Dear Art Educator,

One of the most interesting challenges for artists is to confront history and the memory of atrocity in their work. As a medium, art offers both possibility and pitfall for this type of exploration. Art transcends the barriers of language, allowing for deeper and more evocative encounters with history. Yet the absence of these boundaries increases the chance that the work—and the history—will be misunderstood.

British ceramicist Jenny Stolzenberg is one artist who has bravely undertaken the role of confronting the history and memory of genocide in her work. Stolzenberg focuses on the Holocaust, more specifically on the shoes of the victims. Her impressive ceramic work seeks to return identity and individuality to those murdered, the very qualities the Nazis tried to destroy.

The exhibit Shoes of Memory: Holocaust Ceramics of Jenny Stolzenberg offers students a chance to study her work and to examine the issues of representation, identity and atrocity in art.

This resource package can be used as a tool to prepare your students for their visit to this exhibit. The package is divided into three sections:

I. Pre-Visit Information and Activities
II. Post-Visit Activities
III. Additional Teaching Resources
The Holocaust is the term now given to the Nazi-led genocide of European Jewry. Between 1933 and 1945, Nazi anti-Jewish policy escalated from the removal of legal rights and confiscation of property to physical isolation and, ultimately, mass murder. Other groups were also victimized by the Nazis—including Gypsies (Roma and Sinti), the handicapped and homosexuals—but only the Jews were to be completely annihilated. By the end of World War II, nearly six million Jews had perished in the Holocaust, many in extermination camps, centres designed for the singular purpose of murder.

Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party came to power in January 1933. It did not take long for them to begin their assault on the Jews of Germany. The persecution began with antisemitic legislation, which included the expulsion of Jews from professions, the elimination of citizenship for Jews under the notorious Nuremberg Laws, and the forbiddance of Jews entering public spaces. Jews’ property and wealth were confiscated—a process known as Aryanization—while the Nazis pursued a policy of making their land “Judenfrei”—free of Jews. Sadly, the doors to escape were not open to Jews as countries around the world, including Canada and the United States, denied entry to people considered “ethnically undesirable”.

The policy of making its land “Judenfrei” conflicted with Nazi Germany’s expansionist war aims. More territory gained meant millions of more Jews under Nazi control. While the Nazis decided how to solve their “Jewish Question”, they established ghettos in which to hold millions of Jews. The majority of the 400 ghettos were in Eastern Europe and were characterized by disease, overcrowding and starvation. The ghettos became deportation centres for Jews to concentration camps and extermination camps.

The first Nazi concentration camps had opened in the 1930s as prisons for political opponents of the regime. Eventually the system grew to encompass over 1800 camps, most classified as forced labour camps or transit camps. By late 1941, a new type of camp had emerged: an extermination camp. The extermination camp offered the Nazis a more efficient method of murdering Jews than the previous policy of using mobile shooting squads. It was at this point during the Holocaust that the Final Solution came into effect: the plan to kill all the Jews of Europe.

In total, six extermination camps were built for the task of annihilating the Jews. The extermination camps relied on a very orderly system in which Jews would arrive at the camps and be herded into gas chambers designed to look like showers. Jews not immediately selected for death would be forced to work in the camp, labouring in horrid conditions until they died or were murdered.

Of the nearly six million Jews murdered by the Nazis, over one million were children. To this day, the Holocaust remains a testament to the dangers of bigotry and racism and raises troubling questions about civilization and human nature.
**Timeline of the Holocaust, 1933–1945**

**1933**

**January 30**
Adolf Hitler appointed Chancellor of Germany.

**March 20**
Dachau concentration camp opens.

**April 1**
Boycott of Jewish shops and businesses.

**April 7**
Laws for re-establishment of the Civil Service bar Jews from holding civil service, university and state positions.

**April 26**
Gestapo established.

**May 10**
Public burning of books written by Jews, political opponents of the Nazis, and others.

**July 14**
Law passes permitting the forced sterilization of Gypsies, the mentally and physically disabled, African-Germans and others considered "unfit." East European Jewish immigrants stripped of German citizenship.

**1934**

**August 2**
Hitler proclaims himself Führer und Reichskanzler (Leader and Reich Chancellor). Armed Forces must now swear allegiance to him.

**October – November**
First major wave of arrests of homosexuals.

**1935**

**March 17**
Hitler’s army invades the Rhineland.

**April**
Jehovah’s Witnesses banned from all civil service jobs and are arrested.

**September 15**
"Nuremberg Laws," anti-Jewish racial laws enacted; Jews lose the right to German citizenship and to marry Aryans.
1936
SUMMER
Olympic Games take place in Berlin. Anti-Jewish signs temporarily removed.

JULY 12
First German Gypsies arrested and deported to Dachau concentration camp.

OCTOBER 25
Mussolini and Hitler form Rome-Berlin Axis.

1937
JULY 15
Buchenwald concentration camp opens near Weimar.

1938
MARCH 13
Austria is peacefully annexed (Anschluss) by Germany. All anti-Semitic decrees immediately apply in Austria.

JULY 6 – 15
Representatives from thirty-two countries meet at the Evian Conference in France. Most countries refuse to let in more Jewish refugees.

NOVEMBER 9 – 10
Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass): anti-Jewish pogrom in Germany and Austria; synagogues destroyed; Jewish homes and shops looted; nearly 30,000 Jewish men sent to concentration camps.

NOVEMBER 12
Decree forces all Jews to transfer retail businesses into Aryan hands.

NOVEMBER 15
All Jewish pupils expelled from German schools.

DECEMBER 2 – 3
All Gypsies required to register with the police.

1939
MARCH 15
Germans invade Czechoslovakia.

AUGUST 23
Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed: non-aggression pact between Soviet Union and Germany.
June 1939
Cuba, the United States and Canada refuse to admit Jewish refugees aboard the S.S. St. Louis, which is forced to return to Europe.

September 1
Germany invades Poland; World War II begins.

September 10
Canada declares war on Germany.

October
Hitler extends power of doctors to kill institutionalized mentally and physically disabled people in the "euthanasia" program.

October 12
Germany begins deportation of Austrian and Czech Jews to Poland.

October 28
First Polish ghetto established in Piotrków.

November 23
Jews in German-occupied Poland forced to wear an arm band or yellow star.

1940
Spring
Germany invades Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, Holland and France.

May 7
Lodz Ghetto sealed. No movement allowed in or out of the ghetto.

May 20
Auschwitz concentration camp established at Oswiecim, Poland.

August 8
Battle of Britain begins.

September 27
Italy, Germany and Japan form an alliance called the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis.

October
Warsaw Ghetto established: ultimately contained 500,000 people.

1941
March 22
Gypsy and African-German children are expelled from schools in the Reich.

March 24
Germany invades North Africa.
April 6
Germany invades Yugoslavia and Greece.

June 22
Germany invades the Soviet Union. The Einsatzgruppen, mobile killing squads, begin mass murders of Jews, Gypsies and Communist leaders.

July 31
Heydrich is charged with organizing the "Final Solution."

September 23
Soviet prisoners of war and Polish prisoners killed in Nazi test of gas chambers in Auschwitz.

September 28 – 29
Approximately 34,000 Jews murdered by mobile killing squads, at Babi Yar near Kiev, Ukraine.

October
Establishment of Auschwitz II (Birkenau) for the extermination of Jews, Gypsies, Poles, Russians and others. In related measure, Germany bans all Jewish emigration.

December 7
Japan attacks Pearl Harbour.

December 8
Gassing begins at Chelmno extermination camp in Poland.

December 11
United States declares war on Japan and Germany.

1942
Nazi extermination camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec and Majdanek-Lublin begin the mass murder of Jews in gas chambers.

January 20
Wannsee Conference in Berlin; fifteen Nazi leaders met to discuss "the Final Solution," the plan to exterminate the Jews of Europe.

June
Jewish partisan units established in the forests of Belorussia and the Baltic States.

June 1
Jews in France and Holland required to wear identifying stars.
1943

**January**
German 6th Army surrenders at Stalingrad.

**April 19 – May 16**
Warsaw Ghetto uprising; Jewish armed resistance to being deported to extermination camps.

**June**
Himmler orders the liquidation of all ghettos in Poland and the Soviet Union.

**Summer**
Armed resistance by Jews in Treblinka concentration camp, Bedzin, Bialystok, Czestochowa, Lvov and Tarnów ghettos.

**October 14**
Armed revolt in Sobibor extermination camp.

**October – November**
Rescue of Danish Jewry to Sweden.

1944

**March 19**
Germany occupies Hungary: Eichmann put in charge of plan to eliminate Hungarian Jewry.

**May 15 – July 9**
Over 430,000 Hungarian Jews are deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where most of them are gassed.

**June 6**
D-Day: Allied invasion at Normandy, France.

**July 20**
Group of German officers fail in their attempt to assassinate Hitler.

**August 2**
Nazis destroy the Gypsy camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau; approximately 3,000 Gypsies gassed.

**October 7**
Prisoners revolt at Auschwitz-Birkenau and blow up one crematorium.
1945

January 17
Nazis evacuate Auschwitz and forced prisoners on "death marches" toward Germany.

January 27
Soviet troops liberate Auschwitz-Birkenau.

April
U.S. troops liberate Buchenwald and Dachau concentration camps.
Canadian and British troops liberate Bergen-Belsen.

April 30
Hitler commits suicide in his bunker in Berlin.

May 5
U.S. troops liberate Mauthausen concentration camp.

May 8
V-E Day: Germany surrenders; the war ends in Europe.

August 6
The U.S. bombs Hiroshima, Japan.

August 9
The U.S. bombs Nagasaki, Japan.

September 2
V-J Day: Japan surrenders; end of World War II.

November 1945 – October 1946
International Military War Crimes Tribunal held at Nuremberg, Germany.
**Terms Relevant to the Holocaust**

**Adolf Hitler**
Born in 1889, became leader of the Nazi Party in 1921 and later ruled Germany from 1933-1945. Led Germany into a world war and was the prime initiator of the Holocaust. Killed himself in a Berlin bunker at the end of the war. Contrary to myth, Hitler did not have any Jewish ancestry.

**Antisemitism**
Opposition to or hatred of Jews. Wilhelm Marr coined the term in the late 1870s but the word has come to denote hatred of Jews, in all of its forms, throughout history.

**Aryan**
Originally a linguistic term referring to the Indo-European group of languages. Before the end of the 19th Century, the term had taken on racial definitions, often referring to people whose ancestors were Northern European and thus “purer” than “lesser races”. The Nazis viewed Jews and other non-Aryan people such as Gypsies (Roma and Sinti) and Poles as either inferior or subhuman.

**Auschwitz-Birkenau**
Established in 1940 as a concentration camp in Poland, it became a killing centre in 1942. Auschwitz I was the central camp; Auschwitz II, known as Birkenau, was the killing centre; and Auschwitz III, known as Monowitz or Buna, was the slave-labour camp. In addition, there were numerous subsidiary camps. Auschwitz was liberated by the Soviet Army on January 27, 1945. The number of people who died in Auschwitz is estimated to be between 1.1 and 1.5 million.

**Concentration Camps**
The Nazis established prison camps shortly after assuming power in 1933 to hold and isolate political opponents and those considered to be “racially” undesirable such as Jews and Gypsies. Most of the approximately 1800 camps were transit or labour camps. The first were Dachau, Buchenwald, and Sachsenhausen. After the occupation of Poland, extermination camps were established for mass murder at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, Chelmno and Majdanek.

**Confiscation System**
The Nazis put into place an organized and efficient system to seize the property and last belongings of victims in the concentration camps. All stolen property was sorted, inventoried and then sent to Nazi agencies and organizations. It is estimated by the United States Holocaust Museum that the confiscation process produced over 2,000 freight carloads of stolen goods.

**Death Marches**
Near the end of the war and with the Soviet Army advancing from the East, the Nazis forced many of the already weak prisoners inside the death camps on long, hard forced marches. Approximately 250,000 prisoners died on these marches, either from the harsh conditions or from murder.
**Deportation**
Initially an effort to rid German-held land of Jews, deportation eventually became a means to deliver Jews to concentration camps and to implement the Final Solution.

**Extermination Camp (Death Camp)**
A camp in the concentration camp system designed for the singular purpose of murdering Jews and other victims. Sometimes referred to as a Death Camp. Some extermination camps were connected to concentration, labour and transit camps.

**Final Solution**
The Nazi code name for the plan to exterminate the Jews of Europe. Intended as a resolution to what the Nazis called the 'Jewish Question'.

**Genocide**
Systematic killing, in part or in whole, of a group of people or nation. Term was first coined in 1943 by the Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin. “Genos” in Greek means tribe or race, and “cide” is from Latin, meaning to kill.

**Holocaust**
The mass murder of nearly 6 million European Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators during World War II. Many individuals and groups were persecuted and suffered at the hands of the Nazis, but only the Jews were targeted for total 'extermination'.

**Kanada**
Term used by prisoner work units to denote the warehouses in Auschwitz that contained the stolen possessions of prisoners. The nickname was given since the warehouses contained an abundance of goods, and Canada, in the minds of many, was a “land of plenty”.

**Kommando**
Term used for prisoner work units in the concentration camps. There were many types of Kommando units, including those assigned to work the stolen goods warehouses, and the gas chambers and crematoria. Kommando units were regularly gassed or killed and replaced with other prisoners.

**Liquidation**
Term used by the Nazis for clearing Jews and other victims out of a ghetto, town or camp. Liquidation could also mean murder.

**Majdanek (Maidanek)**
Extermination camp located outside of Lublin in eastern Poland. It also contained a slave-labour camp. Between 79,000 and 235,000 persons died or were killed at Majdanek. Most succumbed to starvation, disease, exposure, and the effects of physical torture or back-breaking labour performed under threat of violence. The number of victims of Majdanek’s gas chambers is unknown.
**Nazis**
Name for the National Socialist German Workers’ Party, which was formed in 1919. Adolf Hitler joined the Party in September 1919, when it was called the German Workers’ Party. The following year the Party added “National Socialist” to its name.

**Ravensbrück**
The only Nazi concentration camp built specifically for women, it first opened in May 1939 just north of Berlin. Established for the dual purposes of “re-education” and slave labour, by 1942 camp doctors began performing terrible medical experiments on prisoners. In six years of operation, Ravensbrück had the highest mortality rate of any camp located in Germany.

**Second Generation**
Term used to describe the children of Holocaust survivors. The Second Generation has responded to the presence of the Holocaust in their families’ lives in a myriad of ways, including through art.

**Slav**
A member of one of the Slavic-speaking peoples of eastern Europe. Group includes Poles, Russians, and Serbs. The Nazis viewed Slavs as inferior and targeted members—like Poles—for enslavement.

**SS**
Abbreviation for Schutzstaffel (Defense Protective Units), usually written with two lightning symbols. Initially established as Hitler’s personal bodyguard, the SS was transformed into a larger organization by Heinrich Himmler. Although some SS units were assigned to the battlefield, the organization is best known for its role in the destruction of European Jewry.

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**Art Terms Relevant to Shoes of Memory Exhibit**

**Abstract Representations**
Objects, representations and artworks that do not resemble figurative or real objects from everyday life. These works usually use forms, shapes and colours that do not look like everyday objects to represent themes or emotions. For example, Jackson Pollock’s paintings are abstract swirls and drips of paint.

**Artist Statement**
A personal reflection that is written by an artist on his or her work. The statement focuses on the most important aspects of the art and the techniques used to make it, and can serve as a bridge of communication and understanding between artist and audience.

**Ceramics**
Used to describe the shaping, finishing and firing of clay. The word “ceramics” comes from the Greek word “Keramos” meaning “Pottery,” “Potter’s Clay,” or “a Potter.” This Greek word is related to an old Sanskrit root meaning “to burn” but was primarily used to mean “burnt stuff.”
**Figurative Objects**

Objects that look like and are supposed to represent something in real life. For example, the ceramic shoes created by Jenny Stolzenberg are figurative objects.

**Firing**

To harden clay, you have to heat it at high temperatures (1280°C), which fuse the clay particles. This is usually done in a kiln (a small oven made for firing ceramics and clay).

**Glaze**

Colour that is thinned to a transparent state and applied over previously painted areas to modify the original colour. One glaze must be completely dry before another colour or layer is applied on top.

**Interpretation**

An artist’s explanation of or personal view about a topic or event. When artists choose to represent an idea through art, they must also explain or examine how they feel about that idea or why they think it is important to represent it in art.

Audience members are sometimes said to interpret the work of an artist, but generally this term refers to the artist’s task. Audiences are said to “read” the work of an artist.

**Medium**

The material or means of expression with which the artist works. Within art, this refers to the method of representation used by the artist (e.g. photography, clay, paint, drawing, collage).

**Representation**

A creation that is a visual or tangible rendering of someone or something. Also, the manner in which something is depicted, exhibited or presented. Representation can affect the way people think about a subject or an event.

**Sculpture**

The action or art of processing (as by carving, modeling, or welding) clay, plastic or hard materials into a three-dimensional work of art.

**Style**

The distinctive or characteristic qualities of an artwork which tell us something about the artist, their background, their training or the time in which they lived.
**Exploring a Holocaust Survivor’s Story Through Art**

Students will research the testimony of a Holocaust survivor and then use art to express what they found to be most significant or meaningful from the account. Let the students know what the various steps of the activity will be before starting.

**Step 1 – Accessing the Stories:** Several Holocaust survivor stories are available on the VHEC’s website. Go to www.vhec.org. Once you have located the website, click on “education”, then click on “teaching resources”, and finally, click on “online resources”. On the far left of the screen will appear several options, including Open Hearts: Closed Doors. Click on this option.

*Open Hearts: Closed Doors* offers several testimonies from Holocaust survivors. Each account tells of pre-war life, experiences during the Holocaust, the journey to Canada after the war, and life in Canada. These stories can be viewed by students online, or downloaded and printed by the teacher or student. To read a story online, click on one of the faces that appear at the top of the page. To access the downloadable stories—and related teaching aids—click on “learning resources”, which is found on the bottom left of the screen.

**Step 2 – Distributing the Stories and Having Students Read:** Whether it is done online or through handouts, each student should have a story to read. Set aside time for students to read a survivor’s testimony. This can be done in class or at home. Tell students to underline or make notes of events or other information that seems significant or important to them.

**Step 3 – Focusing on What to Interpret:** Ask students to decide what they would like to interpret from the survivor’s account for their art. The choice can be very specific—a single event, an object, a person etc.—or more general—a theme, emotion etc.

**Step 4 – What Medium and Style to Use:** Ask students to interpret and represent their selection from Step 3. This could be done through media such as painting, drawing, sculpting, photography, collage or video and through various styles such as abstract, figurative, or their own personal style.

**Step 5 – Creating the Art:** Students can use class time or work at home.

**Step 6 – Creating a Title and an Artist’s Statement:** As students are working, encourage them to create a title for their work and an artist’s statement that describes their artwork, how they made it, and what message they hope to convey with the artwork. Review what an artist’s statement is and what function it serves.

**Step 7 – Possibly Exhibiting the Work:** For those students willing to participate, finished work could be exhibited at the VHEC. Teachers and students who are interested in this possibility can contact the VHEC at 604-264-0499 or info@vhec.org

**For Class Discussion After:** Ceramicist Jenny Stolzenberg has explored her family’s Holocaust past and interpreted it through art as well. Yet there are differences between what your students have done and what Stolzenberg has done. As you move on to the next exercise, tell your students to think about what differences exist between their work and Stolzenberg’s work. Here are some differences to consider:

Why the Art was Created
Medium and Style Chosen
Material(s) Chosen
Intended Audience
Goal of Making the Art


**Discussion Based on the Artist Statement by Jenny Stolzenberg**

Read the following artist’s statement by Jenny Stolzenberg about her work for Shoes of Memory.

*I imagined that if each owner of each pair of shoes could be named, they could be brought back to life.* (quoting Anne Michaels, in her book *Fugitive Pieces*)

My ceramic installation is the result of a life-long exploration to understand and come to terms with my family history. My father, who survived Dachau and Buchenwald, rarely talked to me about his experiences. Either he could not endure re-living them, or possibly he did not want to burden me with his story.

Some years after his death in 1990, I visited Auschwitz. I was profoundly affected by this experience and felt compelled to translate it creatively. I researched widely by visiting Holocaust exhibitions, reading the personal accounts of survivors, and viewing related films and theatre. I was also influenced by artists who had used atrocity in general, and the Holocaust in particular, as a starting point for their work, for example: Christian Boltanski, Rebecca Horn, George Segal, Rachel Whiteread, the Chapman Brothers, Anselm Keifer, and Darren Almond.

Darren Almond’s exhibit, Bus Stops, at the Royal Academy’s Apocalypse exhibition made a particularly deep impression on me. The copies he created of the bus stops from outside Auschwitz were placed in a stark room made artificially freezing cold. Almost all of the people who came into the room walked straight through and out again without appearing to notice what they had seen. This, of course, was exactly the artist’s point: so many people had waited at the bus stops outside Auschwitz. They must have known what was going on behind the electric fences, but they deliberately chose to be unknowing and remain silent.

There are so many images from the Holocaust that I could have used as my chosen metaphor. Why shoes? I believe that shoes are very evocative: they can tell us so much about the owner. In many accounts of survivors, there is invariably a story about shoes: they caused pain, infection, death and, occasionally and more happily, they saved lives.

I was clear that I did not wish to replicate a pile of shoes. Rather, I wanted to create a work that honoured each individual. From my research I knew that victims were invariably forced to wear odd pairs of shoes. I started to make odd pairs of worn shoes of all sizes: men’s, women’s and children’s. I researched shoe styles of the period because I decided that my work should be totally authentic to that time in history. It was equally essential to me that each shoe I made was a beautiful ceramic object. I am often asked how I have been able to create beauty out of the unspeakable. My response is that I needed to pay homage to all those unique lives that were so painfully and senselessly lost. And I preferred to make an installation that would be remembered for its aesthetic qualities, rather than a work that would be impactful in a shocking or horrific way.
Choose one or more of the following questions as points of discussion in your class. Some of the questions are geared toward older students.

**Easier Questions**

- What motivated Jenny Stolzenberg to create her ceramic shoes?
- Why did Stolzenberg decide upon shoes as the focus of her work?

**More Difficult Questions**

- Should we regard Stolzenberg’s work more as an expression of her personal journey or as an educational tool for the public? Explain.
- What other Holocaust-related images might Stolzenberg have chosen? Explain these other choices and how an artist might use them in an exhibit.
- Why has Stolzenberg created “beauty out of the unspeakable”? Do you agree with her decision?
- What are some of the advantages and disadvantages for an artist to choose shocking images to make art about tragedy or loss? What are the advantages and disadvantages for an artist, like Stolzenberg, to choose beautiful images to make art about tragedy or loss?
**What a Shoe Represents; What Shoes Represent**

Read the following information, look at the images, and then fill out the chart and share the opinions expressed.

One of the objects in the exhibit *Shoes of Memory* is a single shoe from a child who was deported to Auschwitz. It is almost certain that this child was immediately selected for death upon arrival at the death camp, since the Nazis only chose strong and healthy adults for slave labour in Auschwitz and condemned the old, very young and weak to the gas chambers.

Another image found in *Shoes of Memory* is a picture of thousands of shoes stored in a warehouse in a death camp.

There are both advantages and disadvantages to using either the single child’s shoe from Auschwitz or the image of thousands of shoes from a warehouse in an exhibit on the Holocaust. Fill out the chart below, expressing your opinion of what each object/image does effectively and what it does not do effectively.

**Shoe or Shoes as Representation: Pros and Cons**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Single Child’s Shoe</th>
<th>Picture of Thousands of Shoes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What would this image or object do effectively in terms of representing the history of the Holocaust in an exhibit?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would this image or object not do effectively in terms of representing the history of the Holocaust in an exhibit?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bonus Question:**
What does this chart suggest in general about choosing an image or an object to represent the history of an event?
Using Art to Explore Traumatic Events in History

Jenny Stolzenberg is not the only artist who has used art to explore traumatic events in history. Below are some other examples of works and artists that confront tragedy.

In groups or individually, research one of the artists and the artworks or monuments that they have created from the list below. Make a short presentation to your class that takes into consideration the following points:

- The event or idea the artist has chosen to represent or picture
- The artist’s background or beliefs
- Where the art is located (gallery or public building, which city it’s in, etc.)
- The materials or medium the artist has chosen to use to make art (paint, concrete, sculpture, clay, etc.)
- The audience the artist might have imagined for their art. Who do you think was meant to see this art? Who was it made for – the victims, the general public, other artists and critics?
- How the art has been received or understood by viewers and critics.

List of Artists/Artworks

Francisco de Goya’s series of etchings “The Disasters of War” (1810-1820)
From 1810-1820 the Spanish painter worked on a series of 82 etchings that record and comment on Spain’s uprising against Napoleon’s troops.

Pablo Picasso’s mural “Guernica” (1937)
Picasso made this mural about the Spanish Civil War and the bombing of the Basque village of Guernica over a short period in 1937. The original is too fragile to leave Madrid, but a copy hangs in the entrance to the UN Security Council.

Marina Vainshtein’s tattoos (1990s to present)
Vainshtein is a California artist whose grandparents are Holocaust survivors. She has covered most of her body with tattoos of Holocaust imagery.
A few years after the end of World War II and the Holocaust, Theodore Adorno proclaimed, “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” What Adorno, a famous critic and sociologist, meant was that any attempt to capture the horrors of the Holocaust in artistic form would fail to adequately convey the reality of the event. Adorno was also concerned that artistic representations of the Holocaust might—albeit unintentionally—transform all the pain, death and loss into beautiful forms, thus changing the very meaning of the event itself. He did not mean that we should stop trying to make art about tragedy and atrocity, but that we could not approach art – which until then was supposed to help us forget our everyday lives – in the same way after the Holocaust – an event that is not part of our “everyday” and that is too painful and tragic to forget.

**As a class, discuss the following points:**

* Is Adorno’s concern that art will not adequately represent the very real horrors of the Holocaust a legitimate one in your mind? Could Adorno’s concern be applied to any effort to portray tragedy in artistic form?

* Are there advantages to using art to explore tragedy? If so, what are these advantages?

* In what ways does Adorno’s concern that art might beautify terrible events conflict with Jenny Stolzenberg’s vision to create beauty out of the unspeakable (see her Artist’s Statement)? How do you reconcile these two different opinions and visions?

**For further reflection:**

Create a mock-dialogue between Jenny Stolzenberg and Theodore Adorno. Have them debate the issues surrounding using art to explore tragedy in history. This can be performed or kept in written form.
CREATE

- You have been appointed to design and mount an exhibit on the Holocaust based on a single object. Pick a Holocaust-related object—except for shoes—and lay out on paper a floor plan with accompanying explanations for how the object will be used to represent the Holocaust. Include what will support the object, such as text and other images. Write a statement explaining why you feel this object should be exhibited, and how it will add to our understanding of the Holocaust.

- Choose a traumatic event from history and select an image that you will use to represent the event. Whether it is through sculpture, painting or drawing, create in physical form the very image as it would be shown in an exhibit. If enough people in the class decide on this option, an exhibition of student work can be displayed for the school, parents and visitors.

RESEARCH

- Research one famous example of art exploring tragedy. You may use one of the examples provided in this packet or choose another piece of art or a monument. Provide the historical context behind the art, what motivated the artist to capture the event, what the art looks like, and how the piece has been received by the public.

- Find out what other artists, critics and writers have said about Theodore Adorno’s dictum, “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” How have these people reacted to Adorno’s words?

- After Adorno’s proclamation, many artists, especially in the U.S., began making abstract or non-figurative art rather than representational or figurative art (Jackson Pollock and Barnet Newman generally and Anselm Kiefer’s paintings about the Holocaust in particular). How can we see the turn to abstract representation as a solution to the problem Adorno presented? Can abstract art still represent an event or make a political statement?
The following resources will provide additional background information on the Holocaust and issues and themes related to the exhibit Shoes of Memory.

**USEFUL WEBSITES**

http://art.holocaust-education.net/
Offers teachers an opportunity to explore the Holocaust through art.

http://www.chgs.umn.edu/Visual___Artistic_Resources/visual___artistic_resources.html
Centre for Holocaust and Genocide Studies offers a superb visual gallery and information on artists who deal with tragedy in history.

http://fcit.coedu.usf.edu/Holocaust/arts/art.htm
The Florida Centre for Instructional Teaching has produced an excellent online teacher's guide, including a section on art.

**USEFUL BOOKS (AVAILABLE IN VHEC LIBRARY)**

Scholarly examination of the issue of the validity of art in the face of catastrophe. The author sees much potential and promise in the representational realm of art.

Catalogue showcasing the work of Columbian born and New Mexico resident Saul Balagura. Excellent examples of Abstract Expressionism.

An account of the process undertaken by Judy in her attempt to explore the Holocaust through art.

Superb catalogue that accompanied the exhibit held at the Minnesota Museum of Art. Several artists and their works are presented, as well as analyses of issues relating to Holocaust art.

A critical look at the use of Holocaust themes in various mediums, including painting. Among the critiqued works is Judy Chicago's "Holocaust Project".

Stephen Lewis  *Art and Agony: The Holocaust Theme in Literature, Sculpture and Film*  CBC, 1984.
Stephen Lewis in conversation with writers and artists on artistic responses to the Holocaust.

**USEFUL VIDEOS (AVAILABLE IN VHEC LIBRARY)**

*Art Against Racism*  - A 22 minute video on art and its uses in combating racism. Includes interviews and examples of art from over 28 countries.