

Preserving Family Stories: *Ruth: A Little Girl's Big Journey*



GRADE LEVEL

K-5 Families

DURATION

35-45 minutes

SUBJECT AREA

Visual Arts

DESCRIPTION OF THE LESSON

During this family activity, families will explore the value of story and learn about the journeys of others as well as their own by reflecting on the short animated film, *Ruth: A Little Girl's Big Journey* to create a family mural on paper that visually represents a memorable journey they have experienced. In conclusion, families may choose to watch the visual testimony of Hilde Gernsheimer to learn about her journey from Germany to England on the Kindertransport.

STANDARDS ADDRESSED

Visual Arts/Connecting Anchor Standard 10.

Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

MATERIALS

- Access to view film, *Ruth: A Little Girl's Big Journey*
- Testimony Clip of Hilde Gernsheimer (2:56)
- Art Paper Roll/Butcher or Mural Paper
- Available home art supplies – crayons, markers, colored pens, colored pencils, tempera paint
- Camera

LEARNING AIMS

As a result of this activity, families will...

- Learn that shared stories from the past and the present can help build a greater appreciation for family and an increased understanding of how challenges can shape who we are.

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Consider

Family Discussion As a family discuss all the various reasons why people take journeys. For example, to visit relatives, to vacation, to spend time with friends, move to a new location, to discover a new culture. Make sure that each family member has a turn to share their ideas.

Watch short film Watch *Ruth: A Little Girl's Big Journey*.

Dr. Ruth's Journey Family Discussion After watching the short-animated film, *Ruth: A Little Girl's Big Journey* together as a family, have everyone think about the following questions to discuss:

What was the reason for Dr. Ruth's journey?

What challenges did she face on her journey and how did she overcome these challenges?

Connect and Reflect Recall from Dr. Ruth's journey in the film, that during the Holocaust many adults and children fled Nazi Germany before, during, and after the war to escape discrimination and harm in order to start a new life.

Discuss: What is something you learned from Dr. Ruth's journey that you can use in your own life?
(Note: For more information about Dr. Ruth, you may want to read her biography found in this family guide.)

Collect

Sharing Family Journey Stories: Each family member takes a turn to share a personal story about a journey they remember from the past or more recently. You may want to record these stories and use some of the question prompts below to help guide the storytelling:

Describe the reason for your journey, where you went, who was with you, the mode(s) of transportation, and whether or not you felt any specific emotions prior to or during your journey experience.

Next, describe a challenge that you may have encountered on your journey. For example, a long travel distance, home sickness, not getting along with siblings, a flight cancelation, left a favorite possession behind, no access to internet etc. Afterwards, share exactly how you overcame the challenge(s).

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Construct

Creating a Family Mural Each family member will brainstorm and sketch images, symbols, words, on a section of the art paper roll to represent a story of their journey.

After each family has outlined their story on the paper, each family member will color it in using various art materials you have available at home to visually represent the unique and collective journeys of all family members.

Communicate

Sharing our Personal Journey Art Family members will each take turns to talk about the artwork they contributed to the mural and why they chose the images, colors, and words that they did to visually represent the story of their journey.

Also, consider the following:

- › Ask each family member to share something they learned or appreciated from making the family mural of their collective journeys.
- › Together, choose a special place to display the mural in your home.
- › Take a picture of your mural to share with other family members.
- › Think about other ways you can learn about and capture more family stories and make a plan on how to preserve these stories.

Optional Watch a clip of testimony from Hilde Gernsheimer, to learn about her journey from Germany to England on the Kindertransport. Think about how her journey was similar or different to Dr. Ruth's journey as well as to your own journey.

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Interviewee Biography

[Dr. Ruth Westheimer](#) (nee Karola Ruth Siegel) was born on June 4, 1928, at her grandparents' home in Wiesenfeld, Germany. She was the only child of Irma Hanauer and Julius Siegel and lived in the house where she was born until she was one year old. After that time, Ruth lived in an apartment in Frankfort am Main, Germany with her parents and paternal grandmother, Selma, where she grew up in an Orthodox Jewish family and recalls attending synagogue weekly with her father and having 13 dolls and a pair of roller skates.



At age ten, as the violence toward Jews was escalating, Ruth's mother and grandmother decided that Nazi Germany was too dangerous for her to live and sent her on the Kindertransport to Kinderheim Warheim, a children's home in Heiden, Switzerland after her father was arrested and sent to a detention camp following the infamous *Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass). For six years she remained at the orphanage and was thankful that she was fed and had a roof over her head, but she also recognized the many opportunities she missed during her childhood such as getting an education. In 1945, after the end of World War II, Ruth was unable to locate any surviving family members. She later learned that her father was killed in the Auschwitz concentration camp in 1942 and her mother was also killed during the Holocaust, although there was never any specific information about her death.

All alone in the world, Ruth emigrated to British Palestine (now Israel) at 17 years of age where she joined the underground army and worked on a *kibbutz* (commune) and studied to be a teacher. In 1950 she moved to France where she studied Psychology. Soon after she moved to the United States and entered the New School for Social Research in New York City. While studying at the New School, she met and married Fred (Manfred) Westheimer in 1961. The couple had two children, Miriam and Joel. Fred passed away in 1997. Ruth has four grandchildren: Ari, Leora, Michael and Ben. The interview was conducted on June 8, 1998, in New York, New York.

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Interviewee Biography

Hilde Gernsheimer, daughter of Carl and Selma Simon, was born in Cloppenburg, Germany, on May 2, 1926. Carl was a horse trader and the family was assimilated into their community. Hilde had three sisters, Edith, Ruth and Ilse. After the Nazi rise to power in January 1933, life began to change for the Simon family. On November 9, 1938, (Kristallnacht; the Night of Broken Glass) Carl was arrested. By the time Carl was released from custody, Hilde and Ruth had been sent on a Kindertransport (children's transport) to England. Once in England, Hilde and Ruth were sent to a Jewish girls' home in Harrogate. Hilde studied and became a hairdresser. In 1944, Hilde and Ruth emigrated to the United States, where their older sister Edith lived. Hilde married Holocaust survivor, Solly Gernsheimer, and they had three children. This interview was conducted on April 1, 1998, in Sterling, Illinois.

