Teacher's Guide

When Art Animates Memory

Exploring Muguette Myers' Story Through the Arts



Fondation Azrieli Foundation

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

11+ Education Activity

memoirs.azrielifoundation.org

Acknowledgements

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A BRIEF HISTORY
OF THE JEWS OF FRANCE DURING THE HOLOCAUST[1]

The last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first three of the twentieth were a period of large-scale immigration that changed the demographic nature of France. By the end of the 1930s, there were 2,453,000 newcomers, and about 110,000 of those were Jewish immigrants who arrived in Paris between 1880 and 1939, nearly three times the number of Jewish people already living in that city in 1880.

During the relatively prosperous 1920s, when Muguette Szpajzer-Myers' parents arrived from Poland, anti-immigrant and anti-Jewish sentiment in France was minimal. But during the years of economic depression, unemployment, dramatic political change and growing fear of Hitler's Third Reich in the 1930s, popular attitudes shifted.

Measures against foreigners and Jews in France had begun well before the German defeat of France in 1940. Immediately following the declaration of war on the Germans in September 1939, French police began rounding up "enemy aliens," mostly Jewish and non-Jewish immigrant men from Germany and Austria under the age of fifty, and confined them in internment camps.

After the signing of the Franco-German armistice on June 22, 1940, which split the country into an occupied zone controlled by Germany and an unoccupied (free) zone under a new French government in Vichy, the first specific anti-Jewish decrees soon followed. While these were issued by the Germans in the occupied zone, the new Vichy regime, led by Marshal Pétain, quickly followed the German example.

During the winter of 1941 to 1942, large-scale arrests of Jews began in Paris and other cities in the occupied zone. Muguette remembers the roundup that almost claimed her and her mother, the first in Paris to include Jewish women and children. At 4:00 a.m. on the morning of July 16, 1942, about 4,500 French policemen armed with lists began knocking on Jewish immigrants' doors. By the time the roundup ceased the next day, police had arrested 12,884 people and confined them at Drancy or in the Vélodrome d'Hiver in Paris. By the end of August, most of the 12,884 and several thousand others seized elsewhere in the occupied zone had been deported to Auschwitz under the most appalling conditions, with children often separated from their parents. At Auschwitz, most were murdered in the gas chambers. By the time of the liberation of most of France in the summer and autumn of 1944, at least 75,721 Jews had been deported, mostly to Auschwitz, from a population in 1940 of about 330,000. About 2,800 of those deported survived.

[1] This historical summary was adapted from the introduction to Muguette Myers' memoir, written by Susan Zuccotti, a professor of history. You can read the introduction in its entirety on pages xv through xxv in *Where Courage Lives*.

Under those circumstances, how is it that Muguette, her brother, her mother and her paternal grandmother survived? Part of the answer lies in the technical details of the Holocaust in France. Until the last months, arrests were usually conducted by Vichy police carrying lists. Those lucky enough to not be listed, or to be away from home when the police came, became aware of the danger and had an opportunity to escape.

The primary explanation for survival, however, focuses on the attitudes of the French people in the villages that took in Jews. In Muguette's case, she declares that everyone in Champlost knew she and her mother and brother were Jewish, but no one cared.

There are, of course, other factors in survival. All survivors admit that they were extraordinarily lucky. And, in all cases, survival required immense courage, flexibility and adaptability.

Muguette's memoir is a tribute to courage. But in the final analysis, the courage was her own.

CLASSROOM INSTRUCTIONS

LENGTH
2 class periods (60–75 minutes each)

AGE APPROPRIATENESS
11+

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
- Understand an artist's creative process and develop critical thinking through the exploration of a work of art.
- Gain knowledge about the Holocaust and develop historical empathy by learning about the experiences of Muguette Myers, who survived the war in hiding.

MATERIALS NEEDED
There are two options for completing this educational activity:
- The digital option involves using a mobile app to explore a work of art and accessing our digital resource Re:Collection to learn about Muguette Myers' story.
- The print option provides all the necessary materials directly in the **Student Workbook**.

Digital Option	Print Option
• **Student Workbook — Digital Option**, either printed or in a digital format • Internet-enabled mobile devices and computers • Adèle Blais' Painting History app ⚠ Requires 2.01 GB of storage • Headphones	• **Student Workbook — Print Option**, either printed or in a digital format • Optional: Internet-enabled computer, as well as a projector and screen for the teacher to display the portrait of Muguette Myers and Re:Collection

PREPARATION



Before teaching about the Holocaust, it is important to reflect on your current level of knowledge, and on your teaching goals and methods. To help you do this, we have created a guide titled The First Step: A Guide for Educators Preparing to Teach About the Holocaust. As you move through the material and short activities in The First Step, you will become familiar with the core content of the Holocaust, reflect on your learning objectives and consider best practices in how to bring this topic into your classroom. We encourage you to explore this guide before beginning the Education Activity with your students.

When addressing a topic as complex and sensitive as the Holocaust, it is important to adopt a trauma-informed approach to best support your students. To help you prepare, we recommend reading our article "Trauma-Informed Teaching and the Holocaust."

ACCOMMODATIONS



- All of the accompanying materials, including PDFs and videos, are compliant with current accessibility standards.
- Consider distributing the **Student Workbook** prior to the in-class lesson to students who require additional time for reading or processing.
- For Lesson 2: Discovering and Visualizing Muguette's Memoir, we recommend assigning the memoir excerpts (options 2, 5, 6 and 7 in the **Student Workbook**) and the videos on Re:Collection (1, 3 and 4 in the **Student Workbook**) to students based on their abilities and interests. Option 7 is also available on Re:Collection in an audio format, read by Muguette.

EXTENSIONS



- Have students read the entirety of Muguette's memoir, *Where Courage Lives*.
- Ask students to create their own portrait of Muguette in the style of collage artist Adèle Blais. The photo used as the basis for the artist's work can be found in the appendix to this guide, on page 12.
- Invite students to explore other portraits of women on Adèle Blais' app, Painting History.
- Have students listen to the musical pieces mentioned by Muguette in the memoir excerpts and videos from Lesson 2:
  - "Bercé par la houle" by Reda Caire
  - "Tristesse" by Felia Litvinne, set to the music of Chopin's Étude, op. 10, no. 3, performed by Germaine Lubin
  - "La Marseillaise" by Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle, performed by Georges Thill
- Explore Literature, an educational activity designed by Professor Audrey Bélanger, available through the online teaching resource Studying Genocides. This activity invites students to understand the process of genocide by weaving together historical context with the perspectives of witnesses or literary characters. This encourages a meaningful understanding of the past through an emotional connection and allows students to reflect on their responsibility to prevent and combat intolerance and discrimination.

LESSON 1
EXPLORING A WORK OF ART

LENGTH
1 class period (60–75 minutes)

MATERIALS NEEDED

Digital Option	Print Option
• **Student Workbook — Digital Option**, Lesson 1: Exploring a Work of Art, either printed or in a digital format • Mobile device with access to Adèle Blais' Painting History app ⚠ Requires 2.01 GB of storage • Headphones	• **Student Workbook — Print Option**, Lesson 1: Exploring a Work of Art, either printed or in a digital format • Optional: Internet-enabled computer, as well as a projector and screen for the teacher to display Muguette's portrait

INSTRUCTIONS

PART 1 — MUGUETTE'S PORTRAIT



The artist Adèle Blais in her studio. Sherbrooke, Quebec, 2025.
© Sofia Villeneuve

STEP 1

Introduce the painter and collage artist Adèle Blais.
A Quebec-based painter and collage artist with nearly twenty years of experience, Adèle Blais employs her own unique creative technique, primarily using acrylic paint and various collage materials. Mainly depicting female subjects, the artist focuses her work on issues of gender equality and seeks to restore women's contributions to history by bringing lesser-known stories to light.[2]

STEP 2

Explain to your students that they will be learning about the story of a Holocaust survivor, Muguette Myers, by exploring a work of art.

[2] Translated from the biography on Adèle Blais' website.

STEP 3

Students will explore Muguette's portrait.

Digital Option	Print Option
Students will explore the portrait on a mobile device with Adèle Blais' Painting History app. **Note:** For this first step, remind your students to put their mobile devices on silent mode.	Students will explore the portrait on page 2 of the **Student Workbook**. **TEACHING TIP** Project the portrait on the board, so that students can immerse themselves in the artwork.

Encourage students to first observe the work in silence.

STEP 4

Have students answer questions 1 to 6 in Lesson 1 in the **Student Workbook**. This task may be completed through discussion or in writing.

TEACHING TIP

In the appendix to this guide, on page 10, you will find prompts to help guide your students as they analyze the portrait.

PART 2 — FORMULATING A DEFINITION OF THE HOLOCAUST

STEP 1

Have students answer question 7 in Lesson 1.

Note: This step can also be completed by drawing the chart on the board and answering each question as a class.

STEP 2

After students have had an opportunity to complete the chart, **offer a clear definition of the Holocaust**. Ensure this definition is appropriate for their age group.

TEACHING TIP

To formulate an appropriate definition of your own, refer to our teaching tool The First Step. You will also find our suggested definition in the appendix to this **guide**, on page 11. Note that the answers to the questions in the chart are also highlighted in bold there.

PART 3 — REFLECTING ON MUGUETTE'S STORY

STEP 1

Students will learn about Muguette's childhood and survival in the context of the Holocaust in France.

Digital Option	Print Option
Individually or in pairs, students will listen to Muguette's story on Adèle Blais' Painting History app. **Note:** Remind your students to unmute their devices and plug in their headphones before clicking on the portrait.	In groups of two or three, students will read the biography and the historical context found on page 7 of the **Student Workbook**.

After listening to or reading about Muguette's story, encourage students to first reflect on what they've learned in silence.

STEP 2

Students will analyze the portrait of Muguette by **answering questions 8 through 10** in Lesson 1 in the **Student Workbook**.

TEACHING TIP

In the appendix to this guide, on page 11, you will find some prompts to help guide your students as they analyze the portrait.

LESSON 2

DISCOVERING AND VISUALIZING MUGUETTE'S MEMOIR

LENGTH

1 class period (60–75 minutes)

MATERIALS NEEDED

Digital Option	Print Option
• **Student Workbook — Digital Option** Lesson 2: Discovering and Visualizing Muguette's Memoir, either printed or in a digital format • Internet-enabled devices or computers • Headphones	• **Student Workbook — Print Option** Lesson 2: Discovering and Visualizing Muguette's Memoir, either printed or in a digital format • Optional: Internet-enabled computer, as well as a projector and screen for the teacher to display the digital resource Re:Collection

INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1

In partners or independently, students will read an excerpt from the memoir, watch a video interview with Muguette or listen to an audio clip of Muguette reading a poem.

Digital Option	Print Option
Using a mobile device or computer, students will access the digital resource Re:Collection to explore the memoir excerpts, videos and audio clip.	Students will read excerpts from Muguette's memoir and transcripts of the video interviews, available in the **Student Workbook**.

TEACHING TIP

Since the excerpts vary in format (audio, video or text), length and content, we suggest assigning them to your students based on their interests and diverse abilities.

Consider sharing the videos and audio excerpt from Re:Collection with the class by projecting them onto the board.

Once you've entered Re:Collection, click "Survivors" and select Muguette Myers' name. Then click on the circles with the following titles:

- Paris Before the War (video, number 1 in the table in the **Student Workbook**)
- Discrimination in German-occupied Paris (video, number 3 in the table)
- An Honorary Citizen of Champlost (video, number 4 in the table)
- Childhood Memories (this memoir excerpt, number 7 in the table, has an audio option)

STEP 2

Students will fill out the right-hand side of the table in the **Student Workbook** and share their responses in small groups or as a class.

STEP 3

Set aside five to ten minutes at the end of the class period **for students to answer questions 4 to 6** in Lesson 2.

Note:
These questions will give your students the opportunity to emotionally come out of the content before they move on to another subject or period at school.

APPENDIX

PROMPTS FOR LESSON 1

• QUESTIONS 1 THROUGH 6:

Here are some prompts related to Adèle Blais' creative process to help guide your students in their analysis of the portrait.

THE USE OF CERTAIN IMAGES AS SYMBOLS:

- birds to represent freedom
- butterflies for metamorphosis
- flowers for emotions and ideas
- angels for protection
- mushrooms for invisible but essential connections to the cycle of life



Muguette Myers: A story of hope by Adèle Blais

THE ARTIST'S INTENTION is indicated by the word *Survivante* (survivor) on the philtrum (the dimple below the nose). The philtrum is also known as the "angel's finger" by poets.

MUGUETTE'S NARRATIVE IS VISUALLY REPRESENTED BY:

- phrases taken from the memoir or inspired by her story:
  - *Les Lieux du courage* (the French title of the memoir, *Where Courage Lives*) on the side of Muguette's nose
  - *trouver refuge dans un village accueillant* (finding refuge in a welcoming village) near her ear
  - *femme courageuse et fort dégourdie* (courageous and very resourceful woman) alongside the photo of her parents
  - *peuple juif* (Jewish people) a little further down
  - *Grande Dame* (great woman) under the photo of Madame Bérault
  - *Liberté et Fraternité* (liberty and fraternity) on the roof of the house
- words in Yiddish:
  - the word פֿרייד (joy) in the teardrop at the corner of her right eye
  - the word וּפּאָה (hope) whispered by the angel into her father's ear
  - the phrase זראַה סדניק (child's heart) in the lower right corner
- photos of family and friends:
  - her parents, Abraham and Bella
  - her brother, Joseph
  - her teacher, Madame Bérault
- images illustrating her journey:
  - a map
  - the yellow star
  - life in the countryside
  - the orange cat

A PALETTE OF COMPLEMENTARY COLOURS TO REPRESENT CONTRAST AND HARMONY:

- pink, evoking childhood, tenderness and love
- green and turquoise (a mineral colour with protective properties), symbolizing purity in ancient times
- yellow, representing light
- touches of neon pink, evoking the contrast between challenges and sweetness, the opposition between the past and the future and the balance between vulnerability and strength

• QUESTION 7

A definition of the Holocaust

The Holocaust refers to **Nazi Germany's attempt to systematically annihilate the Jewish population of Europe**. **Adolf Hitler**, leader of the **Nazi Party**, saw Jews as the primary enemy of the "Aryan" race and believed that Germany would become powerful only by ridding itself of Jews. Starting in **1933**, Nazi Germany took measures to humiliate, isolate and persecute Jews. The Nazis also targeted **other groups** in Germany, including Roma and Sinti, people with disabilities, Jehovah's Witnesses, Afro-Germans, political opponents, and gay men, lesbians and trans people. With the outbreak of World War II in **September 1939**, Nazi policies and violence extended to each **country occupied by or allied with Germany** and eventually reached parts of North Africa. During the war, the Nazis and their **collaborators** began **killing Jews** and other target groups. By the time World War II ended in **1945**, six million Jews had been murdered in the Holocaust.

• QUESTION 8

Students can make connections between various elements of the portrait and parts of Muguette's story:

- Muguette and her family:
  - the photos of Muguette at age 5 and age 10
  - the photos of her parents and brother
  - the words written in Yiddish
  - the hearts that illustrate her love for her mother
- antisemitism and the antisemitic policies implemented by the Nazis:
  - the yellow star
- their refuge and life in hiding at Bois-Mouchet and later in Champlost:
  - the photo of the house
  - the cows
  - the flowers
  - the birds and butterflies, illustrating the peaceful life in the village
  - the photo of Madame Bérault, Muguette's teacher in Champlost

• QUESTIONS 9 AND 10

- The original black-and-white photograph of Muguette was taken in 1936 at a photographer's studio in Paris, when she was 5 years old.
- Students may note that the collage and the colour add more detail, information and emotion to the portrait.
- Students might choose images related to the war, the Nazis or the persecution of Jews, or images highlighting the important role played by Muguette's mother and the people of Champlost.
- These questions allow students to reflect on the artistic choices made by Adèle Blais and on the message she is hoping to convey. Here is how Adèle describes her work:

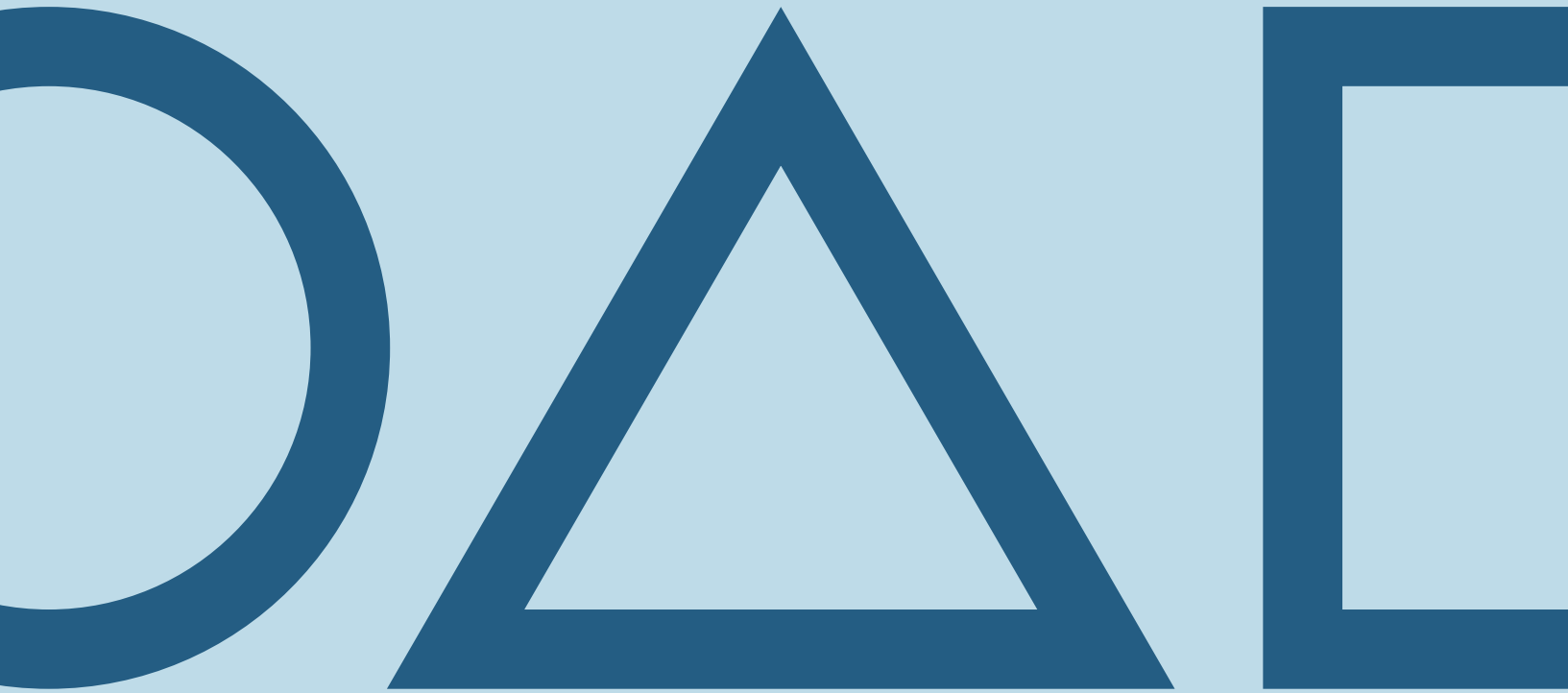
  "My work is one of transmission and reparation. It's a gathering of impressions, research, and fragments that evoke the presence and story of the woman I portray. After long and meticulous historical research, every element within the composition is carefully placed to honor her life and legacy. The intention I breathe into the piece is revealed through a single word, delicately positioned at the level of the philtrum, or as poetic legend calls it, the mark of the Angel's finger. To create, I step into a space without borders or ownership, and I put myself humbly at the service of the feminine thread of History. With these portraits of forgotten human beings, I hope to invite others to open their hearts and surrender without fear to the encounter with this foundational part of our past that was never told to them."[3]

[3] Taken from Adèle Blais' website.



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

We appreciate your feedback — please share your thoughts via memoirs@azrielifoundation.org to help us build better resources for educators.



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