Student Workbook

Print Option

When Art Animates Memory

Exploring Muguette Myers' Story Through the Arts



Student Name: .....

Date: .....

Fondation Azrieli Foundation

Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Program
Programme des mémoires de survivants de l'Holocauste

11+

Education Activity

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LESSON 1

EXPLORING A WORK OF ART



Muguette Myers: A story of hope by Adèle Blais

PART 1 — Muguette's Portrait

Look at the portrait of Muguette Myers by the artist Adèle Blais on page 2 and answer questions 1 through 4.

1. What do you first notice when you look at this artwork?

2. What do you think you know about the person in the portrait?

3. What elements or colours catch your eye?
What effect do these elements or colours have on you?

4. What do you feel when you look at this artwork?


Une enfance
Chamboise


HEART
BLOOD PURIFIER
Maman
Quilt
Liberté et Fraternité

Take a look at the close-ups of the portrait on page 4 and answer questions 5 and 6.

5. Find an item that fits into each of the five categories listed below. Write down what you find.

(1) An animal: _____

(2) A plant: _____

(3) An item for children: _____

(4) A historical item: _____

(5) A word or phrase: _____

_____

6. Do you see a connection between the five items you found? If so, what is it?

_____

_____

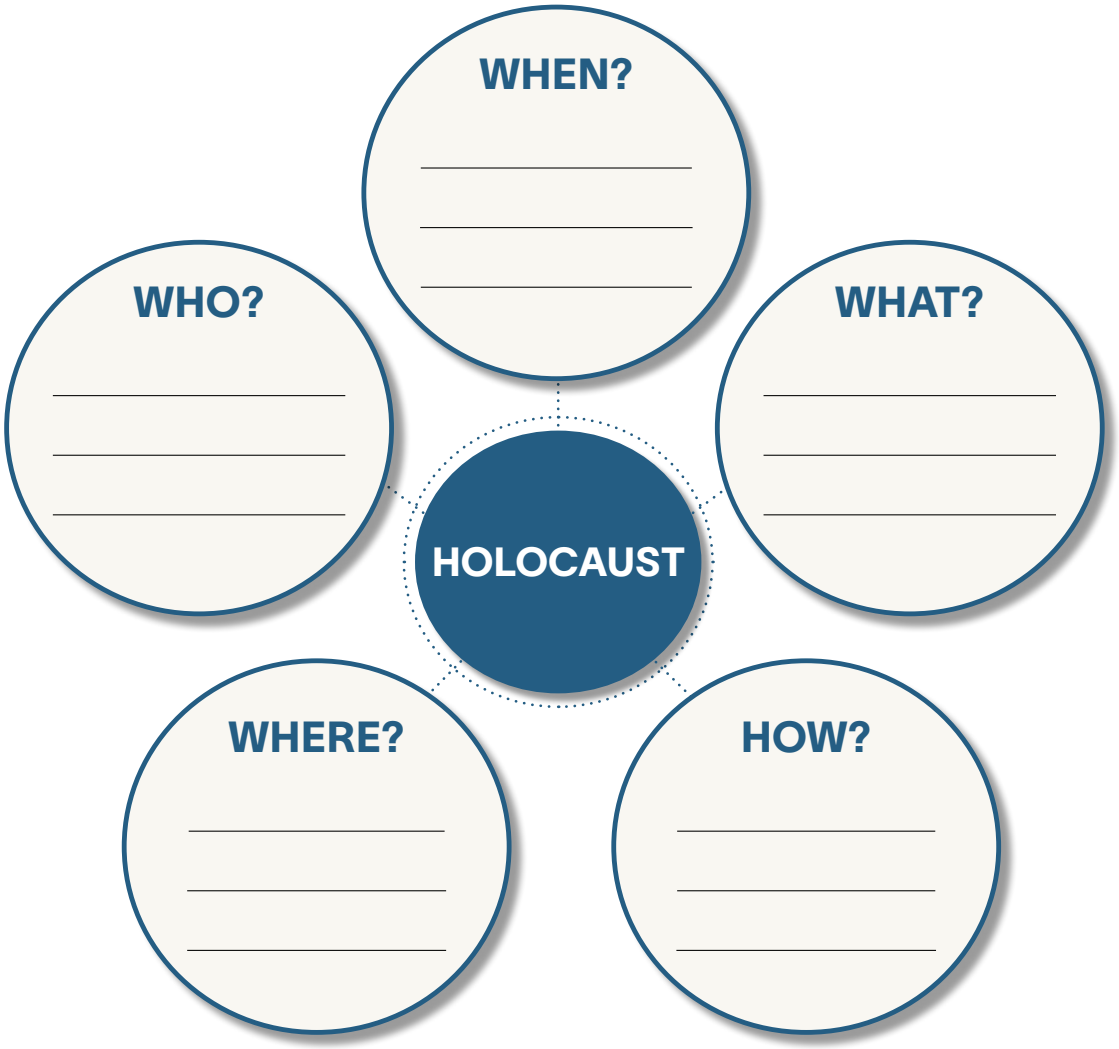
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PART 2 — Formulating a Definition of the Holocaust

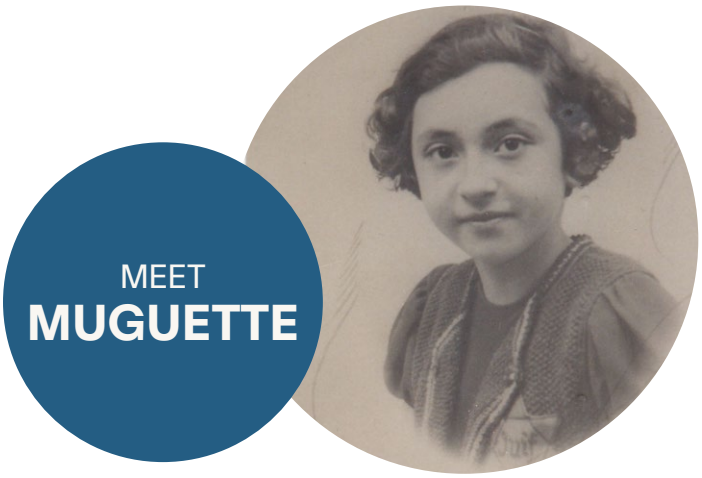
7. What do you know about the Holocaust? In the chart below, list the words that come to mind for each of the questions.



After discussing the Holocaust as a class, write down its definition in the space provided.

PART 3 — Reflecting on Muguette's Story

Read Muguette's biography and the historical background presented below.
Then answer questions 8, 9 and 10 on page 8.



Muguette wearing the yellow star. Paris, France, 1942.
© Azrieli Foundation, courtesy of Muguette Myers

BIOGRAPHY

Originally from Warsaw, Poland, Muguette's parents immigrated to France in the 1920s in the hopes of escaping **antisemitism**.

Muguette was born in 1931, and she spent her childhood in a happy home in Paris with her parents, Abraham and Bella, and her older brother, Joseph. After Muguette's father died in 1935, her mother had to support her and her brother, and she became the first foreign woman in France to obtain a worker's permit.

When World War II broke out in September 1939, Muguette was separated from her family and evacuated to the villages of Sens and Villeneuve-sur-Yonne with her schoolmates; her mother and Joseph found refuge in a small village called Champlost, in Burgundy. Muguette joined her family in Champlost, where they remained until the Germans invaded France in 1940.

Upon their return to Paris, Muguette's family experienced the rising discrimination and persecution of Jews, culminating in the Vél d'Hiv **roundup**, which she and her mother miraculously escaped. Fearing for Muguette's safety, her mother sent her to the village of Bois Mouchet and then to Champlost, where the family lived safely until the end of the war.

Muguette and her family immigrated to Montreal in November 1947.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

France is a country in Western Europe that had a Jewish population of approximately 330,000 individuals before the Holocaust.

Following the invasion of France by the German army in May 1940, the French defence collapsed and Marshal Pétain signed an armistice, under which the French government agreed to collaborate with the invading German army. The Germans occupied the northern part of France, called the occupied zone, and put in place many anti-Jewish policies. The southern part of France, called the Free Zone, was run by a new French government called Vichy that went along with German orders, and even created its own antisemitic policies that applied to the whole country.

Starting in 1941, French police helped arrest Jews, who were sent to transit camps and then deported to Nazi camps where most were killed. Many Jews tried to survive by hiding, by travelling across the demarcation line into the Free Zone or by joining the Resistance. Organizations and individuals — both Jewish and non-Jewish — also put their lives at risk to help them.

France was liberated by the Allies in the summer and fall of 1944. Approximately 77,000 Jews in France were killed during the Holocaust, including Muguette's aunt.

antisemitism: Prejudice, discrimination, persecution or hatred against Jewish people, institutions, culture and symbols.

roundup: A mass arrest of Jews who were then sent to do forced labour, deported to Nazi camps or killed.

8. What connections can you make between Muguette's story and the elements you see in the portrait by Adèle Blais?

9. Compare the original portrait to Adèle Blais' version. How does the addition of colours and collage elements change the way you perceive Muguette?



Muguette at around age 5. Paris, circa 1936.
Courtesy of the Montreal Holocaust Museum.

10. Based on what you have learned about Muguette's story, suggest a word and an image that you would add to the artist's portrait.
Write the word below and draw the image in the space provided.
Why do you think this word and this image are important? What do you think they would add to the portrait?

Drawing area:

LESSON 2

DISCOVERING AND VISUALIZING MUGUETTE'S MEMOIR

1. Read the text assigned to you.

2. In the appendix (page 19) are objects and images taken from the artwork. Select the ones that you think illustrate the text and write the numbers of those images in the right-hand side of the table.

3. If another image comes to mind, feel free to draw it or describe it in the same space.

1. Paris Before the War

Before the war, Paris was extraordinary, beautiful.

My mother used to take me to museums. And just walking in the streets of Paris, you know, I don't like walking in the rain but walking in the streets of Paris under the rain I love.

There was a market not far from where we lived, an outdoor market, and we used to go and buy all kinds of vegetables, and mostly flowers, my mother loved flowers.

And then we used to go, at night sometimes we used to walk over to the...there was the...it wasn't the Seine, it was a canal, and we used to walk down towards the canal and sit and sing.

[Interviewer] Just the two of you, you sang?

Just the two of us.

[Interviewer] What did you sing?

[Muguette sings]

Bercé par la houle	Rocked by the swell
Ah ! qu'il fait bon voguer !	Ah! How good it feels to sail!
Le temps qui s'écoule	The time that slips by
Nous semble plus léger	Seems lighter to us
Le long de la voile	Along the sail
Se pose une étoile.	A star settles.
Bercé par la houle,	Rocked by the swell,
Ah ! qu'il fait bon !	Ah! How good it feels!

Images selected

2. "Tristesse" (Sadness) (memoir, p. 20–21)

In September 1939, I was evacuated from Paris with my all-girls' school and some of the teachers. The French authorities feared that Paris would be bombarded and sent its children, and all adults who were willing to leave, away from the capital. I ended up in a small town called Sens, famous for its beautiful cathedral, about 125 kilometres southeast of Paris. In my group there were between seventy-five and a hundred children. We spent our days there hungry and miserable, in schoolyards, away from our parents, not knowing what would happen to us or where our parents were.

At night we slept on straw mattresses on the floor of the school's gymnasium. We were warned not to eat the pieces of blue bread that were lying on the floor, put there to kill the rats. One evening, we had some new arrivals. We went to bed that night like every other, crying into our mattresses. But that night, something different happened.

Suddenly, when it got dark, a most beautiful voice started singing:

Tout est fini,	All is finished,
Les fleurs des prés,	the flowers of the meadows
Se sont fanées.	have faded,
L'été se meurt...	summer is dying...

The voice soothed us and made us forget where we were. After she was finished singing, we heard another voice, which turned out to be that of her older sister's, say, "It's enough, Rachel!" As soon as we learned her name, we kept calling out loud, "Chante encore, Rachel!" (Sing again, Rachel!) and later, "Encore, Rachel!" Some nights, Rachel, a little girl my age, had to sing it three or four times. We never seemed to get enough of that song. Several weeks later, my mother found me and took me away. I never saw Rachel or her sister again.

Many years later, I came to know the song as "Tristesse" or Chopin's Étude, op. 10, no. 3. This piece of music holds a special place in my memory and in my heart.

Images selected

3. Discrimination in German-occupied Paris

Paris was full of German soldiers. They were wearing grey-green uniforms, we called it *les vert de gris*, and everywhere there were signs in German. Like in every street corner, especially where the opera was and the Arch of Triumph and all that, every sign was in German. It was disgusting, with the **swastika**.

I was scared being back and we were all, you know, we had to wear the **yellow star**. And I remember once being in the Metro with my mother, both wearing yellow stars, and some Germans were passing and I started trembling, okay, and my mother pinched me, don't tremble, don't show them that you're scared.

I remember being singled out, okay, that I had to wear the yellow star and...yeah, we did feel persecuted. Especially my grandmother was getting newspapers, still getting some Jewish newspaper, I don't know how they got it, and they were speaking about what's happening in Germany. So I associated all the Germans with Germany and I was afraid.

swastika: The official symbol of the Nazi Party.

yellow star: The yellow badge or armband with the Star of David on it that many Jews were forced to wear as a result of Nazi policies in German-occupied areas. It functioned as an identifying mark of their lesser status and to single them out as targets for persecution. The Star of David, a six-pointed star, is the most recognizable symbol of Judaism.

Images selected

4. An Honorary Citizen of Champlost

Champlost is a lovely little village. It's one kilometre long. It has a kilometre sign at the beginning, at the entrance of the village, and another one at the exit of the village. And there were houses all over, all along the main road, the main street, and the fields were in the back. Fields and vineyards and cherry trees and apple trees and the people were so lovely.

You see, we went back to Paris and everything was quiet but then we came back to Champlost and there was a story about that. Maman, my grandmother and my aunt were directed by the mayor to a beautiful home where there was another family staying. Now the home was the home of a retired sea captain, so he was getting elderly, and also the mayor told Maman, "You can take all the fruits and vegetables from the garden and everything to eat, but we'd like you, please — the gentleman should eat with you and make sure he takes his medication on time."

So Maman figured she has to do something to thank the old gentleman, so she asked the other lady from the other family, she says, "Let's clean up," because, you know, the old man, he really wasn't clean. So they started with the kitchen, and they started opening cupboards and drawers, and in one cupboard they found a chest. So they opened the chest, and in there there were valuable, there were jewellery and old money and all kinds of artifacts that the old man had brought back from his sea voyages.

So the other lady said to Maman, "We are rich!" Maman said, "What do you mean we are rich, does it belong to us?" But the other lady said, "But he'll never know, he doesn't know." Maman wouldn't want anything about that, so she asked my grandmother to stand guard by the chest to make sure the other lady.... So she went to fetch the priest and the mayor. The priest wasn't there but the mayor came. Now in Champlost, everybody is cousins, they all...their name is Delagneau, everybody is Delagneau. Some of them were married but their maiden names were Delagneau. So the mayor came and he was a cousin of the old man, so he took the chest for safekeeping and he told my mother, "Please consider yourself an honorary citizen of Champlost, and if ever you need us, come back."

Images selected

5. My Religious Education (memoir, p. 58–60)

Growing up in Champlost, a Catholic village, we of course celebrated Christmas. We went to midnight mass at 8:00 p.m. in order to save electricity and to morning mass on Christmas day. However, the gifts were given out not at Christmas but on New Year's Day. That day, we children went from farm to farm not only to wish the farmers a Happy New Year but also to collect presents. We knocked at the door and when it was opened we said in unison, "Je vous souhaite une bonne année, une bonne santé et le paradis à la fin de vos jours." (I wish you a Happy New Year, good health and paradise at the end of your days.) The good farmers wished us the same and always gave us either a few francs or some toys they had. That occupied us for most of New Year's Day because there were about forty houses in the village.

In case of an inspection by the Germans, I was sent to church and to **catechism**, in order to be like the other children. I loved those lessons, which really spoke to a child's imagination: a baby born in a manger, the wise men, the shepherds. It was like a fairy tale and I rapidly became the best in my catechism class of six girls. And on Sundays at mass, the priest l'Abbé Tallard, a saintly man, read my name out loud as being first in catechism.

When we first arrived back in Champlost, Monsieur l'Abbé came to visit Maman. He suggested that we change our last name (the very foreign and very Jewish-sounding Szpajzer) and he gave us new names under which we were inscribed in his registers and in the town hall's. Maman's first name, Bella, became our family name. He gave Maman a new first name: Isabelle. He said that Muguette was not a saint's name, and since he had no little Marie in his catechism class, I became Marie Bella. He had no problem with my brother's name, which is Joseph. I was as proud as a peacock when on Sundays he announced from the pulpit, "First in catechism, Marie Bella."

The priest came to our house quite often because Maman, a seamstress, often had to repair his threadbare cassocks. He sat and made conversation. Maman, self-taught, was a very knowledgeable lady and quite a conversationalist. Whenever he came, he asked Maman the same sempiternal question: "Alors Madame Bella, quand est-ce qu'on la baptise votre

Images selected

petite Marie?" (Madame Bella, when are we going to **baptize** Marie?) "All her friends in catechism will soon be doing their First **Communion**, and if Marie is not baptized she won't be able to do it with them." He then proceeded to tell Maman that people in Champlost were ready to donate the complete outfit — dress, veil, shoes, rosary, white prayer book — for me to be received in style to the bosom of the Catholic Church.

Maman, knowing she was indebted to Champlost for hiding us, didn't know how to refuse. She really didn't want us to lose our deeply-held Jewish identity, even though we were not observant.

But Maman also had to contend with me. I wanted to be baptized. Now that I think about it, I realize that it was mostly not to be different from all my friends.

catechism: A summary of Christian doctrine that is presented in a question-and-answer format and used to teach the principles of the faith.

baptize: To perform the religious ritual of baptism, which symbolizes acceptance into the Christian church. The ritual involves immersion in water or sprinkling a few drops of water on the forehead.

Communion: Also called Holy Communion or Eucharist. The ritual that takes place at the end of the Christian Mass when the faithful commemorate the Last Supper of Christ by consuming consecrated bread and wine. In the Catholic tradition, a child receives communion for the first time at seven or eight years old, during a special ceremony called the "First Communion."

Images selected

6. "La Marseillaise" (memoir, p. 85–86)

Madame Bérault had taught us the seven verses of the French national anthem, "**La Marseillaise**." During the occupation, it was forbidden to sing French patriotic songs. The Germans had been everywhere, often coming to our little village to inspect the livestock, and Madame Bérault knew how children's voices carried when raised in song. No one was bold enough to defy Nazi rules, although a great many Frenchmen did so surreptitiously.

The school year wasn't over when our village was liberated in July 1944, but no one attended on liberation day. We were busy waving at the American soldiers passing in their trucks. It was a holiday for which we had been waiting for five years.

The next day, school resumed as usual. Toward the end of the afternoon Madame Bérault left the room to go to her house, which was simply separated from the school by a glass-topped door. She came back a few minutes later, carrying a big box that she put on her desk. She then opened the box to reveal an old-fashioned phonograph. There was a record already on the turntable. She bade us rise, cranked the handle and lowered it onto the record. The voice of one of France's leading tenors, Georges Thill, singing "La Marseillaise" filled the classroom. We all started singing along. Then I happened to glance at Madame Bérault. She was standing immobile by her desk on the elevated platform, her eyes raised to the ceiling with a look of such emotion on her face that, one by one, we girls fell silent. So magnificent was the tenor's voice that we stood there, holding our breaths.

"**La Marseillaise**": The French national anthem, originally written in April 1792 by Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle, an army engineer, as a marching song during the French Revolution. "La Marseillaise" was adopted as the national anthem in 1879.

Images selected

7. Childhood Memories (memoir, p. 105)

There are villages that interest no one,
Villages lost in the French countryside,
Humble little villages in Burgundy or in Corrèze,
Surrounded by apple orchards
And crowned by vineyards.

I lived in one of those quiet villages
While a storm was overtaking the world.
A mindful little girl, I memorized
The insightful words of a wise farmer.

He said that men are all equal.
He spoke of beauty, of justice and of love
While in a world gone wild, night and day
Men were fighting from the Ural Mountains to the Atlantic shores.

He made me read *Les Oberlé* by **René Bazin**.
He whispered to me about his hero **de Lattre**
When we sat at night by the fireplace
After my lessons were studied and recited word-perfect.

He gave me a taste for freedom
We listened secretly to the British radio
The personal messages made him happy:
He was a **resistant**, and some were meant for him.

He died without descendants, this old Burgundian farmer
But his memory and his example
Will live forever in our faithful hearts,
Never to be forgotten.

Images selected

Bazin, René (1853–1932): A French law professor and author. His most well-known novel, *Les Oberlé* (1901), describes a family affected by Germany's annexation in 1871 of parts of the French regions of Alsace and Lorraine after the Franco-Prussian War.

de Lattre de Tassigny, Jean (1889–1952): A French general who fought in both World War I and World War II. After the French defeat in 1940, he remained under the command of the Vichy regime but opposed the German invasion of the Free Zone in November 1942. Arrested and sentenced to ten years in prison, he escaped and pledged allegiance to General de Gaulle, the leader of the Free French Forces. He took command of French troops during the landing in Provence and participated in the liberation of Europe. After the war, he helped to modernize the French army and, from 1950 to 1952, he led French forces during the Indochina War, a conflict over the independence of Indochina, which had been colonized by France in the late 19th century.

resistant: A member of the French Resistance, a collective term for the movement that opposed the German occupation and French collaborating regime during World War II. The Resistance published underground newspapers, helped Allied prisoners-of-war escape, sabotaged German war equipment and created intelligence networks that gathered military information in order to gain armament support from Britain. Some groups within the movement were involved in rescuing Jews.

REFLECTION



4. This activity has helped you get to know Muguette through different mediums, particularly literature and art. In your own words, retell Muguette's story, highlighting or explaining the moments you consider most important.

5. What is something you know now about the Holocaust that you didn't know before learning about Muguette's life?

6. At the end of this activity, what emotions are you feeling?

APPENDIX

Here are some of the elements — photographs, objects, text and artifacts — that the artist Adèle Blais used to create the collage in Muguette's portrait.


1
Muguette at age 5


2
Muguette at age 10


3
Muguette's parents



4
A heart that says "heart" and "the perfect blood purifier"


5
Yellow flowers


6
A dove


7
A teardrop-shaped diamond


8
A butterfly


9
Madame Bérault, Muguette's teacher



10
A yellow star that says *Juif* (Jew)


11
Joseph, Muguette's brother



12
The phrase *Liberté et Fraternité* (liberty and fraternity)


13
Musical notes on a sheet of music


14
A country house


15
A cherub's head with wings on either side


16
The faces of a mother and her baby


17
A rooster and a hen


18
A sun



19
The word *Survivante* (survivor)


20
A fairy with butterfly wings


21
Two planes flying over a map of France



22
The phrase *trouver refuge dans un village accueillant* (finding refuge in a welcoming village)

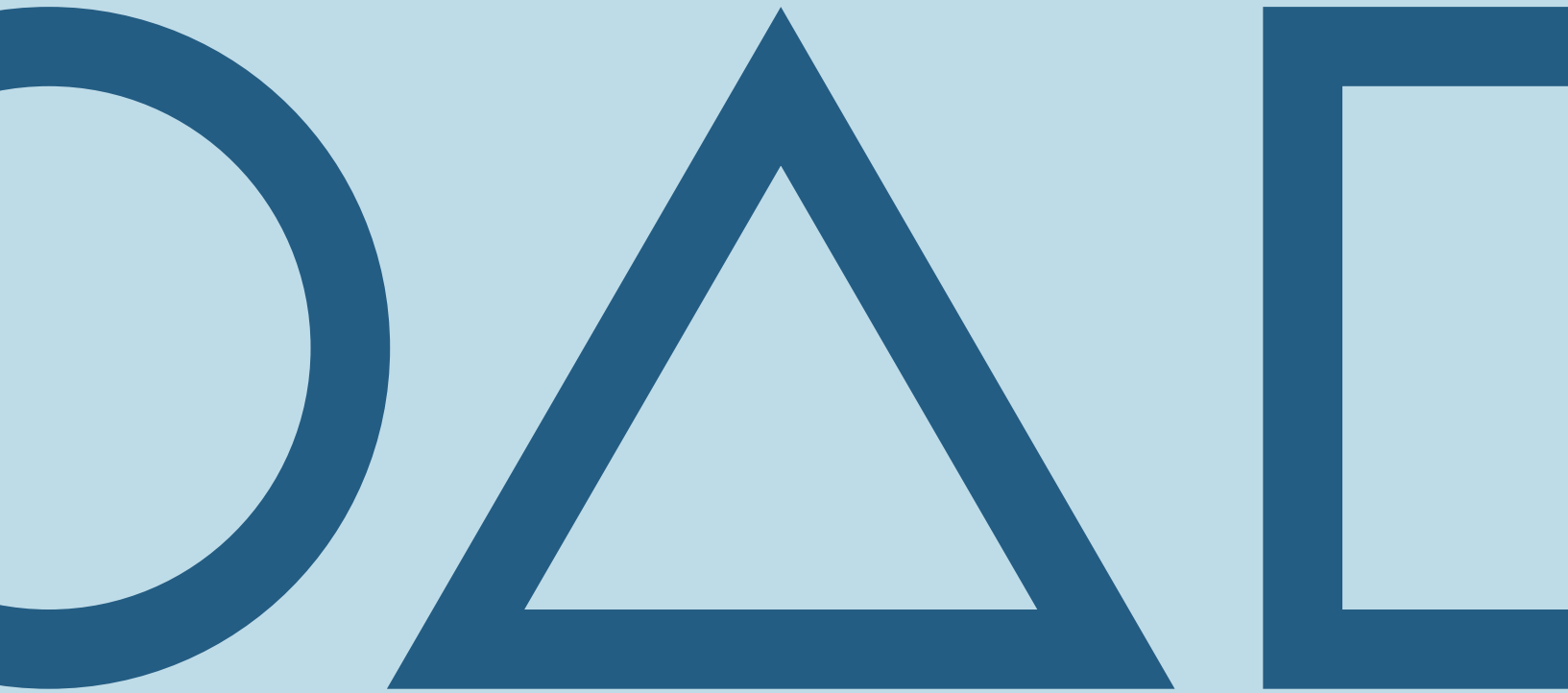

23
The Yiddish word פרייד (joy)


24
Two stars


25
A bouquet of flowers


26
A teddy bear


27
The Eiffel Tower



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