

**The United Jewish Community  
of the Virginia Peninsula, Inc**

**Presents**

**The Ninth Annual Holocaust  
Writing Competition for Students  
2010**

**“Hiding in the Spotlight:  
A Musical Prodigy’s Story  
of Survival 1941-1946”**

*“I don’t care what you do -- just live!”*

~~Dmitri Arshanskaya

**This competition is made possible through the generosity  
of the Sarfan/Gary S. and William M. Nachman Philanthropic Fund.**



*This year’s competition is dedicated to the memory of Samuel Althaus,  
speaker at the 2009 Annual Community Holocaust Remembrance Program.  
Mr. Althaus taught us so much about courage, patriotism, and love.*

November/December 2009

## A Note from the Holocaust Writing Competition Chairs Sandy Katz and Helaine Shinske

Dear Teachers,

We appreciate all of you who have encouraged your students to participate in the Holocaust Writing Competition in past years and for your efforts to submit their writings. As retired educators, we know how difficult and time-consuming it is to attempt a project that is not sanctioned by specified curriculum directives. To those of you who have participated, thank you for knowing the importance of teaching tolerance to our youngsters even though you are already taxed with your day to day educational activities..

We do have a few suggestions for the 2010 contest. All of these suggestions are outlined for you in our booklets; most teachers read the directions and have complied in the past. But we wish to emphasize the following:

- Please make sure each student has submitted **two copies** of his or her entry **stapled individually**.
- Make sure their **names do not appear on the papers** themselves, **only on the cover sheet**.
- It would also shave off hours when we code the entries if you could **alphabetize** the students' names according to the prompts they select.

We welcome the new teachers to our contest along with those who have previously participated. We are delighted to see so many familiar names of teachers each year. Someday we hope to meet you all!

Remember also, if you have class sizes that are significantly smaller than 22 students, please let us know so that we may consider sending you a class set of books for your efforts. No one should be penalized for small classes in this day and age!

Thanks again for your participation.

## ATTENTION TEACHERS!

### *Earn Books For Your Classroom Simply By Submitting Your Students' Work to The Holocaust Writing Competition*

All teachers who submit at least 22 original student entries may choose one title from the following lists. Simply fill in the information below and return this page with your students' entries. If you teach smaller classes, please call us regarding the number of entries needed to qualify for this program. A substantially smaller entry will not be counted toward the minimum requirement.

**All entries must meet competition guidelines.** We will deliver or mail the books to you at your school. If there is another book related to teaching tolerance that is not on the list, or other educational materials you would like, please notify us, and we will consider your request. Please note that the books are presented to the teachers for the school's use.

Circle one title from the following:

#### **Middle School Books**

1. *Friedrich*, Hans Peter Richter
2. *Jacob's Rescue*, Malka Drucker
3. *Tunes for Bears To Dance To*, Robert Cormier
4. *Number The Stars*, Jane Lowry
5. *Upon The Head Of The Goat*, Aranka Siegel
6. *Kinder Transport*, Olga Levy Drucker
7. *The Man From The Other Side*, Uri Orlev
8. *A Pocket Full of Seeds*, Marilyn Sachs
9. *The Cage*, Ruth Minsky Sender
10. *A Place To Hide: True Stories Of Holocaust Rescues*, Jane Pettit
11. *The Shawl*, Cynthia Ozick
12. *Clara's Story*, Clara Isaacman
13. *The Devil's Arithmetic*, Jane Yolen
14. *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Anne Frank
15. *The Wave*, Todd Strasser
16. *Der Maus*,
17. *Island on Bird Street*, Uri Orlev
18. *Night Crossing*, Karen Ackerman, Elizabeth Sayeles
19. *Thanks to my Mother* - Schoschana Rabinowitz, James Skofield

20. *If I Should Die Before I Wake*, Han Nolan
21. *Behind the Bedroom Wall*, Laura Williams, A. Goldstein

#### **High School Books**

1. *Mila 18*, Leon Uris
2. *Sophie's Choice*, William Styron
3. *Survival in Auschwitz*, Primo Levi
4. *Gentle Hands*, Ruth Kerr
5. *A Scrap of Time*, Ida Fink
6. *Never To Forget*, Milton Meltzer
7. *Rescue*, Milton Meltzer
8. *The Hidden Children*, Howard Greenfield
9. *Night*, Elie Wiesel
10. *Raoul Wallenberg: The Man Who Stopped Death*, Sharon Linnea
11. *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Anne Frank
12. *The Wave*, Todd Strasser
13. *Coming Evil*, Vivian Velde
14. *The Book Thief*, Markus Zusak

**Please print all information clearly.**

Full Name of Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Full Name of School \_\_\_\_\_

Complete School Address \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_ City/Town \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

School Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Class Size \_\_\_\_\_ Subject Teaching \_\_\_\_\_

**This cover sheet should accompany all students' entries. For questions, please contact Helaine Shinske - 865-7288 or Sandy Katz - 868-7704 - Co-Chairs, Holocaust Writing Competition Committee**



## Are you preparing your students for the SOL tests?

**This competition can assist you in preparing your students for the SOL by addressing the following SOL skills for both Social Studies and Language Arts/English.**

### Social Studies SOL Skills

Identify, analyze, and interpret primary source documents, records, and data, including artifacts, diaries, letters, photographs, journals, newspapers, historical accounts, and art to increase the understanding of events and life in the United States.

Evaluate the authenticity, authority, and credibility of sources.

Formulate historical questions and defend findings based on inquiry and interpretation.

Communicate findings in analytical essays and/or comprehensive papers.

Develop skills in persuasive writing with respect to enduring issues.

Apply geographic skills and reference sources to understand how relationships between humans and their environment have changed over time.

Interpret the significance of excerpts from famous speeches and other documents.

### Language Arts/English SOL Skills

Read and understand information from varied sources.

Apply knowledge of resources in preparing written presentations.

Credit the sources of both quoted and paraphrased ideas.

Use writing to interpret, analyze, and evaluate ideas.

Develop narrative, literary, expository, and technical writings to inform, explain, analyze, or entertain.

Collect, evaluate, and organize information.

# The Holocaust Writing Competition For Students

**The competition is open to students from  
Gloucester, Hampton, Newport News, Poquoson, Williamsburg/James City County,  
York County, Smithfield, Suffolk, and surrounding areas.**

One of the primary goals of this writing competition is to encourage young people to apply the lessons of history to the moral decisions they make today. Through studying the Holocaust, students explore the issues of moral courage as well as the dangers of prejudice, peer pressure, unthinking obedience to authority, and indifference. This competition provides students an opportunity to think and express themselves creatively about what they have learned.

## **Prizes Will Be Awarded In Each Category As Follows:**

### Middle School Divisions (Grades 6, 7, and 8)

First Place: \$150  
Second Place: \$100  
Third Place: \$75

### High School Divisions (Grades 9, 10, 11, and 12)

First Place: \$150  
Second Place: \$100  
Third Place: \$75

Winners will be honored at the annual community Holocaust Remembrance program, Yom Hashoah, on Sunday, April 11, 2010 at 2:00 PM at the Jewish Community Center, 2700 Spring Road, Newport News.

If you would like additional copies of the guidelines, or have any questions about this competition, please contact:

Linda Molin, Administrative Assistant at the UJCVP, 930-1422  
or by email at [unitedjc@ujcvp.org](mailto:unitedjc@ujcvp.org).

**You may also download a PDF of this booklet from our website  
[www.ujcvp.org](http://www.ujcvp.org) and follow the link.**

Winning entries may be published, exhibited, or reproduced on our website and in publications of the UJCVP. If you do not want your work published, exhibited, or reproduced, you must notify us in writing at the time you submit your entry. **Authors of the winning essays will be asked to provide their entries to the UJC electronically** (if possible) for inclusion in the winning entries booklet distributed at the Yom Hashoah program.

**Deadline for entries:  
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2010**

**WRITING COMPETITION GUIDELINES  
MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL DIVISIONS**

**Read Carefully**

1. Select one of the activities presented and write a piece of creative or expository writing following the instructions for each. Entries may be up to three pages in length and must be typed and double spaced.
2. Include a cover page with the following information on both copies:
  - a) The division you are entering, Middle School or High School, and the activity you are addressing.
  - b) Your full name, home telephone number and address including zip code, and your email address.
  - c) Grade, teacher's full name, and school

**To ensure impartial judging, do not put your name or other identifying information on any page other than the cover page. Staple all pages together in the upper left hand corner with the cover page first.**

3. Cite all sources.
4. **Failure to comply with the following rules will result in disqualification.**
  - a) **Two complete copies of your entry must be submitted.**
  - b) Only one entry per student will be accepted.
  - c) Activity choice must be cited.
  - d) Entries must be received by deadline.

**Teachers: It would be helpful if entries were submitted in alphabetical order.**

Judging will be based on the following criteria:

1. Work is original, cohesive, and insightful.
2. There is proper use of language including grammar and spelling.
3. Instructions and guidelines are followed.

Entries will not be returned.

***All entries must be delivered to the United Jewish Community  
no later than 4:00 PM, Friday, February 19, 2010***

***to the Newport News JCC***

2700 Spring Road, Newport News, Virginia 23606

*(Office hours M-Th 8:30 AM-5:00 PM, Friday 8:30 AM - 4:00 PM)*

***(757)930-1422***

**OR**

***by 12:30 PM on Friday, February 19, 2010***  
***to the Williamsburg JCC office.***

104 Bypass Road, Williamsburg, VA 23185

*(Office hours M-F - 8:30 AM - 12:30 PM)*

***(757)645-2331***

# Holocaust Writing Competition for Students

## **“I don’t care what you do -- just live!”**

Zhanna and her sister Frina lived in a time without iPods, MP3 players, without boomboxes or CD players. Not even cassette tapes! There was no such thing as Youtube, VH-1 or MTV. There was no such thing as *television*! “Phonographs were rare amenities.” [p.23]

Lullabies for Zhanna and Frina floated into their peaceful night from a violin and a piano; sheet music was lit by candlelight or kerosene lamps. Zhanna and Frina lived in a time when making and listening to music carried great importance in the lives of many people. Normal teenagers, Zhanna and Frina lived in a time when they were “immersed in the happy, self-absorbed existence... unaware of the events outside the borders of their country.” [p.55] Their peacefulness turned horrific. Fortunately for the two sisters, the time came when even the most cruel and vicious soldiers craved soothing music to escape the horrors of their own behavior.

Russian Jewish girls, Zhanna and Frina were gifted with musical talent that ultimately saved their lives. Zhanna said, “Our music every time had saved us, snatched us out of the worst human pollution. That’s what made our lives possible. Without it, we would have been destroyed long ago.” [p.251]

Zhanna and Frina also lived in a time when they had to change their Jewish-sounding names to Anna and Marina in order to save their lives. Part of their life-saving charade included changing their birthdays. In order to live, they lied about how their parents died. The only true part of their invented fiction: They really were teenage orphans. In truth, their parents and grandparents and 16,000 other Jews from their hometown of Kharkov marched to their death at the hands of Hitler’s Nazi regime.

During their death march, just before being gunned down into a ditch-- a mass grave—Zhanna’s father bribed a Nazi soldier to ignore Zhanna’s escape, bartering his treasured pocket watch for Zhanna’s life. Putting his winter coat on her shoulders, her father “whispered his final words to Zhanna, ‘I don’t care what you do, just live! Go!’” [pp.88-89]

Zhanna walked for hours with “her father’s coat dragging on the ground, the memory of their last moments together throbbing like a fresh wound. ...The tears were stinging her cheeks in the sub-zero cold. ...Her clothes were frozen to her body by urine... and she was light-headed from hunger.” [pp 90-91].

After a series of courageous and kind acts from “righteous gentiles,” the orphaned sisters miraculously reunited. “Frina said nothing about her ordeal—how she escaped, what she witnessed—or about the fate of Mama, Papa, and the grandparents, and Zhanna didn’t ask—that day, or ever. Some things are unspeakable.” [p.97]

***Zhanna and Frina Arshansky lived – and did not die-- in the time of the World War II Holocaust. 11,000,000 innocent people--- 6,000,000 of them Jews, starved in death camps and perished from the earth at the hands, and guns, and gas chambers of the Nazi regime.***

Continued.... next page

Like Frina, some survivors of the Holocaust never spoke the unspeakable. Zhanna “was reluctant to revisit and plumb memories she had never shared.” [p. 275] Her son, Greg Dawson, describes his childhood as aptly “cliché: blissful ignorance.” [p.4] As Greg grew into an adult, “events conspired to coax my mother into revealing more and more of her story.” Zhanna explained her decades of silence by saying, “*How can you tell children about such things? It would be too cruel.*” [p.7]

When Zhanna finally broke her silence, her son Greg Dawson wrote the book *Hiding in the Spotlight: A Musical Prodigy’s Story of Survival 1941-1946*.

The book’s powerful title contains an oxymoron. How can one “hide in the spotlight?” Musical prodigies posing as non-Jews, Zhanna and Frina survived the Holocaust when their musical talents were discovered. In the book, Dawson chronicles Zhanna’s stories of how the sisters’ survival depended in so many ways upon their being forced to play piano and accordion music for Nazi soldiers’ amusement and entertainment.

Greg Dawson writes, “The day the Nazi’s routed the Jews of Kharkov from their homes, my mother slipped the sheet music for her favorite Chopin, *Fantasy Impromptu*, under her shirt and carried it with her through the war and to America. She still has it today, five weathered sheets, a treasured token of a lost childhood, and a piece whose name- *Fantasy Impromptu*- eerily presaged her wartime odyssey.” [p.7]

*Continue with activities on next page.....*

## Creative Writing Prompts

### 1. HIGH SCHOOL ONLY:

Based on this Holocaust story of survival, write lyrics, rap, poetry, or another form of creative writing also entitled *Fantasy Impromptu*.

### 2. MIDDLE SCHOOL ONLY:

You are the pocket watch that bought Zhanna's life from a Nazi soldier. Your journey into the world of Nazi terror begins as you save the teenager's life. In the form of a diary entry, interview, or poem, tell your emotional story. When you write, you may wish to consider some of the following: What does it feel like to be a token of bribery, going from the safety of Zhanna's father's pocket into the hands of a Nazi soldier? What do you see and hear shortly after Zhanna's escape? Imagine what happens to you in the months and years after the executions at the ditch. What may have motivated the soldier to accept the bribe? What do you imagine ultimately happened to the pocket watch? Where is it today?

### 3. BOTH HIGH SCHOOL AND MIDDLE SCHOOL:

Some Holocaust survivors like Frina have refused to talk about their experiences. Others, like Zhanna, have told or have been coaxed to tell their story many years later. Using what you have learned about the Holocaust, create Frina's untold story in any form of creative writing.



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## Expository Writing Prompts

### 1. HIGH SCHOOL ONLY:

Greg Dawson wrote about a trip he took to his mother's homeland. At the mass grave, the ditch called Drobitsky Yar, an "austerely beautiful memorial" contains the names of many of the victims believed to be buried in the ditch. In addition to finding the names of his grandparents and great-grandparents, "I was *shocked* to find the names of my mother and Frina, engraved with equal certainty and finality. They had come that close to extinction. I had come that close to non-existence. It was like visiting a cemetery and coming upon my own gravestone." [pp.265-266]

Greg Dawson realizes how close he came to never being born. In fact, hundreds of millions of people were never born because of the 11 million annihilated lives during the Holocaust. Write an essay about who and what was lost from humanity as a result of the Holocaust. Were there only losses? What can be gained from the lessons of the Holocaust?

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**2. MIDDLE SCHOOL ONLY:**

Zhanna Arshansky Dawson is still alive. What questions would you like to ask her? Explain why your questions are important to you. Tell her what you've learned and how you feel after hearing her story. If you can relate her experiences to any conditions facing your generation, explain those connections. Describe for Zhanna what you will do to teach future generations the lessons you've learned from studying the Holocaust.

**3. BOTH HIGH SCHOOL AND MIDDLE SCHOOL:**

To respond to this prompt, read these painful excerpts from Dawson's book:

*"Like cockroaches we huddled in those cracks, listening anxiously to the growing roar of the German planes...."* [p.59]

Orphaned and seeking a place to live, Zhanna was told by the director of an orphanage, *"We have...not much food- mostly cucumbers. We go through the Germans' garbage for bits of meat and gristle. You will be very hungry here."* The bed in the orphanage was just a sheet- *"it was gray with crawling lice. I felt a sickness all over. I grabbed the sheet and ran downstairs to the yard to shake it out. I was shaking all over. I wanted to burn the sheet but I could not. There were no other sheets."* [pp. 125-126].

*"It was a luxury to lean where you didn't have to lean on another human being. I immediately fell asleep standing up. Sleep was like bread and air."* [p.163]

Zhanna and Frina had to reinvent their identities in order to survive in orphanages and music schools. They escaped rape. [p.155] They had to "play for the enemy." They suffered unbearably yet they survived.

Compare and contrast your own problems and those facing your generation with those of Zhanna, Frina, Anne Frank, Sam Althaus, and other teenagers who lived or died during the Holocaust. Although you might be inclined to write about obvious technological and material advances your generation enjoys, also consider what *immaterial* social, cultural, and/or political advances your generation enjoys as a result of the Holocaust. What social, cultural, or political work remains unfinished? How will you help finish it?

## WORKS CITED

Dawson, Greg, *Hiding in the Spotlight: A Musical Prodigy's Story of Survival 1941-1946*. New York, New York: Pegasus Books LLC, 2009

## Bibliography

### Holocaust Related Web Sites

[www.holocaust-trc.org/](http://www.holocaust-trc.org/)

[www.facing.org/](http://www.facing.org/)

[www.holocaust-history.org/](http://www.holocaust-history.org/)

[www.ushmm.org/](http://www.ushmm.org/)

[www.wiesenthal.com/](http://www.wiesenthal.com/)

[www.yad-vashem.org.il/](http://www.yad-vashem.org.il/)

This is an extraordinary website to help you with your research:  
<http://www.holocaust-trc.org>

### Holocaust Related Books

- ◆ Prospective entrants should consult the catalog in their school library.
- ◆ Key to abbreviations: Books suitable for middle school students (MS); for high school students (HS). Books available at eight public libraries: Gloucester Co.(G), Hampton (H), Newport News (NN), Poquoson (P), York Co.(Y), Williamsburg Regional (W), Christopher Newport University (CN), College of William and Mary (WM).

### Poetry

*Holocaust Poetry*, compiled by Hilda Schiff, 1995. MS, HS [NN, P, W, Y]

### History

Bachrach, Susan. *Tell Them We Remember*, 1994. MS [All eight libraries.]

Bauer, Yehudah. *A History of the Holocaust*, 1982. MS, HS [G, NN, W, CN, WM]

Byers, Ann. *The Holocaust Overview*, 1998. MS [G, Y, W]

Chaikin, Miriam. *A Nightmare in History: The Holocaust 1933-1945*, 1987. MS [G, H, NN, P, Y, W]

Gilbert, Martin. *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe during the Second World War*, 1985. MS, HS [H, NN, Y, CN, WM]

Landau, Ronnie. *The Nazi Holocaust*, 1994. MS, HS [H, NN, W, WM]

Meltzer, Milton. *Never to Forget: The Jews of the Holocaust*, 1976. MS, HS [All eight libraries.]

Rossel, Seymour. *The Holocaust: The Fire That Raged*, 1989. MS [NN, P, W]



*“A Lifetime of Caring”*

***United Jewish Community of the Virginia Peninsula, Inc.***

***2700 Spring Road, Newport News, VA 23606***

***104 Bypass Road, Williamsburg, VA 23185***

***Telephone: (757) 930-1422***

***Fax: (757) 930-3762***

***Williamsburg Telephone: (757) 645-2331***

***Email: [unitedjc@ujcvp.org](mailto:unitedjc@ujcvp.org)***

***website: <http://www.ujcvp.org>***