

Rescue, Resistance, and Resilience

The Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre's (CTHGC) documentary “*I Never Said Goodbye*”, on child survivor from France, Helene Joffe.

Target Audience: Middle to High School (History, Social Studies, Life Orientation, or Human Rights Education). Students should have a basic knowledge of Holocaust history.

Core Materials: *I Never Said Goodbye* (30-minute documentary film – available on CTHGC YouTube channel, or via file transfer), projector and speakers, writing materials, map of *Nazi Domination of Europe*.

Lesson plans:

- **Option 1:** 50-60 mins lesson plan, *including* the film screening
- **Option 2:** Film screening, followed by 50-60 min lesson plan

Option 1: Film screening & short discussion (50-60 mins)

Phase 1: Pre-Viewing & Context (8 Minutes)

Teacher to establish the historical context and introduce Helene’s specific situation to the learners.

Historical Context (5 Mins):

- Explain that the Nazis attacked Poland in 1939, sparking **World War II**, and then rapidly took over countries across most of Europe (*show map of Nazi Domination of Europe: PPNT Slide 5*)
- Everywhere the Nazis took control, is where the **Holocaust** occurred. The Nazis targeted Jewish communities, who they believed were so-called “racially inferior” and a “threat” to so-called German “racial purity”. The Nazis targeted Jewish communities with **violence, segregation, and harsh laws** that took away their human rights and dignity.
- From 1942, the Nazis and their *collaborators* (governments, armies or ordinary people who helped them) rounded up and deported entire Jewish communities. They put them on trains to **death camps** in Nazi-occupied Poland, and murdered them there.
- This included roundups in **Western Europe**. In January 1943, Nazi occupying forces and local *collaborating* French police began rounding up Jewish populations in southern France (Marseilles).
- **Helene Joffe** was a French Jewish child, who grew up in Marseilles (*PPNT Slides 6-8*). She was only 8 years old when her father Ruben was arrested for being Jewish, and taken away by the Nazis and the French police. He was later murdered at a death camp in Nazi-occupied Poland called **Sobibor** (*PPNT Slide 12-16*).
- Helene survived the Holocaust as a child, saved by a combination of lucky escapes and with the help of the **French Resistance**.

Briefing for the film (3 Mins):

To encourage active watching, have two specific tracking assignments displayed on the board/ projector/ on worksheets. *(PPNT Slide 37)*

Divide the classroom in half, and assign one prompt to each half:

- **Group A (Focus on Rescue/ Resistance):** *Look for the specific actions – both small and large – that **ordinary people** and the **French Resistance** took to keep Helene and her family safe or hidden.*
- **Group B (Focus on Identity/ Resilience):** *Pay attention to what **Helene had to give up or change** (like her daily routine, her name) to stay alive, and how she coped **emotionally** as a child at the time.*

Students can also write down any general questions that come up for them.

Phase 2: Film Screening (30 Minutes)

Play the documentary film *I Never Said Goodbye*.

Move around the room quietly to ensure students are occasionally jotting down a word or two based on their assigned topic, or to clarify any questions.

Phase 3: Integration & Debrief (12 Minutes)

Use a structured rapid-fire review to capture the core lessons.

The Power of Small Actions (3 Mins): *(PPNT Slide 38)*

- Ask Group A: *“What stood out to you about how ordinary people and the French Resistance kept Helene and her family safe?”*
- *Key concepts:* Resistance wasn't only armed fighting and sabotage. It was also providing fake papers, rural safehouses, and changing identity papers to protect people being targeted by the Nazis. It's the choice of ordinary people to help those in need by offering a refuge, food, or support.

The Cost of Survival (3 Mins): *(PPNT Slide 39)*

- Ask Group B: *“What did survival cost Helene emotionally as an 8-year-old child?”*
- *Key concepts:* Discuss the meaning of the title *“I Never Said Goodbye”* (Helene never got to say goodbye when her dad was taken away). Highlight the resilience required to separate from family, get taken away from home and her friends and education, live in constant fear, and adopt a new name and identity, just to exist.

Reflections (3 Mins):

Wrap up the class by tying the film's ending to the present day. Helene Joffe moved to South Africa as a young woman, became a teacher, and dedicated her life to speaking out against prejudice, racism and hatred. *(PPNT Slides 33-36)*

Ask thought-provoking questions like: *“Why does a Holocaust survivor from 1943 care so deeply about standing up to intolerance and antisemitism in our world today?”*
“That kind of world do we want to live in, in our schools, clubs, and communities?”

Option 2: Post-screening workshop (50-60 minutes)
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In this lesson plan, the 30-minute documentary film can be assigned for homework the night before, or watched altogether in class **prior to this workshop**.

Phase 1: Immediate Reaction & The Title (10 Minutes)

Reflections (5 mins):

After watching the film, provide time for the learners to process their thoughts and emotions. Ask them to write down a single word or phrase that captures how they felt watching the film. It could also be an anecdote, photograph, or scene that stood out to them.

If the time allows, ask for a few learners to share – and ensure to facilitate the process and to add where there are knowledge gaps.

Deconstructing the Title (5 Mins):

Have the title displayed on the board or projector: **“I Never Said Goodbye.”** (*e.g. PPNT Slide 1*)

Prompt the class: “Helene’s father was arrested in Marseille, taken to the Drancy transit camp, and ultimately murdered in a camp called Sobibor – a death camp built by the Nazis in occupied Poland. Why did the filmmaker choose this quote for the title?”

Also: Who else did Helene never get to say goodbye to?”

Teacher Note: Guide them to contemplate that “never saying goodbye” applies to her father and family structure of love and protection. And by extension, also to her childhood (explained through the loss of her doll), the warmth of her home, her education and hobbies, her real name (Helene Mindel), and her physical and emotional safety. This all vanished virtually overnight, and many aspects she would never be able to recover.

Ask the learners to share their feelings about this realisation, if time allows. Facilitation should be sensitive, supportive and reassuring. Avoid sensationalism or generalisations.

Phase 2: Rescue and Resistance (15 Minutes)

Key concepts: Resistance wasn’t only armed fighting and sabotage. It was also providing fake papers, rural safehouses, and changing identity papers to protect people being targeted by the Nazis. It was the choice made by ordinary people to help those in need by offering a refuge, food, or support.

If time: Mapping the routes of displacement after deportation from Marseille

Write down the places Helene’s family were forced to move:

- **Ruben (father):** Marseille – Drancy internment camp (France) – Sobibor Death Camp (Poland) (*PPNT Slides 12-16*)
- **Helene, Sima (mother), Berthe (sister), Armand (baby brother):** Marseille – Fréjus Internment Camp – Hidden in a French town with German Cavalry – BETRAYAL.

(Helene and Armand are taken to hide with the French Resistance in the country side. Sima is hidden elsewhere. Berthe joins the Resistance as a courier.) (PPNT Slide 17-20)

- **Leon and Michel (older brothers):** Marseille – Fréjus Internment Camp – escape to join the French Resistance fighting the Nazis in France. (PPNT Slides 21-25)
- After liberation, the Mindel family is reunited in France (aside from Ruben) and has to rebuild their lives. Helene moved to Cape Town at 20 years old. (PPNT Slides 28-36)

Brainstorming the Network (7 Mins):

As a class, or in smaller breakout groups, draw a small stick figure labelled “Helene Joffe, 8 years old” in the centre of the board/ flip chart paper. Ask the class to name every person or asset required to keep that single child alive in Nazi-occupied France.

- **Her father, Ruben:** Deciding to return from his shop and face possible Nazi arrest and deportation, to protect the rest of the family (Note: The French police were *collaborators* here – they chose not to protect their French Jewish citizens).
- **The officer at Fréjus:** Allowed the family to leave, despite their papers marked with a red “J” (for “Jew”).
- **The French Resistance:** Members of the underground network took great risks, even risking their own lives. They moved Helene and her family to a small town after the escape from Fréjus Internment Camp, forging new identity papers. After Helene was betrayed by the little girl at school, the Resistance got them out and found new places to hide.
- **The Forgers and Couriers:** People who risked their lives to print fake French identification papers for Jews, or accepted the dangerous task of couriering important documents to assist the French Resistance.
- **The Rural Families:** Ordinary people who fed and clothed Helene and her brother, and kept them alive. Others (like farmers) who chose not to report or betray Helene and her brother while they were in hiding.

Discussion Core (8 Mins):

Ask: “Why did ordinary people risk everything for a child they didn't know?”

Allow learners to offer a variety of reasons – there is no one element that made people become rescuers, no matter their access to power or their relative obscurity. A common thread could be their willingness to step up for what they thought was right, and a refusal to accept injustices around them – even at the risk of their lives.

Non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews across Europe during the Holocaust are known as the *Righteous Among the Nations*.

Phase 3: The Psychology of “The Hidden Child” (15 Minutes)

This section shifts focus from physical survival to emotional survival.

Identity Shift (8 Mins):

Have a table of two columns displayed on the board or projector, or on worksheets. The left-hand column contains text, and the right-hand column is blank. (PPNT Slide 41)

As a class or in groups, **complete the right-hand column together**, exploring what parts of Helene's life she had to alter or give up to survive during the Holocaust. (PPNT Slide 42)

Pre-war life	Wartime experiences (complete together)
Helene Mindel (The Reality)	<i>Helene Arnaud (The false identity, in hiding)</i>
Jewish identity and heritage	<i>False identity (French Catholic), ban on practising Jewish traditions or festivals.</i>
Lived in a vibrant city (Marseilles)	<i>Hidden in quiet, rural isolation.</i>
Close with her parents and siblings	<i>Separated – had to pretend her past never existed.</i>
Had freedom and a happy childhood	<i>Limited freedom, had to do physical tasks to survive. Lived in fear of being discovered.</i>

Thinking Prompt (7 Mins):

Ask: "What kind of emotional or psychological pressures did Helene have to face as a hidden child?" For example, the fear of revealing her real name, or identity, and the risks of being arrested or even killed by the Nazis.

In addition: "What long-term emotional or psychological impacts do you think a survivor carries into adulthood, after spending their formative years suppressing their true identity, and having their human rights taken away?"

Phase 4: The Past and Present Legacy (10 Minutes)

After the Holocaust it was calculated that approximately 90% of Jewish children in Europe were murdered by the Nazis – a total of approximately 1.5 million children. Helene survived by the narrowest of margins because ordinary people helped her and chose not to look away.

Helene was 11 when she was liberated, and had to rebuild her life. As an adult she eventually moved to South Africa, became an educator (teaching French in schools for many years), and worked closely with the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre to share her testimony.

(PPNT Slides 33-36)

Final discussion:

Share this quote with the class: ***"The opposite of love is not hate – it's indifference."***

Discuss or use a writing prompt: *"Based on Helene's story, what is one small way an ordinary person can stand up against injustice or bullying in our school or community today?"*

Discuss, and wrap up by summarising the insights/ lessons that came out of the session.