afraid someone was trying to kill her?”
Students: “Because she had late-onset PTSD.”
Facilitator: “But why did she have late-onset PTSD?”
Students: “Because of the problems she had to endure as a victim of the Holocaust.”

The activity can go on like this until the students have looked deeply at all of the causes involved in Sonia’s PTSD.

**HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS**

1. **Unanswered Questions.**

*Prisoner of her Past* is a complex story that leaves the viewer with many unanswered questions. Have students compile a list of questions they were left with after watching the film. These may include questions about Sonia’s past, late-onset PTSD, the Holocaust, Howard’s upbringing, or any other issues they felt the film left open-ended. Encourage students to reflect on how they felt at the end of the film. Were there gaps in the story that made them uneasy, curious, or mystified? Have students think about where these feelings came from and how to flesh them out into concrete questions.

When this assignment is completed, have students discuss their questions in small groups and have each group think about the following questions:

- Which questions come up the most?
- Is there a common theme that can be found throughout some of the questions?
- Where does this theme come from?
- Why do you think this was a common theme?
- What is it about the subject matter of *Prisoner of her Past* that leaves us with so many unanswered questions?

Have a volunteer from each group present the group’s conclusions.

After all of the groups have presented, have a class discussion in which you try to answer some of these unanswered questions. You may muse on what you think may have happened to characters in the film, or discuss why Howard Reich was unable to provide us with answers to these questions.

2. **Shedding Light on Childhood Trauma**

On his blog ([http://prisonerofherpast.wordpress.com/](http://prisonerofherpast.wordpress.com/)), Howard Reich writes that the main reason for making *Prisoner of her Past* was “to shed light on childhood trauma”. Read the following article on childhood trauma and fill out the questions in *Student Handout B*, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/28/opinion/brooks-the-psych-approach.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/28/opinion/brooks-the-psych-approach.html)
Once you have completed the assignment, have a class discussion around the questions in the handout. Did you have similar answers to these questions? What differences in opinions came up in answering these questions?

3. Personal Journalism: Getting the Story
Howard Reich investigated Sonia Reich’s story by visiting her and her relatives and talking to them about their past. This opened up many stories about the trauma she experienced as a result of the Holocaust and helped him to understand his upbringing and heritage. Do you have a family member whose story may help you understand your background? Interview an elder from your family or community and write an article about the story. If your family member is like Sonia Reich and suffers from trauma, you may have to do some archival research on your own to come up with the full story. The following resource may be helpful in coming up with some questions: http://suite101.com/article/oral-histories-a21004

In your article, you may want to answer some of the following questions:
- What did you discover about your family or community member that was most meaningful to you? Why?
- What did you learn about your background that you did not know before? How did this make you feel?
- What similarities and differences did you come across between your upbringing and the upbringing of your family or community member?
- Did interviewing your family or community member change your perception of him/her,? Your family? Your community? How?

Once these articles are finished, you can compile them into a class-wide newspaper or magazine on stories from the past, and hand them out to each of the students. You may even want to make extra copies to give as gifts to the people who were interviewed.

Also, if you liked the River of Life activity above, here is another way you can apply it:
Create a River of Life for your family or community member based on your interview. Just like you mapped your obstacles and pathways, make a river showing their obstacles and how they overcame them. Think about what appeared to be the most significant events in their lives and how these events brought them to where they are today.

Here are some tips on interviewing from Howard Reich:
1. Learn as much about your subject in advance, then write out all your questions.
2. When you’re interviewing, look directly at the subject – don’t stare at your questions. Only glance at your written questions in passing, as needed. You need to establish human contact to have a conversation!
3. Listen to what your subject says, and create follow-up questions on the spot. So if the subject says: “I had a very hard life.” You say: “What was hard about it?” If he or she says, “Well, I had all this work to do,” you say: “What kind of work?” In other words, keep pressing for details.
4. Read your subject: In other words, watch his or her face, listen to his or her voice. If a topic becomes emotionally difficult, give the subject time to take a breath, to pause. Basically, respond sensitively to the person you’re talking to. Do not make them too uncomfortable, or they won’t say anything!
5. Allow the subject to wander away from your questions into other areas he or she wants to discuss – just make sure to come back to the questions you hope to have answered.

4. Film Criticism
Have your students write reviews of the film. Here is a link to some examples of student reviews of Prisoner Of Her Past: http://prisonerofherpast.com/essays/
WHAT YOU CAN DO

Supporting the Elderly
- Volunteering and interviewing the elderly in Nursing Homes
- Contact Congress regarding issues that will expand the world of possibilities for aging in the United States. [http://capwiz.com/leadingage/home/](http://capwiz.com/leadingage/home/)
- Stay up-to-date on issues faced by women in the retirement community through the Older Women’s League Action Alert Network [http://www.owl-national.org/pages/alerts](http://www.owl-national.org/pages/alerts)

Emergency Preparedness
- Read up on the emergency preparedness plan for your area
- Keep supplies on hand and instruct the young people in your home about what to do [http://www.bt.cdc.gov/](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/)

Disaster Relief
- Organize a blood drive at your school [http://www.redcrossblood.org/hosting-blood-drive](http://www.redcrossblood.org/hosting-blood-drive)
- Volunteer or fundraise for Red Cross disaster relief [http://www.redcross.org/support](http://www.redcross.org/support)
- Organize a school-wide fundraiser for natural disaster victims

Helping People with PTSD
- Visit the About Face website [http://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/AboutFace/](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/AboutFace/) and use the information there to spread the word about helping people with PTSD

RESOURCES

Genocide
- Genocide Watch
- Human Rights Watch - Children’s Rights
- UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child
- Holocaust Education Project

The Holocaust
- Teaching About The Holocaust
- Map of the Pale of Settlement
- Women and The Holocaust

Dubno, Ukraine
- Map of The Ukraine
- Map of Dubno

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Children of Holocaust Survivors
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network
- PTSD Trauma and Help Guide
- Transgenerational Trauma

Disaster Relief
- ActionAid - Emergencies and Conflict

SUGGESTED READING

Non-Fiction:
- Prisoner Of Her Past: A Son’s Memoir by Howard Reich
- Night by Elie Wiesel

Graphic Novels:
- Maus by Art Spiegelman
- Safe Area Goražde by Joe Sacco

Fiction:
- Parable of the Sower by Octavia Butler

Poems:
- The Little Smuggler by Henryka Łazowertówna
Student Handout A: Comparing and Contrasting Sonia and Leon

Sonia and Leon are cousins, who both had similar experiences during the Holocaust. However, despite these similar experiences, they both have extremely different ways of dealing with their trauma. Discuss these similarities and differences with your group by answering the following questions and use the diagrams below them to record your conclusions.

1. How were Sonia and Leon’s experiences similar during the Holocaust? How were they different?

   ![Venn Diagram for Sonia and Leon's Experiences]

2. How were Sonia and Leon’s reactions to their trauma similar? How were they different?

   ![Venn Diagram for Sonia and Leon's Trauma Reactions]
Read the New York Times article “The Psych Approach” and answer the following questions about the effects of childhood trauma.

1. What are some of the causes of childhood trauma described in the article? Do you think Sonia Reich experienced any of them? If so, which ones?

2. What are some of the adverse effects of childhood trauma described in the article? Why do you think childhood trauma leads to these effects?

3. In the article, Paul Tough interviews a young lady named Monisha. How are her experiences similar to Sonia Reich's?

4. According to this article, motivation, self-control, and resilience are as important as raw I.Q. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

5. Did Sonia Reich exhibit any of the above qualities? How do you think they may have helped her? How do you think a lack of these qualities may have disadvantaged her?