Nazi Hunter: Simon Wiesenthal

**Study Guide**

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**Biography: Simon Wiesenthal**

At the end of World War II, thousands of Nazis who par­ticipated in the systematic murder of some 6,000,000 Jews and millions of Gypsies, Poles and other "inferior" peoples, slipped through the Allied net and escaped to countries around the globe, where many still live in freedom. Simon Wiesenthal, a survivor of the Nazi death camps, dedicated his life to docu­menting the crimes of the Holocaust and to hunting down the perpetrators still at large. "When history looks back," Wiesenthal explained, "I want people to know the Nazis weren't able to kill millions of people and get away with it." His work stands as a reminder and a warning for future generations.

As founder and head of the Jewish Documentation Center in Vienna, the freelance Nazi hunter, usually with the cooperation of the Israeli, Aus­trian, former West German and other governments, ferreted out nearly 1,100 Nazi war criminals, including Adolf Eichmann, the administrator of the slaughter of the Jews; Franz Mur­er, "The Butcher of Wilno," and Erich Rajakowitsch, in charge of the "death transports" in Holland. Accounts of his grim sleuthing are detailed in his memoirs, The Murderers Among Us (1967). His other books include Sails of Hope (1973), Sunflower (1970), Max and Helen (1982), Krystyna (1987), Every Day Remembrance Day (1987), and Justice Not Vengeance (1989). In 1989, a film based on Mr. Wiesenthal's life entitled Murderers Among Us: The Simon Wiesenthal Story was produced by Home Box Office and starred Academy Award-winning actor Ben Kingsley as Simon Wiesenthal.

Simon Wiesenthal was born on December 31, 1908 in Buczacz, in what is now the Lvov Oblast section of the Ukraine. When Wiesenthal's father was killed in World War I, Mrs. Wiesenthal took her family and fled to Vienna for a brief period, returning to Buczacz when she remarried. The young Wiesenthal gradu­ated from the Gymnasium in 1928 and applied for admission to the Polytechnic Institute in Lvov. Turned away because of quota restrictions on Jewish students, he went instead to the Techni­cal University of Prague, from which he received his degree in architectural engineering in 1932.

In 1936, Simon married Cyla Mueller and worked in an archi­tectural office in Lvov. Their life together was happy until 1939 when Germany and Russia signed their "non-aggression" pact and agreed to partition Poland between them; the Russian army soon occupied Lvov, and shortly afterward began the Red purge of Jewish merchants, factory owners and other professionals. In the purge of "bourgeois" elements that followed the Soviet occupation of Lvov Oblast at the beginning of World War II, Wi­esenthal's stepfather was arrested by the NKVD and eventually died in prison, his stepbrother was shot, and Wiesenthal himself, forced to close his business, became a mechanic in a bedspring factory. Later he saved himself, his wife, and his mother from deportation to Siberia by bribing an NKVD commissar. When the Germans displaced the Russians in 1941, a former employee of his, then serving the collaborationist Ukrainian Auxiliary police, helped him to escape execution by the Nazis. But he did not escape incarceration. Following initial detention in the Janowska concentration camp just outside Lvov, he and his wife were as­signed to the forced labor camp serving the Ostbahn Works, the repair shop for Lvov's Eastern Railroad.

Early in 1942, the Nazi hierarchy for­mally decided on the "Final Solution" to the "Jewish problem" -- annihilation. Throughout occupied Europe a terrifying genocide machine was put into opera­tion. In August 1942, Wiesenthal’s moth­er was sent to the Belzec death camp. By September, most of his and his wife's relatives were dead; a total of eighty-nine members of both families perished. Because his wife's blonde hair gave her a chance of passing as an "Aryan," Wi­esenthal made a deal with the Polish un­derground. In return for detailed charts of railroad junction points made by him for use by saboteurs, his wife was provided with false papers identifying her as "Irene Kowalska," a Pole, and spirited out of the

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camp in the autumn of 1942. She lived in Warsaw for two years and then worked in the Rhineland as a forced laborer, without her true identity ever being discovered.

With the help of the deputy director, Wiesenthal himself escaped the Ostbahn camp in October 1943, just before the Germans be­gan liquidating all the inmates. In June 1944, he was recaptured and sent back to Janowska where he would almost certainly have been killed had the German eastern front not collapsed under the advancing Red Army. Knowing they would be sent into combat if they had no prisoners to justify their rear-echelon assignment, the SS guards at Janowska decided to keep the few remaining inmates alive. With 34 prisoners out of an original 149,000, the 200 guards joined the general retreat westward, picking up the entire population of the village of Chelmiec along the way to adjust the prisoner-guard ratio.

Very few of the prisoners survived the westward trek through Plaszow, Gross Rosen and Buchenwald, which ended at Mau­thausen in upper Austria. Weighing less than 100 pounds, Wie­senthal was barely alive when Mauthausen was liberated by the 11th Armored Division of the Third U.S. Army on May 5, 1945.

As soon as his health was sufficiently restored, Wiesenthal be­gan gathering and preparing evidence on Nazi atrocities for the War Crimes Section of the United States Army. After the war, he also worked for the Army’s Office of Strategic Services and Counter-Intelligence Corps and headed the Jewish Central Com­mittee of the United States Zone of Austria, a relief and welfare organization. Late in 1945, he and his wife, each of whom had believed the other to be dead, were reunited, and in 1946, their daughter Pauline was born.

The evidence supplied by Wiesenthal was utilized in the Ameri­can zone war crime trials. When his association with the United States Army ended in 1947, Wiesenthal and thirty volunteers opened the Jewish Historical Documentation Center in Linz, Aus­tria, for the purpose of assembling evidence for future trials. But, as the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union intensified, both sides lost interest in prosecuting Germans, and Wiesenthal’s volunteers, succumbing to frustration, drifted away to more ordinary pursuits. In 1954, the office in Linz was closed and its files were given to the Yad Vashem Archives in Israel, ex­cept for one - the dossier on Adolf Eichmann, the inconspicuous technocrat who, as chief of the Gestapo’s Jewish Department, had supervised the implementation of the “Final Solution.”

While continuing his salaried relief and welfare work, including the running of an occupational training school for Hungarian and other Iron Curtain refugees, Wiesenthal never relaxed in his pur­suit of the elusive Eichmann who had disappeared at the time of Germany’s defeat in World War II. In 1953, Wiesenthal re­ceived information that Eichmann was in Argentina from people who had spoken to him there. He passed this information on to Israel through the Israeli embassy in Vienna and in 1954 also in­formed Nahum Goldmann, but the FBI had received information that Eichmann was in Damascus, Syria. It was not until 1959 that Israel was informed by Germany that Eichmann was in Buenos Aires living under the alias of Ricardo Klement. He was captured there by Israeli agents and brought to Israel for trial. Eichmann was found guilty of mass murder and executed on May 31, 1961.

Encouraged by the capture of Eichmann, Wiesenthal re-opened the Jewish Documentation Center, this time in Vienna, and con­centrated exclusively on the hunting of war criminals. One of his high priority cases was Karl Silberbauer, the Gestapo officer who arrested Anne Frank, the fourteen year-old German-Jewish girl who was murdered by the Nazis after hiding in an Amsterdam attic for two years. Dutch neo-Nazi propagandists were fairly successful in their attempts to discredit the authenticity of Anne Frank’s

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famous diary until Wiesenthal located Silberbauer, then a police inspector in Austria, in 1963. “Yes,” Silberbauer con­fessed, when confronted, “I arrested Anne Frank.”

The Jewish Documentation Center in Vienna was a nondescript, sparsely furnished three-room office with a staff of four, including Wiesenthal. Contrary to belief, Wiesenthal did not usually track down the Nazi fugitives himself. His chief task was gathering and analyzing information. In that work he was aided by a vast, infor­mal, international network of friends, colleagues, and sympathiz­ers, including German World War II veterans, appalled by the horrors they witnessed. He even received tips from former Na­zis with grudges against other former Nazis. A special branch of his Vienna office documented the activities of right-wing groups, neo-Nazis and similar organizations.

Painstakingly, Wiesenthal culled every pertinent document and record he got and listened to the many personal accounts told to him by individual survivors. With an architect’s structural acumen, a Talmudist’s thoroughness, and a brilliant talent for investigative thinking, he pieced together the most obscure, incomplete, and apparently irrelevant and unconnected data to build cases solid enough to stand up in a court of law. The dossiers were then pre­sented to the appropriate authorities. When, as often happens, they failed to take action, whether from indifference, pro-Nazi sentiment, or some other consideration, Wiesenthal went to the press and other media, for experience taught him that publicity and an outraged public opinion are powerful weapons.

The work yet to be done was enormous. Germany’s war crimi­nal files contained more than 90,000 names, most of them of people who have never been tried. Thousands of former Nazis, not named in any files, were also known to be at large, often in positions of prominence, throughout Germany. Among Mr. Wiesenthal’s many honors include an Honorary Knighthood of the British Empire from Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain, the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Clinton, decora­tions from the Austrian and French resistance movements, the Dutch Freedom Medal, the Luxembourg Freedom Medal, the United Nations League for the Help of Refugees Award, the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal presented to him by President Jimmy Carter in 1980, and the French Legion of Honor which he received in 1986. Wiesenthal was a consultant for the motion picture thriller, The Odessa File (Paramount, 1974). The Boys from Brazil (Twentieth Century Fox, 1978), a major motion pic­ture based on Ira Levin’s book of the same name, starred Sir Laurence Olivier as Herr Lieberman, a character styled after Wi­esenthal.

In November 1977, the Simon Wiesenthal Center was founded. Today, together with its world renowned Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles and the New York Tolerance center, it is an in­ternational center for Holocaust remembrance, the defense of human rights and the Jewish people. With offices throughout the world, the Wiesenthal Center carries on the continuing fight against bigotry and anti-Semitism and pursues an active agenda of related contemporary issues. “I have received many honors in my lifetime,” said Mr. Wiesenthal. “When I die, these honors will die with me. But the Simon Wiesenthal Center will live on as my legacy.”

In 1981, the Wiesenthal Center produced the Academy Award winning documentary, Genocide, narrated by Elizabeth Taylor and the late Orson Welles, and introduced by Simon Wiesenthal.

Wiesenthal lived in a modest apartment in Vienna and spent his evenings answering letters, studying books and files, and work­ing on his stamp collection. He lived there with his wife Cyla until her death on November 10, 2003.

Wiesenthal was often asked to explain his motives for becoming a Nazi hunter. According to Clyde Farnsworth in the New York Times Magazine (February 2, 1964), Wiesenthal once spent the Sabbath at

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the home of a former Mauthausen inmate, now a well-to-do jewelry manufacturer. After dinner his host said, “Simon, if you had gone back to building houses, you’d be a millionaire. Why didn’t you?” “You’re a religious man,” replied Wiesenthal. “You believe in God and life after death. I also believe. When we come to the other world and meet the millions of Jews who died in the camps and they ask us, ‘What have you done?’ there will be many answers. You will say, ‘I became a jeweler,’ Another will say, ‘I have smuggled coffee and American Cigarettes,’ Another will say, ‘I built houses,’ But I will say, ‘I did not forget you’.”

 Meet Actor Tom Dugan

**TOM DUGAN** is originally from New Jersey where he studied acting at Montclair University, then moved to Los Angeles in the early 1980’s. Some of his early work includes the popular ZZ Top rock video, “Legs,” Odd Jobs with Paul Reiser, The Puppet Masters with Donald Sutherland, Marked for Death with Steven Segal, and The Naked Gun with O.J. Simpson.

After playing a variety of guest starring roles, on Lois & Clark, Chicago Hope, Just Shoot Me, Alien Nation and The Tracey Ullman Show, Tom caught the attention of director Ivan Reitman, who cast him in five of his feature films: Ghostbusters II, Kindergarten Cop, Dave, Beethoven II and Junior.

Tom’s credits include The Trial of Old Drum opposite Scott Bakula, Race to Space with James Woods, The Practice, Curb Your Enthusiasm, Even Stevens and Friends. On the Los Angeles stage, Tom has starred in The Man Who Came to Dinner, Happy Birthday Wanda June, Black Comedy, Amadeus and Misery. National tours include his critically acclaimed one-man comedy Confessions of a Swordfish and On Golden Pond with Jack Klugman.

*Shades of Gray*, Dugan’s first historical play, is an original one-man show written by and starring Tom which looks into the mind of the Civil War’s greatest general; General Robert E. Lee. Utilizing gripping photographs and popular music of the era, it depicts General Lee reflecting on his thoughts on April 9, 1865 before his historic meeting with General Grant. At its world premiere in Richmond, Virginia, *Shades of Gray* received a standing ovation.

Go to www.dowartists.com/artists/tomdugan to learn more about Tom Dugan.

**A Message from the Playwright:**

“My dad was awarded the Bronze Battle star and Purple Heart in WWII. Of all his stories about his time in Europe, the one that impressed me the most as a kid was when his unit (the 83rd infantry) liberated the Langenstein concentration camp in Germany. I was riveted by the extremes of the situation - unfathomable cruelty vs. complete kindness; enormous courage vs. revolting cowardice. Feeling the 35-year-old shrapnel under his skin I said to him, “Boy, Dad, you must really hate Germans.” His answer surprised me, “What are you kidding? Half of my family is German...there are all types of people, good and bad. I don’t judge by what group somebody belongs to, I judge by how they behave.”

It was that rejection of collective guilt that first drew me to Wiesenthal’s story. Simon Wiesenthal not only spent his life tracking down and bringing to justice Nazi war criminals, he also defended a few German and Austrian officers who refused to participate in “the final solution.” He not only fought for the rights of Jewish Holocaust victims, but Soviet, Polish, Gypsy, Jehovah’s Witness and homosexual victims as well. For me, Simon Wiesenthal was a true 20th Century hero.

**Why Do We Tell Stories?**

“So many things happen to us every day that it is sometimes hard to make sense of them. Storytelling lets us do that. Sto­rytelling helps us give order and meaning to our lives. It helps us organize our past and plan our future. Stories help us iden­tify actions and behavior so we can avoid repeating mistakes. That’s why some sto­ries teach us lessons, which are called morals. We tell stories because they make us laugh and cry. We tell stories because they help us understand ourselves and others. They entertain us and teach us.

Storytelling is as old as humanity and common to all races and cultures. In ear­ly times, storytelling was used to explain the forces of nature that humans did not understand and found frightening, such as storms, tidal waves, and lightning. Stories also told about gods and heroes and reminded people about behavior they should imitate. Some stories were just for fun. Through stories, one genera­tion passes its culture, religion, and val­ues to the next generation.”

**Where were you the last time you heard a story? Was it a good story? Why?**

**What are other places where you have heard or told a story?**

**Playwriting** is much like storytelling, ex­cept in a play, the stories are written down in a way so that each character can find his or her lines. A storyteller might change the story a little each time he or she tells it, but PLAYS HAVE SCRIPTS WITH DISTINCT CHARACTERS IN CONFLICT.

**Pre-Show / Post-Show Acting Activities**

Here’s an easy way to prepare for the performance and build your professional portfolio, even if you are new to theater.

**Pre-Show Activities**

1. Ask students to share one example of a favor­ite television or film character. How do they act? What do they do? What conflicts do they face?

2. Look at multicultural photographs in a variety of textbooks (social studies and language arts). What do differences in nationality do to character?

3. Ask students to bring a photograph to class that depicts a character they like or dis­like. Why do they like or dislike the charac­ter? Could the character do something to ei­ther gain or lose the student’s admiration?

4. Locate theatre reviews in our local newspa­pers. Identify comments about costuming in local productions.

5. Ask students to share their previous experi­ence attending live performances (school plays, church musicals, summer camp, and professional productions) AND/OR locate reviews of shows such as The Sound of Music.

**Post-Show Activities**

1. Encourage students to write a description of the character’s demeanor in the production. “What was the character’s attitude? How did they walk? Is this ‘normal’ for the character?”

2. Ask students to discuss the objectives of char­acters in the show. What motivated them? Did they get what they wanted? How did they go about getting it?

3. Share theatre reviews with the class.

4. Hand props may enhance a character; hand­bags, walking stick, feathered hat, pocket watch, etc. “How do these props help you understand the character? In some instances productions will rely on hand props and generic costuming to convey character development: stethoscopes for a doctor, helmets for firefighters, pointers for teachers. “If the character didn’t have these items, would you understand who they were?”

**RESOURCE ROOM**

**Simon Wiesenthal Center**

[**www.wiesenthal.com**](http://www.wiesenthal.com)

An international Jewish human rights organization dedicated to generating change through the Snider Social Action Institute and education by confront­ing anti-Semitism, hate and terrorism, promoting human rights and dignity, defending the safety of Jews worldwide, and teaching the lessons of the Holo­caust for future generations. With a constituency of over 400,000 households in the United States, it is accredited as an NGO at international organizations including the United Nations, UNESCO, and the Council of Europe. Headquar­tered in Los Angeles, the Simon Wiesenthal Center maintains offices in New York, Toronto, Boca Raton, Paris, Buenos Aires and Jerusalem.

**Teaching the Holocaust to Younger Students**

[**http://www.pbs.org/teachers/thismonth/genocide/indexl.html**](http://www.pbs.org/teachers/thismonth/genocide/indexl.html)

Increasingly, educators are incorporating Holocaust studies into younger grades, although many disagree over what specific grade levels are appropri­ate. There are many fine stories about children during the Holocaust. Choose one of the novels appropriate for younger children. See this PBS website for story suggestions, lesson plans and more.

**America’s Story from America’s Library**

[**http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi**](http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi)

This website is brought to you from the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., the largest library in the world and the nation’s library. The site was de­signed especially with young people in mind, but there are great stories for people of all ages, and we hope children and their families will want to explore this site together. Here, you can discover what Abraham Lincoln had in his pockets on the night he was assassinated. (You will be surprised.) Or you can read about other “Amazing Americans” such as Buffalo Bill Cody and his “Wild West” show; the heroism of Harriet Tubman, who helped many slaves escape bondage; the music of jazz great Duke Ellington; or the inventions of Thomas Edison.

**Arts Edge Teaching Materials**

[**http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org**](http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org)

Sponsored by the Kennedy Center - arts curriculum plans and resources, in­cludes links to educational web sites in all disciplines.

**Creative Drama and Theatre Education Resource Site**

[**www.creativedrama.com**](http://www.creativedrama.com)

A resource for educators, students, artists, and interested parties in creative drama and theatre. Book lists, play information, theater games, and lesson plan ideas are gathered on this site.

**Never Forget: Holocaust Resources**

<http://neverforgetresources.blogspot.com/2010/01/lily-cupboard-story-of-holocaust.html>

**ADDITIONAL READING on the HOLOCAUST:**

***All but My Life*** by Gerda Weissman Klein (recommended for grades 9-12)

***Alex’s Wake: A Voyage of Betrayal and a Journey of Remembrance*** by Martin Goldsmith

***Branded on My Arm and In My Soul, A Holocaust Memoir*** by Abraham W. Landau

(Mr. Landau settled in New Bedford after WWII)

***Far Above Rubies*** by Cynthia Polansky

***I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing up in the Holocaust*** by Livia Bitton-Jackson (recommended for grades 7-12)

***I Promised I Would Tell: Her Poetry and Testimony During the Holocaust*** by Sonia Schreiber Weitz

***The Children of Willesden Lane: Beyond the Kindertransport: A Memoir of Music, Love and Survival*** by Mona Golabek & Lee Cohen

***The Inextinguishable Symphony: A True Story of Music and Love in Nazi Germany*** by Martin Goldsmith