

# COMMUNITY DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

## ***THE FAST RUNNER***

DAVID BERCOVICI-ARTIEDA, DIRECTOR

When a young Jewish girl loses her father in an act of Nazi violence, she is angered by the compassion shown by her Rabbi towards their oppressors. Later, facing the concentration camp gates, she must reject anger and embrace compassion in a final, courageous act to save her beloved Rabbi's life.



"This is not just a film — it's a call to remember, to feel, and to care. Created with over 200 volunteers, powered entirely by donations, and crafted using 35mm film and period-correct lenses to immerse the viewer in its time, *The Fast Runner* is a labor of love, remembrance, and compassion."

— David Bercovici-Artieda  
Director, Producer, & Cinematographer, *The Fast Runner*

# ABOUT *THE FAST RUNNER*

Set in Nazi-occupied Poland at the onset of World War II, *The Fast Runner* (2023) is a 15-minute narrative film that tells the story of Frida, a young Jewish Polish girl whose life and worldview are forever changed by the devastating realities of the Holocaust — and by an unexpected lesson in compassion.

Through Frida's personal experience, the film explores how the Holocaust was not just a historical event, but a deep human tragedy shaped by individual choices, moral complexities, and acts of quiet resistance. At the heart of Frida's community is her beloved best friend and spiritual mentor, the Rabbi, a man known for his unwavering kindness. He begins every interaction with a warm, heartfelt greeting — even toward Herr Muller, the neighborhood Polish policeman. While the Rabbi's behavior confuses Frida, it also intrigues her: How can one demonstrate compassion to someone who is your neighbor and who becomes directly involved in persecuting and terrorizing their Jewish community?

At its core, *The Fast Runner* tells a deeply Jewish story — a story of resilience, identity, and moral struggle in the face of unprecedented persecution. Through the experience of Frida, the film explores how the Jewish community, as the Nazis' primary target for complete extermination, navigated dehumanization and impossible moral choices during the Holocaust. The central, systematic, and industrialized goal of the Holocaust was total annihilation of the Jewish community, resulting in the murder of six million Jewish people. The Nazis also victimized other marginalized groups, including Roma, people with disabilities, and political opponents, whom they viewed as racial, biological, or ideological threats to their vision of a "pure" German society. Nazi ideology, rooted in racism, antisemitism, nationalism, and eugenics, dehumanized entire populations and fueled mass atrocities across Europe during World War II.

*The Fast Runner* carefully illustrates the different stages of the Holocaust era. It begins by portraying the richness of pre-war Jewish life, where they enjoyed the full vibrancy of everyday life. It then transitions to the period of ghettoization, when they were forcibly segregated, isolated, and confined to precarious conditions. Finally, the film confronts viewers with the deportations — the systematic transportation of Jewish people from towns and cities to ghettos, labor camps, and extermination camps where their survival became a matter of chance and resistance. Through Frida's story, *The Fast Runner* invites audiences to witness not only the historical realities of the Holocaust but also the enduring strength of the human spirit in the face of unimaginable cruelty.



# HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Holocaust was not a single event, but a devastating series of escalating actions rooted in hatred, nationalism, and long-standing prejudices against the Jewish population that increased across Europe in the years following World War I. Germany's defeat in the war led to economic devastation, embarrassment, social unrest, and a crisis of national identity. The Treaty of Versailles deepened the wounds, fostering resentment among the German people and providing fertile ground for extremist ideologies to take hold. In this climate, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party gained power by exploiting fear, promoting antisemitism, and scapegoating Jewish people and other marginalized communities for Germany's struggles. The rise of the Nazis was not inevitable — it happened through legal means, propaganda, and because of a lack of coordinated resistance to early policies of exclusion and dehumanization. Studying the Holocaust as a series of decisions, indifference, actions, and failures to act allows us to reflect on the importance of the role we can each play to build inclusive, just, and compassionate societies.

The Holocaust was a genocide targeting Jewish people first and foremost. Six million Jewish people — men, women, and children — were murdered as part of the Nazis' plan to eliminate the Jewish people entirely. Events such as the Nuremberg Laws, Kristallnacht, as well as the formation of ghettos like Kraków and the establishment of extermination camps like Auschwitz, were primarily aimed at Jewish containment and extermination. Alongside them, approximately five million others from persecuted groups also perished. From 1933 onward, the Nazi regime swiftly dismantled civil liberties, targeting Jewish people, disabled people, Roma, LGBTQIA+/2SLGBTQI+ individuals, political opponents, and others deemed "undesirable" under the eugenics ideology of the Nazi party. The Holocaust and testimonies of other genocides teach us the danger of indifference and the consequences of letting fear and propaganda overpower empathy, respect, and truth. The aftermath of the Holocaust left profound scars across communities, nations, and generations. The young girl in *The Fast Runner* symbolizes a resistance, resilience, and hope that humanity will persist even in the most challenging of times.

By centering its story on a single child, her family, and her interactions with a German officer, *The Fast Runner* helps viewers connect personally to the broader tragedy of the Holocaust and the dehumanizing impact of hatred and oppression. The film encourages empathy, reminding us that behind every statistic is a human being with dreams, talents, a story, and the right to live freely with dignity.

# USEFUL TERMS

- **Holocaust** — The total and systematic genocide, perpetrated by Nazi Germany and its collaborators, with the aim of annihilating the Jewish people. The primary motivation was the Nazis' antisemitic racist ideology. Between 1933 and 1941, Nazi Germany pursued a policy that dispossessed the Jewish community of their rights and their property, followed by the branding and concentration of the Jewish population. This policy gained broad support in Germany and much of occupied Europe. In 1941, following the invasion of the Soviet Union, the Nazis and their collaborators launched the systematic mass murder of the Jewish community. By 1945, nearly six million Jewish people had been murdered, as well as five million people from other marginalized groups. (Yad Vashem)
- **Antisemitism** — A certain perception of Jewish people, which may be expressed as hatred toward the Jewish community. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities. (This definition utilized for this guide was adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.)
- **Genocide** — The crime of intentionally destroying part or all of a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group by killing people or other methods. (Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jewish lawyer, was responsible for coining this definition, as the word *genocide* did not exist before World War II.)
- **Propaganda** — Information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view.
- **Human Rights** — The universal rights held by all individuals by virtue of their humanity.
- **Bystander** — A person who is present at an event or incident but who doesn't take part in what is happening.
- **Upstander** — A person who speaks up or acts in support of a cause or another person.
- **Resistance** — The act of resisting, opposing, exposing or withstanding someone or something, usually a force of oppression, injustice, or violence.

# GUIDING QUESTIONS

*How can the Holocaust remind us that oppression and genocide are not a single event, but a long-term process involving political, legal, and social shifts that slowly dehumanize targeted groups? How does learning about the Holocaust challenge us to think about our actions, prejudices, and the importance of standing up against injustice?*

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Historical Context

Participants may or may not have previous knowledge pertaining to World War II and the Holocaust. Use this as an opportunity to understand the common knowledge of the group and offer insights to bridge any knowledge gaps. Write what participants share on the board or a projected screen. Be prepared to add in additional background information as needed.

- What did you already know about World War II and the Holocaust?
- What do you know about the history of Jewish people in Europe? (If possible, allow participants to watch and/or listen to a few recorded oral testimonies from Holocaust survivors or refugees to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences in Europe both pre- and post-war. Personal interviews can be found within [The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Jeff and Toby Herr Oral History Archive.](#))
- Remember other stories of the World War II era and the Holocaust you have seen or read. How can reading, viewing, or listening to various perspectives of the Holocaust through film, short stories, memoirs, and poetry enrich our understanding of the complexity of people's experiences?
- Consider the impact of *The Fast Runner's* story as a short film. Why do you think the director decided to make a short film instead of a feature-length film or a documentary?

**ADD YOUR THOUGHTS AND NOTES IN THE BOX ABOVE!**

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## **Dehumanization & Extremism**

The Nazis planned and executed a system for extermination of the Jewish population, where the first stage involved discrimination (Kristallnacht, racial laws, curfews, prohibitions, etc.), then segregation (the establishment of Jewish ghettos), deportation (intended to drive Jewish people out of the country), and then mass extermination through the use of concentration camps and mass shootings. Discuss the significance of mass efforts to dehumanize the Jewish community.

The historical context portrayed in *The Fast Runner* invites us to expand our knowledge and broaden our perspective about the Holocaust by showing us how it started and how it progressed.

- What examples of dehumanization of Jewish people did you notice in the film?
- What is the goal and effect of dehumanizing a group of people? Have you seen examples in your life?
- What examples of dehumanizing behavior towards the Jewish community did you notice in the film?
- Nazi propaganda played a significant role in shaping both German society and the broader European collective mindset. The indoctrination of the masses took several years and was carried out through speeches, posters, pamphlets, school education, etc. As a result, many neighbors of Jewish families and communities in various European towns and cities turned their backs on them. In many cases, Jewish people were betrayed and placed in grave danger by those living right beside them. Consider examples between Officer Müller and Frida, as well as other community members. Officer Müller was a neighbor, a person who knew the Jewish residents of their small Polish town very well.

Discuss how alignment with extremist views can shift community relationships.

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## **Bystander vs. Upstander Behavior**

Discuss the difference between passive and active approaches to acts of injustice, including reflection on how one person's actions can make a difference in the lives of many.

- How do you think personal stories help us develop empathy? Why is empathy an important skill when studying difficult historical events like the Holocaust?
- How can empathy be a jumping off point for resistance and action?
- What does it mean to be an upstander? How do upstanders reflect on their sense of justice in order to make better decisions about what is right and what is wrong?
- Can you recall and share a time you were a bystander or upstander, or witnessed an event with bystanders and upstanders?

# EXTENDED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

*These hands-on activities can be completed individually or in groups and extend learner engagement with the film.*

- Research ways in which Jewish resistance took place during the Holocaust, including armed uprisings, cultural defiance, and spiritual resilience. (Examples may include the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the Białystok Ghetto Uprising, the Jewish Combat Organization, and individuals such as Mordechai Anielewicz.) What kinds of tactics and strategies did they use? What risk accompanied those tactics and strategies?
- Also explore how non-Jewish individuals in Germany resisted the Nazi regime, and consider the forms their resistance took, whether through protest, sabotage, sheltering victims, or speaking out against injustice. (Examples may include the White Rose Movement, Martin Niemöller, organized strikes by underground labor unions.) Extend to include resistance workers in other moments of history or now.
- Help participants develop critical thinking skills about media, misinformation, and visual literacy by providing examples of propaganda posters, news articles, or video excerpts similar to those the Nazi party used during the Holocaust. Ask participants to analyze: What is the message? Who is the target? What emotions is it trying to provoke? How does it dehumanize or “other” certain groups?
- Research and invite local upstanders and activists who work on a cause important to your group. Encourage participants to compare common goals and tactics between current community workers and past resistance workers. Reflect on the various acts of resistance you’ve learned about in connection with the Holocaust or that you saw in *The Fast Runner*.
- Organize a visit to a local or regional Holocaust museum or other social justice museum.
- Create a book or movie club to continue exploring the Holocaust or other resistance movements throughout history.
- Invite a Holocaust survivor or a descendent of a Holocaust survivor to your school, church, or congregation.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

(All underlined resources are hyperlinks)

- Human Rights Upstanders examples <https://humanrights.ca/upstander/#/>
- International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance  
<https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism>
- Jewish Upstanders website <https://jewishupstanders.org/>
- School Library Journal's robust list of middle school and YA books about the Holocaust  
<https://www.slj.com/story/Commemorate-Holocaust-Remembrance-Day-with-this-Booklist-libraries-students>
- “The Edelweiss Pirates, Zazous, and Swing Kids: How Youth Subculture Resisted the Nazis During World War II” by Zack Budryck in Teen Vogue <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/edelweiss-pirates-zazous-swing-kids-youth-subcultures-world-war-ii>
- The National WWII Museum <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/>
- The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum <https://www.ushmm.org/>
- The USC Shoah Foundation <https://sfi.usc.edu/>
- The Wiener Holocaust Library <https://wienerholocaustlibrary.org/>
- Yad Vashem Museum <https://www.yadvashem.org/>



# ABOUT JOURNEYS IN FILM

Journeys in Film is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to the use of film to promote a richer understanding of our diverse and complex world.

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## JOURNEYS IN FILM RESOURCES AND SERVICES

**We create educational resources** that spark community discussions and/or promote proactive learning for youth, parents, educators in K-12 and higher education, homeschoolers, and other learning communities. We also **create impact materials for libraries and community organizations.**

We leverage our established educational relationships to **promote materials in active outreach** to these audiences. We **extend the reach of a film and its lifespan** in the educational marketplace and beyond.

We work with a wide array of partners (non-profit organizations, educational institutions, educators, museums, teacher training institutes) to **develop resources tailored to the individuals and communities we work with and the audiences they seek to reach.**

**Our resources** focus on cultivating human empathy and compassion, developing a deeper knowledge of global issues and current challenges, and encouraging civic engagement.



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educating for global understanding