



Teacher's Guide for *Adventurers Against Their Will*

Welcome by Author Joanie Holzer Schirm

2013 Global Ebook Award Winner: Best Biography
2015 Florida Department of Education, Just Read, Florida!
Recommended Reading, Grades 9-12

Dear Educator,

I'm honored to have a moment of your time to invite you to consider the inclusion of all or part of the accompanying Lesson Plans into your curriculum. In the history of the world, there are many people and events that represent the memory of forcibly displaced persons whose lives were changed forever by intolerance and conflict. As the author of a narrative nonfiction book that uses primary sources to personalize and crystallize this issue, I thought it helpful for me to begin with an introduction to [Adventurers Against Their Will](#). My hope is that it will help differentiate the subject matter from other WWII and Holocaust books and provide a rationale for the approach to the Lesson Plans.

[Adventurers Against Their Will](#) is a true account of a Jewish doctor who in May 1939 flees his Nazi-occupied Czech homeland and seeks refuge in China. Over the next six years, across four continents, he carries on a letter correspondence with a group of young adult Prague friends - Jews and non-Jews – also displaced persons. This young doctor, Oswald “Valdik” Holzer, was my father. Eventually he became an American citizen, settling in Melbourne, Florida to practice medicine as a family doctor. There, he hid the letters away in antique Chinese boxes. Discovered in 2000 after his death, four hundred letters by seventy-eight writers provide a glimpse into a chaotic world tortured by violent intolerance.

After I had the letters translated, I was drawn to a group of seven of the seventy-eight writers who detailed their lives on the run. As unanticipated circumstances unfolded around them in places like Great Britain, France, Ecuador, China, and the USA, they described how they felt. I needed to know more. *Adventurers Against Their Will* is my story, some seventy years later, of a search for the letter writers or their descendants and what I uncovered.

Written before, during and after WWII and the Holocaust, the words from the letters offer students a chance to see the authors as individual human beings. Students will gain empathy for these no longer faceless displaced persons – forced to rebuild lives after the traumatic loss of family, friends, home, and possessions.

Sadly, the experience of forcibly displaced persons remains an evergreen story. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees 2013 Global Trends Report revealed 50 million displaced people - the highest since World War II. “We see the immense costs of, not ending

wars; of failing to resolve or prevent conflict,” said UNHRC chief Antonio Guterres. “Peace is today dangerously in deficit.” The United Nations Refugee Agency headline of February 13, 2015 reiterates the continuing challenge: “The conflict in Ukraine has been extremely violent in the recent days. Almost a million people have become internally displaced in Ukraine while over 600,000 are seeking asylum in neighboring countries.”

Your students’ twenty-first century learning must reflect on new knowledge with critical thinking. The Lesson Plans, collaboratively created with the extraordinary professionals at [A Pass Educational Group](#), have a purposeful mission for you in the classroom and our world. Highlighted Common Core and Florida State Standards align with the lesson plans. “Read to learn” content offers meaningful ways for students to become active citizens, building the kind of world we all want to live in.

Simply said, the Lessons create an environment of learning where the individual student understands: “Why should I care?” Therefore, the Lessons fit well with the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Position Statement: Human Rights Education: A Necessity for Effective Social and Civic Learning. NCSS recognizes that “Human Rights Education, in both its civil and its humanitarian aspects, is a necessary element of social studies programs.” All students across different subjects gain the opportunity to study, analyze and connect the meaning and insight of words and phrases from primary and secondary sources and text. The examination of authentic life stories (versus making up fictitious stories) and the use of diverse media allows students to question and solve problems. The Lesson Plans, as well as the book, were reviewed for accuracy by relevant experts in the field.

The Lesson Plans offer students the opportunity:

- to learn beyond the classroom walls, exploring geography (then and now);
- to analyze the elements of human experience intertwined with social and political conflict;
- to discuss relevant issues of rights – political rights, human rights, civil rights, and justice;
- to find opportunities for research and collaborative discussions about the causes that fester and create circumstances of persecution and displacement of persons;
- to step into a different time and place as well as explore related current events involving today’s adventurers against their will; and finally,
- to recognize the importance of a sense of responsibility to take appropriate action when confronted with injustice.

Any project such as this has many people to thank for helping make it become a reality. Some of the people who’ve provided guidance to me during this educational cause include: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) Fellow Teachers, Bill Younglove and Kim Klett, USHMM Holocaust Survivors and Victims Resource Center Reference Coordinator Michlean Lowy Amir, The Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center of Florida Executive Director, Pam Kancher and Resource Teacher, Mitchell Bloomer, and the International Tracing Services (ITS) Head of Historical Research and Education, Susanne Urban. Special thanks go to

A Pass Educational Group. CEO Andy Pass and Social Studies Development Director Stephen Gibson and their team provided excellent work, recognizing the importance of multi-perspective learning and incorporating it into the Lesson Plans.

To discuss the use in your classroom of electronic copies of primary source material available from the historic Holzer Collection, please reach out to me at joanie@joanieschirm.com. Additional information is available on www.joanieschirm.com/teachers/

As teachers, you hold in your hands, heart, and mind, the chance to change the world. With that in mind, I hope you will find ways to incorporate all or a piece of these Lesson Plans into your curriculum.

May the words from the past shared in *Adventurers Against Their Will* promote peace through understanding.

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Adventurers Against Their Will by Joanie Schirm (ISBN# 978-0-988678125) - available in Print and EBook through a variety of sources including Ingram Book Company, Follett School Solutions, Amazon.com, Kindle, and more. For Czech language version of *Adventurers Against Their Will*, contact TRITON books in Prague.

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