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# Consider: Purpose

**USC Shoah Foundation**, **Lionsgate**, and **Kingdom Story Company** are partnering to educate young people about the courage to choose kindness in connection with the film ***White Bird***. The film is adapted from the beloved R.J. Palacio graphic novel. Mark Bomback wrote the screenplay. ***White Bird*** is an inspirational story about an act of courage in the face of danger and one person's ability to make a difference. It is an uplifting movie about how one act of kindness can live on forever.

Inspired by the themes of ***White Bird***, the **USC Shoah Foundation** introduces this family viewing guide focusing on the power of kindness.

The guide is intended to spark meaningful discussions about the film in an age-appropriate manner while providing opportunities for viewers to think deeply about the historical context in which it is set — the Holocaust and its human impact. **Echoes & Reflections**, our leading Holocaust education organization, recommends that "children in grades 3–6 are building their own personal moral understanding and that of the world around them. As such, [learning] about the Holocaust offers a valuable experience that can help to introduce concepts of prejudice and antisemitism, respect for differences, standing up for others in need, and exploring what it means to be resilient."

***White Bird*** sparks conversation around topics of empathy, resilience, rescue, choices, and the human capacity for both kindness and cruelty. This guide provides safe and secure guiding questions and testimony-based resources to facilitate those discussions. It is a powerful resource, as it allows families with children of all ages to deepen their understanding of the important message — the courage to choose kindness — as salient now as it was then.



# Film Summary



From the world of *Wonder*, which sparked a movement to "choose kind," comes the inspirational next chapter: ***White Bird***. Struggling to fit in at his new school after being expelled for his treatment of Auggie Pullman, Julian (Bryce Gheisar) is visited by his grandmother (Helen Mirren) and is transformed by the compassionate and heroic story of her attempts to escape Nazi-occupied France during WWII. From the director of *Finding Neverland*, ***White Bird*** reminds us to be brave and choose kind.

## Guidelines for Family Conversations

***White Bird*** ignites powerful conversations about the complexities of human behavior and the power of our choices. These conversations can be full of curiosity and can also be challenging. The guide provides families recommendations for how to reflect on the powerful message of the film and grow in knowledge. Consider following these guidelines to help process thoughts, feelings, and film themes as a family.

- **Let them know they are safe and loved.** Tell them you love them and that they are safe, so they feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings.
- **Be their main source of information.** Ask what they know and what questions they have, then explain things simply and talk about your family's values.
- **Be patient and listen.** They might need time to understand and ask more questions later, so check in with them again.
- **Ask for help if needed.** It's okay if you don't have all the answers; you can find resources or ask others for support, including professionals.

# Collect: Historical Background

Before watching ***White Bird***, it's helpful to understand some important context and key terms presented in the film. This will help families gain a deeper understanding of ***White Bird*** and be better prepared for the emotional and educational journey the story offers.

**Brief Historical Overview**

In the 1930s and 1940s, the Nazis, led by Adolf Hitler, were in control of Germany. During World War II, which lasted from 1939 to 1945, the German army, led by the Nazis, took control of many countries in Europe. In May 1940, the Nazis invaded France. By June, France had to surrender, and the country was split into two parts. The northern part of France was occupied by the Nazis, meaning they were in charge there. The southern part, known as Vichy France, was not directly controlled by the Nazis but was still influenced by them.

During this time, the Nazis killed 6 million Jews. This is known as the Holocaust. One reason the Holocaust happened was antisemitism, which is hatred of Jewish people as individuals or as a group. This kind of discrimination existed before the Holocaust. The Nazi government and its collaborators, groups that worked with them, made antisemitic laws that took away Jewish people's rights and humanity. The Nazis also discriminated and killed millions of other individuals they felt were inferior.

Many individuals, communities, and governments were bystanders, meaning that they knew different parts of what was happening and had the ability or opportunity to act, but made the choice not to do so.

In Vichy France, even though it was not directly controlled by the Nazis, antisemitism was still widespread. Jewish families had to register with the government and wear special badges, and lived in constant fear of being taken away. During the Holocaust, some people resisted against the Nazis, including in France. In some cases, Jewish and non-Jewish people fought back with weapons. In other cases, Jewish people resisted and maintained their humanity by continuing to practice Jewish traditions. Some non-Jewish individuals and families hid Jews so that the Nazis would not be able to find them. People who were allies — a tiny minority in Europe — spoke or acted in support of Jewish people, and some were able to rescue several Jews from Nazi violence.

The story of ***White Bird*** takes place in this dark time, showing how antisemitism affected the lives of Jewish families in Vichy France. However, it also tells a story about kindness and courage. It shows how, even when surrounded by hatred, one person can make a significant difference by having the courage to choose kindness. This story reminds us of the importance of standing up for what is right and helping others, no matter how hard it might be.

# Testimony Connections from the USC Shoah Foundation

To help connect with the real history behind ***White Bird***, consider watching a short clip of testimony from Betty Eppel, who survived through this time in France by hiding. Listening to this firsthand experience provides an authentic, true-life perspective. It can foster a sense of courage and resilience from those who faced unimaginable challenges.

Scan the QR code or click on the link to access Betty's testimony.



**Betty Eppel**

**Jewish Holocaust Survivor**
Date of Birth:  April 19, 1935 (Valenciennes, France)
Date of Interview: May 13, 1998 (Jerusalem, Israel)

In the clip, Betty Eppel recalls what it was like living in hiding for three years with Mr. and Mrs. Guicherd. She discusses what she learned, her diet, and her day-to-day activities.

# Construct & Communicate: Discussion Questions



After watching ***White Bird***, take some time to reflect on the powerful message of the film. Review the Guidelines for Family Conversations provided above.

Use the discussion questions in this guide to help process thoughts, feelings, and film themes as a family.

## Kindness

- How does Grand-mère's story teach Julian to choose kindness?
- How might kindness help prevent some of the injustices you see in your community and the world today?

## Antisemitism

- In the film, what were Sara and her family's experiences with antisemitism? What were the consequences of antisemitism?
- How can understanding their experience help us recognize and stand up against antisemitism and hate today?

## History

- How can fiction, like ***White Bird***, help teach important lessons about historical events like the Holocaust?

Once you have reflected on the film, consider ways to move forward as a family by taking action at home and in your community.

- **Learn about the world:** Stay informed with reliable news sources about global events.
- **Build empathy:** Read books emphasizing empathy and compassion to your child that help them understand how others feel and why it is important to be kind and supportive; ask your local librarian for recommendations.
- **Envision a bright future:** Discuss and visualize a bright future with your child by creating a vision board inspired by your child's ideas of peace and kindness.
- **Practice self- and community-care:** Show your child how they can make a difference in their community by supporting those in need and using self-care techniques like deep breathing to stay calm.

By reflecting on the themes presented in ***White Bird*** and taking these steps, you can help your child develop a deeper understanding of empathy, kindness, and the importance of taking action in the world around them.





# Characters and Cast

**Young Sara Blum (Ariella Glaser):** The protagonist, a Jewish girl hiding from the Nazis.

**Grand-mère/Older Sara Blum (Helen Mirren):** The protagonist, Holocaust survivor, grandmother of Julian Blum.

**Julian Blum (Bryce Gheisar):** Sara Blum's grandson, who hears his grandmother's story about hiding from the Nazis.

**Julien Beaumier/Tourteau** or **Crab (Orlando Schwerdt):** A kind-hearted boy who, along with his family, helps to hide Sara.

**Vivienne Beaumier (Gillian Anderson):** Julien's mother, who plays a significant role in Sara's protection.

**Jean Paul Beaumier (Jo Stone-Fewings):** Julien's father, who also aids in hiding Sara.

# Resources for Exploring the Historical Background

**Online**

**USC Shoah Foundation**

IWitness is a digital education platform

Talk and Take Action: Parents' & Caregivers' Guide to Countering Antisemitism

**Historical Background (for students 8th grade and up)**

Brief Histories: The Holocaust, 1933-1945

**Digital Activities**

The Power of Kindness

Breaking the Rules to Save a Life

Exploration of Courage in the Face of Adversity

The Mystery of Goodness

**Echoes & Reflections**

Timeline of the Holocaust

Guidelines for Effective Holocaust Education in Upper Elementary

**Books**

*Nicky and Vera: A Quiet Hero of the Holocaust and the Children He Rescued*
by Peter Sís (2021)

*Signs of Survival: A Memoir of the Holocaust*
by Renee Hartman with Joshua M. Greene (2022)

*We Must Not Forget: Holocaust Stories of Survival and Resistance*
by Deborah Hopkinson (2021)

*We Are Witnesses: Five Diaries of Teenagers Who Died in the Holocaust*
by Jacob Boas (Originally published in 1995; republished in 2009)

# Glossary

Here are some key terms mentioned in the film that will help more fully contextualize the events depicted:

**Antisemitism**
Hatred of Jewish people as individuals or as a group.

**Bystander**
A person who is present at an event or who knows about it happening and has the ability or opportunity to take action but makes the choice not to do so.

**Discrimination**
Unfair treatment of one person or group of people because of the person or group's identity.

**Deportation**
Removal of people from their areas of residency for purposes of resettlement elsewhere. With regard to the Jews of Europe during the Holocaust, deportation by the Nazis meant removal to another city, ghetto, concentration camp, or extermination center.

**Hiding**
Many Jews hid to resist Nazi oppression or imprisonment in places such as caves, cellars, attics, or barns with the help of non-Jewish or local population.

**Holocaust**
A time in history when the German government, run by the Nazi Party, discriminated against and persecuted Jews and other groups of people deemed by the state to be inferior or social and political outsiders. They ultimately took the lives of 6 million Jewish people and many others.

**Jews**
People who practice Judaism and/or its ethnic and cultural traditions.

**Nazi**
Short for Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (N.S.D.A.P.). A political party that gained power in Germany after World War I. The party's leader, Adolf Hitler, was a forceful dictator who hated Jewish people. The swastika was the party symbol.

**Occupation**
The invasion, conquest, and control of a nation or territory by foreign armed forces.

**Prejudice**
Prejudging or deciding about a person or group of people without enough knowledge or information. Prejudicial thinking is often based on stereotypes.

**Resistance**
Generally, the action of an individual, nation or group in opposition to those in power. More specifically, efforts by Jews and others to oppose persecution at the hands of the Nazis and their partners.

**Stereotype**
An oversimplified and general idea about a person or group.

**Swastika**
The swastika is an ancient Sanskrit symbol meaning good fortune and well-being. The Nazis co-opted the symbol and changed its meaning to stand for their power and to scare those who they disliked. Today, the swastika is still used by some people and groups as a symbol of hate.


White Bird
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