



Escape: Holocaust Testimony as Animated Film

Student Workbook



Student Name: _____
Date: _____

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BACKGROUND READING



Morris's identification photo. Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 1944.

BIOGRAPHY:

Morris Schnitzer was born in 1922 in the city of Bochum, located in western Germany near the Dutch border. His parents, Hermann and Rosa, immigrated to Germany from Eastern Europe and owned a chain of retail stores. Morris and his two brothers, Eddi and Benno, were cared for by their maternal grandmother, Baba Shoshi, who took their religious education seriously. Morris was the only Jewish student in his class. He excelled in school and developed a lifelong passion for education. In 1933, Morris witnessed the Nazi Party come to power in Germany and experienced the increasingly severe measures put in place against German Jews in the following years. During Kristallnacht, Morris's father was arrested and sent to a concentration camp; upon his return, he told Morris about the horrors he had witnessed there. With this in mind, sixteen-year-old Morris left Germany on a Kindertransport to the Netherlands, where he was still living when the Germans invaded in 1940. During the next four years, Morris repeatedly evaded capture — often using false identities — on a journey that took him through Belgium, France and to Switzerland, always trying to stay one step ahead of the Nazis and their collaborators. After being liberated in Belgium in 1944, Morris was hired by the American army to work as an interpreter. After he left the army, Morris lived in the Netherlands before joining his brother Eddi in Canada in 1947, with hopes of resuming his education.

Morris Schnitzer is a Holocaust survivor who immigrated to Canada in 1947 and settled in Quebec. You can learn about his experiences by reading his memoir, *Escape from the Edge*. Below is some background that will help you understand Morris's story.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

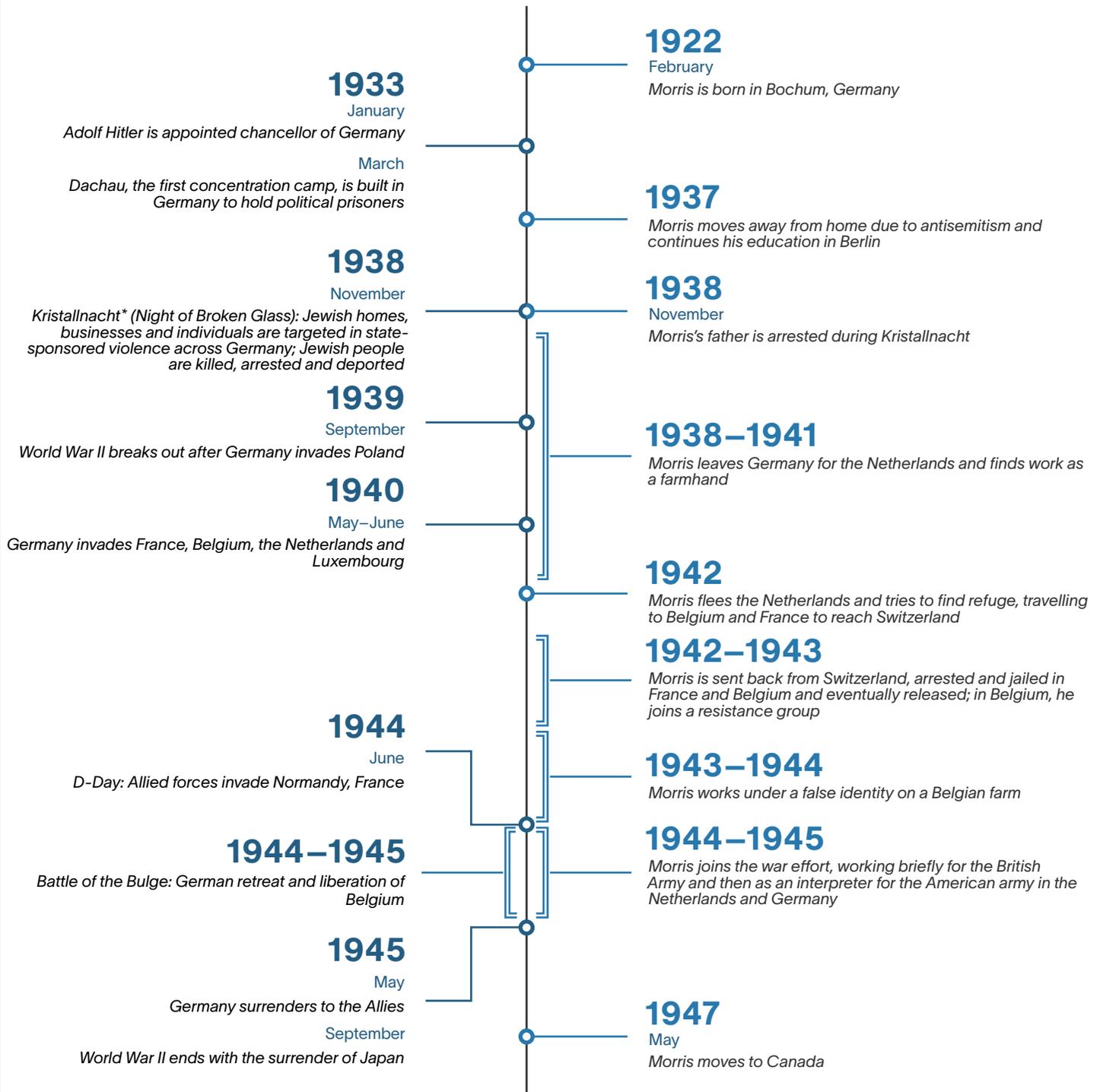
Morris's family lived in Germany, a country located in Central Europe that is bordered by several countries including Poland, Austria and the Netherlands. The Jewish population of Germany was approximately 500,000, which was less than 1 per cent of the country's total population. When Hitler and the Nazi Party came to power in 1933, they gradually implemented many anti-Jewish measures that reflected their antisemitic ideology. In general, the German population supported these measures or did not speak out against them. Due to this rising discrimination, many Jews tried to leave Germany by obtaining visas to immigrate to other countries. Kristallnacht — the violent attack on German Jews and their property in late 1938 — was a turning point that convinced many people that they had no future in Germany. Leaving Germany was difficult because the German government restricted the amount of money that Jews could take with them, and few countries wanted to accept Jewish refugees. Nevertheless, more than half of the Jewish population managed to leave Germany before the start of World War II in September 1939. Approximately ten thousand Jewish youth left Germany on a Kindertransport (children's transport) organized by groups in England and other countries to bring young Jews out of Germany. For Jews who arrived in the Netherlands, the relief was short-lived, as the Germans invaded the Netherlands in May 1940 and took over the government. In 1942, mass arrests and deportations began: Jews were arrested and held in a transit and internment camp, and then sent to Nazi camps where most were killed. Some Jews escaped to neighbouring countries, such as Belgium and France, which were also occupied by the Germans, where they tried to survive by hiding or staying on the run until the end of the war. Between 131,000 and 180,000 German Jews were killed during the Holocaust, including Morris's parents and his brother Benno.

"And there I was one evening at the end of December 1942, a free man in Brussels. A German Jew. Via the Netherlands. Via Switzerland. Via France. I was free in Brussels! I didn't know anyone. I had never lived in Belgium. A war was on. What was I supposed to do now?"

TIMELINE

HISTORICAL DATES

MORRIS'S PERSONAL HISTORY



*Also referred to as the November Pogrom to signify that the violence took place over several days and involved not only broken glass, but widespread destruction and mass violence.

WORKSHEET 1

PRE-FILM REFLECTION

Before viewing *Escape: The True Story of Morris Schnitzer*, an animated short film about one survivor's experiences during the Holocaust, respond to the following questions:



1. What are your first thoughts when you think of history? Do certain words come to mind?

2. People often learn about history by reading books and examining quotes by famous individuals. In school, have you used a different form or *medium*¹ to learn about history?

- Consider your family's history, the history of your favourite sports team or even the history of your neighbourhood. How did you learn about these things?

¹ A *medium* (or media, plural) is the form used to transmit information: "a mode of artistic expression or communication" such as photography, video or text (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2025).



3. If you've learned about World War II or the Holocaust before, what do you remember about these events?

4. What comes to mind when you think of cartoons or animation?

- Reflect on animated films or television shows that you know. Why do you think people like animated films or television shows?

5. What are your expectations for the film?

WORKSHEET 2

POST-FILM REFLECTION

After viewing *Escape*, answer the following questions:



1. What are three facts you learned from the short film? These could be about historical events, the war, the Holocaust, Morris's life, the Netherlands, etc.

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

2. What are two questions that you have about the short film? Alternatively, what are two questions that you wish you could ask Morris Schnitzer?

(1) _____

(2) _____

3. Choose one quote, image or moment that stuck with you from the film.

WORKSHEET 3

DISCUSSION

Gather in small groups and discuss the following questions. Be sure to take notes about your answers; they will be useful for the final assignment.



1. Discuss your answers from the previous worksheet. What did you learn about Morris's life (or the war) that surprised you? How are your takeaways different from those of your group members?
2. The title of the short film is *Escape: The True Story of Morris Schnitzer*. What are your thoughts about this title? In what ways can animation be true or untrue?
3. How does animation change how Morris's story is told? You may consider other examples of animation to help illustrate your answer.
4. Do you feel like this film changed your understanding of the Holocaust? How so? If not, why?
5. Choose one of the quotes below, and answer the following questions:
 - a. What is the message within the quote?
 - b. Why might you agree or disagree with it?
 - c. How does the quote relate to the short film?

(1) "Drawing is simply another way of seeing."²
— Comic book artist Chris Ware

(2) "What the animated world gives you, which I've realized, is an innocence and a way of storytelling which allows the audience to connect and fill in the dots in a much more profound way. You can still have characters that are as meaningful and emotionally engaging, but you're freed of reality to [a] certain extent. And therefore you can retain innocence."³
— Actor and director Andy Serkis reflecting on the animated movie *Animal Farm* (2025)

(3) "Animation can explain whatever the mind...can conceive."⁴
— Artist and entrepreneur Walt Disney

² Chris Ware, interview by Charlie Rose on *Charlie Rose*, PBS, November 13, 2017.

³ Drew Taylor, "Why Andy Serkis Ditched Performance Capture for His Animated 'Animal Farm' Adaptation," *The Wrap*, June 14, 2025.

⁴ Randi J. Rost, *OpenGL Shading Language*, 2nd ed. (Addison-Wesley Professional, 2006).



Notes:

A large, vertically oriented rectangular area with a light beige background and horizontal ruling lines, intended for taking notes.

WORKSHEET 4

FINAL ASSIGNMENT — MEDIA ANALYSIS

In the previous activities, we have considered how historical truth can be communicated using different media, specifically the medium of animated film. In this final activity, you will be making your own short film to reflect on *Escape*. Recall the discussions from the previous activities to build the assignment below.



FILM A GROUP DISCUSSION

Using your school's available resources (i.e., an internet-enabled laptop or tablet), you will record a short group discussion.

Your goal is to produce a filmed discussion about *Escape: The True Story of Morris Schnitzer*. Consider using a panel interview format — a group discussion — to respond to the guiding questions below.

Filming Instructions

1. On your device, test the camera and microphone to ensure that both image and sound are recorded.
2. Place the device on a stable, even surface facing your group. Be sure to include all group participants in the camera's frame.
3. Record your group discussion. Use the discussion instructions below to guide your conversation.
 - > Only edit your video if you need to cut some discussion.
4. Save your group discussion to your school's shared drive.
5. Share the video (by link) with your teacher on your school platform.

Discussion Instructions

1. Familiarize yourself with how to conduct a group interview:
 - a. When viewing examples with your teacher of interviews and panel discussions, observe how the host introduces guests and asks questions, and how participants keep their conversation moving.
2. Plan your own show:
 - a. Time limit of 3–5 minutes, to be confirmed with your teacher.
 - b. Review the questions and the student checklist below.
 - c. Consider practising your replies before filming.



3. Film your discussion:

- a. In the first 15–30 seconds, introduce your talk show and establish a tone for the discussion.
- b. One member of the team can act as the host or moderator: someone who reads out the questions and can ask other members to speak. (Moderators must still respond to others and give their opinion during the discussion.)
- c. Ensure that each member of your group gets a turn to speak.

See below for guiding questions to help you organize your discussion. They are also included in your checklist.

Guiding Questions:

1. What was the most surprising or shocking moment of this short film? Was the moment you chose different from the ones your teammates chose?
2. Did the animation make Morris's incredible story more or less believable?
3. How does *Escape: The True Story of Morris Schnitzer* compare with other animation that you know of (i.e., cartoons or anime)? Have you ever seen an animated story like this before?
4. Would you like to see more class lessons animated in this way? Why or why not?
5. If you could make suggestions to teachers, how would you decide what animation can be used in class? Should certain subjects not be allowed to be depicted as cartoons? How would you decide on what is appropriate?

WORKSHEET 4.1

STUDENT CHECKLIST



1. Complete this sheet when preparing for filming. Use the second page to make sure you've completed every part of the assignment.
2. Respond to the reflection question after you have finished filming.
3. Hand this checklist in to your teacher after you have submitted your short film.

Name of your show:

Name of host:

Tone of your show (An informative panel on a morning program? A serious part of a news bulletin?) and its **purpose** (To inform? To persuade?):

How would your audience watch your show? It could be part of an online series, or perhaps a segment during a longer television show, for example.



STEPS	✓
1. View examples of recorded interviews.	
2. Take note of what you appreciate in these examples. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the host ask good questions? • Do the guests have adequate replies? • How are the participants seated? 	
3. Set up the camera and seats for your group members.	
4. Test the camera. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is everyone in the frame? • Can everyone's voice be heard? • Do you know how to save the interview and send it to your teacher? 	
5. Filming Your Interview, Step 1: Have the host introduce your show and everyone on the panel.	
6. Filming Your Interview, Step 2: Ensure everyone gets a chance to share their responses to the questions. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What was the most surprising or shocking moment of this short film? Was your moment different than those of your teammates? 2. Did the animation make Morris's incredible story more or less believable? 3. How does <i>Escape: The True Story of Morris Schnitzer</i> compare with other animation that you know of (i.e., cartoons or anime)? Have you ever seen an animated story like this before? 4. Would you like to see more class lessons animated in this way? Why or why not? 5. If you could make suggestions to teachers, how would you decide what animation can be used in class? Should certain subjects not be allowed to be depicted as cartoons? How would you decide on what is appropriate? 	
7. Save your interview and send it to your teacher.	

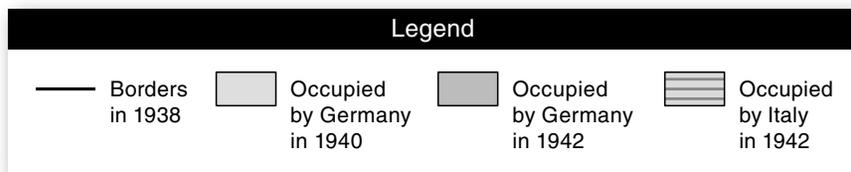


Reflection:

Write a short paragraph that explains how you produced your short film and any challenges you had along the way (this is also known as a “director’s commentary”). What might you do differently if you had to do it again?

A large rectangular area with a light beige background, containing numerous horizontal lines for writing.

APPENDIX A Morris Schnitzer's Journey in Western Europe



APPENDIX B

Short Film Time-Stamps

Time	Year	Location	Description
0:18–1:12	1946	Franeker, the Netherlands	Morris tries to validate his true identity at a Dutch administrative office to obtain an identity card.
1:13–1:46	1946	Franeker, the Netherlands	Morris encounters individuals from his past, including someone named Van der Berg.
1:47–2:11	1946	Franeker, the Netherlands	At a table with his old acquaintances, Morris begins to tell his story.
2:12–2:40	1928	Wattenscheid, Germany	Morris has a happy childhood.
2:41–2:58	1933	Wattenscheid, Germany	After the Nazis assume power, his life begins to change. School is unbearable; former friends turn against him.
2:59–3:09	1933	Germany	Morris's uncle is beaten up, and Morris has a bad feeling that something will happen to the rest of his family too.
3:10–3:13	1937	Berlin, Germany	Morris and his brother Eddi move to attend school in Berlin.
3:14–3:40	1938	Berlin, Germany	Morris and Eddi learn of their father's arrest. Their mother helps them obtain visas to leave Germany.
3:41–4:45	1938	Wattenscheid, Germany	Morris has a final conversation with his father before leaving for the Netherlands. It is the last time Morris sees his parents and little brother Benno.
4:46–4:59	1938	The Netherlands	Morris escapes to the Netherlands on a train.
5:00–5:36	1938–1940	Franeker, the Netherlands	Morris starts working on a farm where he meets Van der Berg.
5:37–6:09	1940–1941	Franeker, the Netherlands	Germany invades the Netherlands in 1940. Morris and the other Jewish farmhands are arrested in 1941.
6:10–6:50	1941	Amsterdam, the Netherlands	Morris escapes and flees to Amsterdam.
6:51–7:05	1941	Amsterdam, the Netherlands	In Amsterdam, Morris seeks assistance from the Jewish Council.
7:06–7:26	1942	Amsterdam, the Netherlands	Morris reconnects with an old friend named Piefke, and they decide to flee to Switzerland via Brussels, Belgium.
7:27–7:45	1942	Brussels, Belgium	Piefke's uncle helps them to buy false identity cards; Morris becomes Jan Van Capelle.
7:46–8:06	1942	Belgian–French Border	Morris and Piefke cross the border to occupied France. They travel to Nancy.
8:07–8:49	1942	Nancy, France	They seek help at a church where a priest gives them advice on how to enter Switzerland.
8:50–9:31	1942	French–Swiss Border	Morris and Piefke reach the border, which is heavily guarded by German soldiers. They run to the river, and Piefke swims across to Swiss territory.
9:32–10:39	1942	French–Swiss Border	Morris can't swim but finds another way to cross the river.
10:40–11:20	1942	Switzerland	Morris reunites with Piefke, and they go to the nearest town.
11:21–11:44	1942	Switzerland	They are stopped by the Swiss police.
11:45–12:10	1942	Switzerland	The Swiss police bring them to the border and instruct them to leave Switzerland and never return.

Time	Year	Location	Description
12:11–13:01	1942	Swiss Border	Morris is separated from Piefke and arrested. He is sent to a prison in Brussels.
13:02–13:19	1942	Brussels, Belgium	Morris's false Belgian identity card eventually gets him out of prison.
13:20–13:44	1942	Brussels, Belgium	Morris joins the Belgian resistance against the Nazis.
13:45–14:25	1943	Belgium	The resistance is betrayed, and the authorities storm their hideout. Morris is on the run again.
14:26–15:25	1943–1944	Belgium	Morris starts working on a farm owned by Monsieur and Madame Degive.
15:26–16:16	1944	Belgium	German soldiers arrive to search the farm and request Morris's identification papers. They leave without discovering his identity.
16:17–17:29	1944	Belgium	During the liberation of Belgium, a resistance group shows up at the farm to take away Monsieur Degive. Morris steps in and saves Degive's life.
17:30–18:00	1944	Belgium	Morris leaves the farm.
18:01–18:13	1946	Franeke, the Netherlands	Back in 1946, Morris concludes his story.
18:14–19:00	1946	Franeke, the Netherlands	Morris goes back to the administrative office with Van der Berg as his witness, and is able to reclaim his name and identity.

