

# THE HEART FROM AUSCHWITZ ELEMENTARY CYCLE THREE



The Montreal Holocaust  
Memorial Centre

5151, chemin de la Côte-Sainte-Catherine Montréal (Québec) H3W 1M6 Canada (514) 345-2605 [info@mhmc.ca](mailto:info@mhmc.ca)

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# SUMMARY

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	<p>This activity has been designed to allow you to study the Holocaust in the classroom, adopting a reflective approach centered on the themes of living in society and engaging in dialogue. It is intended to “conclude in peace” the study of the Holocaust that began, for several of your students, with the pedagogical activity <i>Hana’s Suitcase</i>, and was followed by a visit to the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre and listening to a survivor’s life story.</p>
<b>INITIAL ACTIVITY</b>	<p><b>During the initial activity</b> students will recall, through their photographs, their visit to the Museum: the artifacts, survivors’ testimony, etc. You will draw their attention to a specific exhibit, the <i>Heart from Auschwitz</i>. After reading a text and seeing a video clip, you will explore with them the story of this artifact, its creation, and the message it carries.</p>
<b>THE PROJECT</b>	<p><b>The project</b> will lead the students to the action phase: They will carry on the message of empathy that the <i>Heart from Auschwitz</i> conveys. Students will construct a heart, write their messages in it, and, if they so decide, offer it to the Holocaust survivor whose testimony they heard or to any other individual.</p>
<b>ISSUE</b>	<p>The Nazi project endeavored to destroy all sense of humanity in the people it targeted. The artifact that will be studied (<i>Heart from Auschwitz</i>) is resounding proof of the failure of this policy and of the persistence and strength of the human spirit.</p>
<b>TIME REQUIRED</b>	<p>Pilot projects have shown that the activity can be done in 4-5 hours.</p>



## SUMMARY

### CONNECTIONS WITH QUÉBEC EDUCATION PROGRAM

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE in connection with the **Geography, History, and Citizenship Education** program

Enable students to:

- Reflect on art as a form of human expression and on its transformative power
- Connect the past and the present, with particular reference to the Holocaust
- Adopt a reflective approach to the issues of human rights and human dignity
- To become aware of their ability to connect the past and the present, with particular reference to the Holocaust
- To understand the effects of their actions on the collectivity of mankind

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE, in connection with the **Ethics and Religious Culture** program

Enable students to:

- Engage in dialogue with one another, with the past, with diversity
- Practise dialogue through writing and acts of empathy (offering their heart)
- Reflect on the moral choices one might have to make in life
- Look on the value of human experiences, specifically the meaning of empathy within the Auschwitz context, and the significance that can be attributed to it
- Reflect on their own values and on the strength of the human spirit



## SUMMARY

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### **PEDAGOGICAL OBJECTIVE**

This activity will enable students to acquire the following competencies :

### **CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES**

- Intellectual : **to use information**
- Intellectual : **to bring one's creativity into play**
- Personal and social: **to cooperate with others**
- Methodological: **to adopt effective work methods**
- Communication-related: **to communicate appropriately**

### **SUBJECT-SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES**

- English Language Arts : **to read a variety of genres**
- English Language Arts : **to produce a variety of genres**
- English Language Arts: **to communicate orally**
- Arts Education: **to produce artistic and media works**



# INITIAL ACTIVITY

## SUMMARY

In the initial activity students reflect on the strength of the human spirit. The *Heart from Auschwitz* is used as an example. The study of this artifact enables the students to become aware of the act of creating a birthday present, such as the *Heart from Auschwitz* in the context of the Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp, the Holocaust, and the war.

## TEACHING MATERIAL



- Computer workstation with **projector screen**
- **CD (to be returned to the MHMC)** includes:
  - o 3 Museum photos (dog on bench reserved for the Aryans / Kristallnacht / 6 candles for 6 million dead)
  - o 5 photos of the *Heart* in the museum
  - o 12 detailed photos of the *Heart*
  - o 1 video clip of the *Heart from Auschwitz* (1 min. 15 sec.)
  - o 1 video clip of the making of the *Heart* (2 min.)
  - o 1 video testimony by Zlatka Pitluk, who explains how the artifact was made in the Auschwitz labor camp (in Yiddish, with French sub-titles, 5 min. 10 sec.)
  - o The story of the *Heart from Auschwitz* (Word and PDF)
  - o Translations of the *Heart* (PowerPoint and PDF)
- a **reproduction** of the *Heart from Auschwitz* (**to be returned to the MHMC**)

## STUDENT MATERIAL

The **story** of the *Heart from Auschwitz*



## INITIAL ACTIVITY

### PREPARATION



3 photos in the  
Museum



Photos of the *Heart*  
in the Museum

+++Draw students'  
attention to the  
antithesis between  
the words *Heart*  
and *Auschwitz* +++

### 1. Have the students recall and discuss their visit to the museum :

- How did you feel during your visit to the Museum?
- What did you see in the Museum?
- Do you remember anything in particular: a photo, a video clip, an artifact?
- How did the Museum collect these artifacts?
- How would *you* define the Holocaust?
- Why did we visit this Museum?

### 2. Announce to the students that they will now study *Heart from Auschwitz*. Show the photos of the *Heart* in the Museum.

### 3. Begin a discussion as to the placement of the *Heart* in the Museum :

- Why is this artifact displayed by itself in the cabinet?
- Who named this artifact the *Heart from Auschwitz*? Why? What do you think of the name?
- Do you remember the story told by the Museum guide about the *Heart*?
- How did the guide learn about this story?
- Who is Fania ?
- Is it possible to imagine Fania's feelings as the women offered her the *Heart*?
- Is it possible to imagine what writing in this artifact meant to these women?



## INITIAL ACTIVITY



Video clip of  
interview with  
Zlatka Pitluk

+++ Zlatka speaks  
Yiddish.+++

+++If your  
students have read  
*Hana's Suitcase*,  
remind them of the  
heart-shaped  
bread baked by  
Hana's mother on  
the occasion of her  
birthday (pg. 55 of  
book).+++



Story of the *Heart*

**4. Show the video clip of Zlatka Pitluk** (5 min. 10 sec.). Ask the students to collect as much information as possible on the *Heart*.

In particular, the students should try to understand:

- the manner in which the artifact was made in 1944 ;
- the context in which the women found themselves ;
- the difficulty involved in finding the necessary materials (scissors, fabric, pens)
- the risks involved

**5. Conduct a discussion** on the statement by Zlatka Pitluk:  
“**The only thing not forbidden was thinking.**”

**6. Distribute the story of the *Heart*** and allow reading time.

**7. Remind the students of the main facts** that have come out of the discussion, the viewing of the video clip, and the reading of story of the *Heart*.

**8. Propose a challenge to the students:** We are going to construct a heart, write our own messages in it, and offer it to someone!



## INITIAL ACTIVITY

### EXECUTION

**1. Announce to the students that they will now conduct an enquiry into the *Heart* to answer 3 questions:**

- How was the *Heart* constructed?
- What is written in the *Heart*?
- What message will we write in the heart we construct and what will we do with it?

+++The reproduction was made by a bookbinder.+++

**2. Reveal the reproduction of the *Heart* from Auschwitz.** While handling it carefully and passing it around, the students will brainstorm on:

- its construction ;
- the words that they may succeed in reading (not easy!).



Translations of the *Heart*

**3. Project the translations of the *Heart*** (PowerPoint and PDF) onto the screen and **note the students' reactions.**

+++If your class has heard a survivor's testimony, you might suggest that they offer the heart to that individual.+++

**4. Students must now consider the heart they will construct:** What message will they include? Will they offer it to someone? If so, to whom? **Set up group discussions**, to answer the following questions :

- What words do I want to write in the heart?
- What is the main message that we want to convey?
- What expressions include the word *heart*? What do they mean?
- What shall we do with the heart? Offer it? To whom? Why?

+++Open- hearted, from the bottom of one's heart, heart-to-heart, etc. +++



## INITIAL ACTIVITY

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### INTEGRATION AND RECOMMITMENT

#### 1. Review with the class:

- What has the Museum visit taught you about the *Heart from Auschwitz*?
- What did you learn today about this artifact?
- What does this artifact mean to you?
- What important message will your heart contain? What do you mean to say?
- What will you do with the heart? Will you offer it to someone? Why?
- What will be the significance of our act?

#### 2. Announce the project: We will be constructing a heart and writing our messages in it.



# THE PROJECT: CONSTRUCTING A HEART

## SUMMARY

The project actively engages the students through the making of a heart inspired by the artefact displayed in the Museum. The artistic activity becomes a way of transmitting a message about community living and engaging in dialogue, through an object which symbolizes empathy.

## TEACHING MATERIAL

Computer and projection screen.

## STUDENT MATERIAL

The students themselves will determine which materials they will need to make the heart.

## INITIAL STAGE

**1. Remind students of the challenge:** we are going to make a heart modeled on the Heart that we saw in the Museum, put our own messages inside it and choose someone to whom to offer it.

+++It is best if the class is divided into groups of 4 and each group creates one layer of the heart.+++

**2. Engage students in a discussion on the method and organisation** necessary to make a heart with the help of the following questions:

+++Pilot projects have shown that the students tend to create a personal heart (to keep) and a collective heart (to offer).+++

- What are the necessary stages?
- How are we going to organise ourselves?
- What materials do we need?
- How can we ensure that each group makes a layer of the heart that is the same size?
- How will we make the shape?



Video clip on making the heart

**3. If necessary,** show the video clip about making the heart.

**4. Make a note of the method and organisation decided upon.**



## THE PROJECT: CONSTRUCTING A HEART

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<b>EXECUTION</b>	The students create the artifact and write their messages.
<b>INTEGRATION AND RECOMMITMENT</b>	<p><b>1. Focusing on the heart constructed by the class and on the reproduction of the Heart from Auschwitz, recall the initial activity and project, and then discuss :</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- What do you think of your heart?</li><li>- What have you learned in constructing the heart?</li><li>- What have you learned by studying the <i>Heart</i> and Fania?</li><li>- What have you learned about the Holocaust and Auschwitz?</li><li>- What do you think of the messages written in your heart?</li><li>- What has today's activity given you personally?</li><li>- What has today's activity brought to the class?</li><li>- How will you use what you have learned today?</li><li>- The heart will be offered to .... How do you think this person will feel when opening it? What will your messages mean to this person?</li><li>- Do you wish to show your heart to others?</li><li>- Do you believe that the principal message contained in the heart will touch others?</li></ul>



## THE PROJECT: CONSTRUCTING A HEART

### INTEGRATION AND RECOMMITMENT

+++Excerpt from  
*Images in Spite of  
All*, Georges Didi-  
Huberman,  
University of  
Chicago Press,  
2008, pg. 42:  
“To suffer  
Auschwitz, at every  
level of this endless  
experience, meant  
suffering the fate  
that Primo Levi  
called simply the  
'demolition of a  
man' [...] the  
'demolished' man  
was first of all a man  
rendered apathetic  
to the world and to  
himself, i.e.  
incapable of  
empathy+++

### 2. Conclude the activity by summarizing :

- **To study** the story of the *Heart from Auschwitz* is to understand the events of the Holocaust and to recognize Auschwitz as the ultimate symbol of the Nazi project (see Annex A).
- To learn more about this artifact, we examined closely the reproduction and saw the **videotaped interview** of a woman (Zlatka Pitluk) who participated in its making in 1944 in Auschwitz.
- Each **Museum artifact** helps us to learn more about the Holocaust. Similarly, the oral or written life stories of Holocaust survivors are important so that we may know the course of events during the genocide.
- The women took risks to construct and offer the *Heart* to Fania on the occasion of her birthday in 1944. They made both a **personal choice** (each individual woman) and a **collective choice** (all the messages are gathered in a single object). Their act can be said to be an **affirmation of their existence**.
- **The Nazi project consisted in dehumanizing the people they targeted.** The *Heart from Auschwitz* was proof that **these women remained profoundly human**, despite their circumstances.
- To construct a heart is to **commit to action** through writing and creating.
- **To write is to take a stand.** To think of a message is to put oneself in the place of the person who will read it.
- To offer a heart is to offer a kindness. It is an **act of empathy**, of dialogue, of humanity.



## THE PROJECT: CONSTRUCTING A HEART

### OTHER PROJECT IDEAS

- **Write a message, put it in a bottle** and bury it so that future generations will find it (see Annex B);
- **Watch other life stories of Holocaust survivors at [www.mhmc.ca](http://www.mhmc.ca)** in order to understand the importance of witnesses' stories (see Annex C);
- **Watch or listen to other life stories of human rights violations at [citizen.nfb.ca/displaced-violence-life-stories](http://citizen.nfb.ca/displaced-violence-life-stories) (Video and Radio tabs)** in order to understand the importance of witnesses' stories;
- **Make a PowerPoint document** in which the students talk about the process of making the heart, their impressions following the visit to the Museum, and what they have learned about themselves through the activity. Alternatively, make a **video report** in which the students carry out their own interview with a person who has experienced human rights violations.



# EVALUATION

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Exercise your professional judgment in assessing the following points or any other points that you deem essential:

- Manner in which the students progressed through the ethical questions
- Manner in which the students progressed through the questions pertaining to living in society
- Student assessment of the heart they constructed
- Student involvement in the project to construct the heart
- The writing in the heart
- The reading of the story of the *Heart*
- Oral communication
- Students' artistic process
- Students' interaction with each other
- Students' understanding of the significance of this activity
- Student's response to the activity in its entirety.



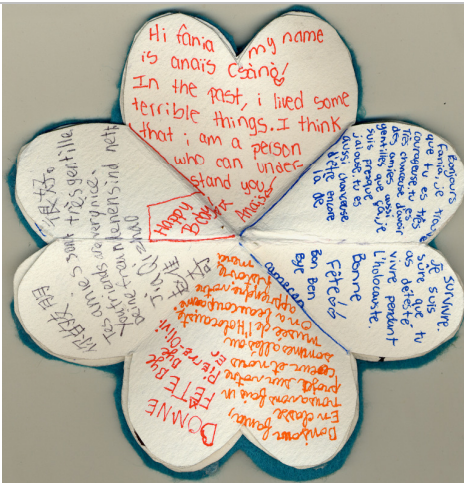
# EXAMPLES 2009



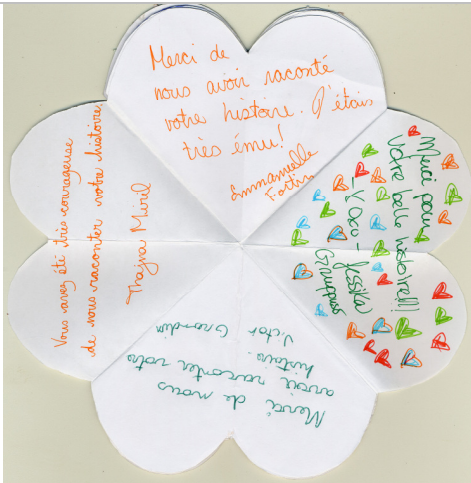
École Honoré Mercier 2009



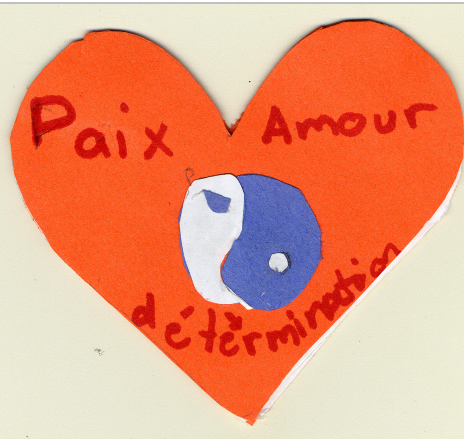
Beechwood Elementary School 2009



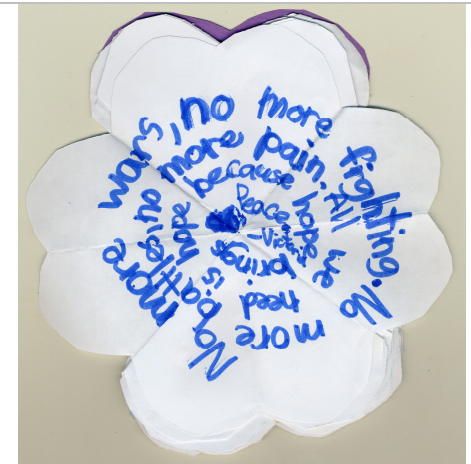
École Lambert-Closse 2009



École Sainte Anne 2009



Westpark School 2009



Mary Gardner School 2009



# ANNEX A: AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE

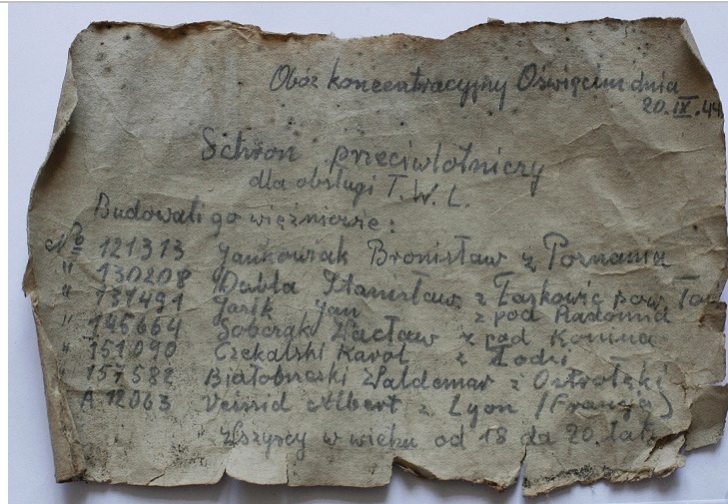
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<b>TITLE</b>	<b>“Auschwitz Birkenau. German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940-1945)”</b>
<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<p>“Auschwitz–Birkenau, monument to the deliberate genocide of the Jews by the Nazi regime (Germany 1933-1945) and to the deaths of countless others bears irrefutable evidence to one of the greatest crimes ever perpetrated against humanity.</p> <p>It is also a monument to <b>the strength of the human spirit</b> which in appalling conditions of adversity resisted the efforts of the German Nazi regime <b>to suppress freedom and free thought</b> and to wipe out whole races.</p> <p>The site is a <b>key place of memory for the whole of humankind for the Holocaust, racist policies and barbarism</b>; it is a <b>place of our collective memory</b> of this dark chapter in the history of humanity, <b>of transmission to younger generations</b> and a <b>sign of warning</b> of the many threats and tragic consequences of extreme ideologies and denial of human dignity”.</p> <p>Auschwitz was placed on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1979, on the basis of the following criteria: “to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of <b>outstanding universal value</b>”.</p> <p>Source : <a href="http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/31/">http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/31/</a></p>



# ANNEX B: MESSAGE DISCOVERED NEAR THE AUSCHWITZ CAMP IN 2009

## THE DISCOVERED MESSAGE



Source : <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,grossbild-1507087-621720,00.html>

## TRANSLATION

+++Translated by Paula and Adam Porepa, Holocaust survivors of Polish origin. Adam Porepa regularly tells his story to young people.+++

Auschwitz concentration camp, day of 20 September 44

Air defence bunker  
For the service T. W. L.

Constructed by the prisoners:

- N° 121313 Jankowiak Bronislaw from Poznan
- " 130208 Dubla Stanislaw from Laskowice district Tarnów
- " 131491 Jasik Jan from Radom
- " 145664 Sobczak Wacław from Konin
- " 151090 Czekalski Karol from Lodz
- " 157582 Bialobrzeski Waldemar from Ostrołęka
- " A12063 Veissid Albert from Lyon (France)

All aged between 18 and 20 years.

## HISTORY

The message was discovered in a bottle by construction workers in 2009. It was inserted in the cement wall of a bunker, not far from the former camp of Auschwitz (Oświęcim in Polish). This building was built by prisoners and was designed to protect the German SS from aerial attacks. Other buildings in the surrounding area served as storage and living quarters. Today, the building is owned by a school.

Source : <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8022860.stm>



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## ANNEX B: MESSAGE DISCOVERED NEAR THE AUSCHWITZ CAMP IN 2009

### THE STORY OF ALBERT VEISSID, ONE OF THE PEOPLE NAMED ON THE NOTE

#### Auschwitz note leads to survivor

By Laurence Peter and Marianne Landzettel  
BBC News 29 April 2009



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Page last updated at 13:42 GMT, Wednesday, 29 April 2009 14:42 UK

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### Auschwitz note leads to survivor

By Laurence Peter and Marianne Landzettel  
BBC News

**Auschwitz survivor Albert Veissid does not know who put his name on a list that remained hidden inside a bottle for more than 60 years.**

Builders working near the site of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp found the bottle recently. It had been left in a cement wall by inmates.



"I'm surprised by all of this," the 84-year-old told BBC News from his home in a village in the south of France.

The note bears Mr Veissid's name along with those of six Polish prisoners.

A prisoner number was tattooed on Albert Veissid's arm in Auschwitz

"Auschwitz survivor Albert Veissid does not know who put his name on a list that remained hidden inside a bottle for more than 60 years. Builders working near the site of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp found the bottle recently. It had been left in a cement wall by inmates. "I'm surprised by all of this," the 84-year-old told BBC News from his home in a village in the south of France. The note bears Mr Veissid's name along with those of six Polish prisoners.

Mr Veissid, a French Jew, was arrested by French police in Lyon in August 1943 and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where Nazi Germany murdered more than one million people, most of them Jews.

Since Monday, Polish and French journalists have contacted Mr Veissid, wanting to hear his story. He only learnt about the message in a bottle when his grand-daughter told him what builders had found at the site in southern Poland. The bottle had been left in the cement of a bunker near the Auschwitz camp. The note is dated 9 September, 1944. The construction team to which Mr Veissid was assigned worked outside the concentration camp, in buildings used by the German SS as living quarters and for storage.



## ANNEX B: MESSAGE DISCOVERED NEAR THE AUSCHWITZ CAMP IN 2009

### BBC ARTICLE (CONTINUED)

In one warehouse the prisoners had to fortify the walls in a section which was to serve the Germans as an air-raid shelter.

"I worked in the bunker, and the Christian Poles worked above me," he said.

At least two other members of the group survived the camp, an Auschwitz Museum official said. The daughter of Bronislaw Jankowiak - one of the Poles named on the note - has confirmed to the BBC that her father survived Auschwitz and died in Sweden in 1997.

In an e-mail, Irene Jankowiak said "he came to Sweden in 1945, rescued from Germany. There he met my mother, married and had four children. One of them is me."

"My father seldom spoke about his experiences during his imprisonment. It was too harsh for him. Now it feels like I have got one more piece to my family history."

The building the Nazis used for storage today belongs to a school. Recently when builders started to lay bare the brickwork under the thick layers of old cement they discovered the bottle.

### 'Very lucky'

"I wouldn't have survived if I hadn't worked in that construction team at Auschwitz," said Mr Veissid. "I was very lucky. I was friendly with the Poles and they gave me some of their soup. And what they stole from the Germans I hid in the bunker - jam and other food."

But Mr Veissid has no idea who added his name and camp identification number to the Polish names on the note.

Mr Veissid's Holocaust journey began with a French police raid in August 1943. "The police rounded up quite a few young Jews that day," he recalled. "They handed me over to the Germans, who sent me to a labour camp in Provence. There the Gestapo came to find me and on 30 May 1944 I was sent to Auschwitz."

"The rest of my family hid from the Nazis - my father stayed in a cinema, my brother lived under a bridge and my mother and sisters found refuge with local peasants."

On 18 January 1945, days before the Soviet army reached Auschwitz, Albert Veissid was sent on a death march to the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany. Later he was again moved to a smaller camp, about 80km (50 miles) away, where he was finally liberated.



## ANNEX B: MESSAGE DISCOVERED NEAR THE AUSCHWITZ CAMP IN 2009

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### BBC ARTICLE (CONTINUED)

#### Visits to Auschwitz

Mr Veissid returned to France suffering from tuberculosis and it took him four years to recover. Then he set up a small business in Marseille, selling clothes.

"Now I live in a pretty little Provençal village with my wife. I have a son aged 53, and a daughter aged 48," he told the BBC.

Over the years he has stayed in touch with other survivors and every year he goes back to visit Auschwitz. This year he went with a group of schoolchildren - to keep the memories alive for the next generation"

Source : <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8022860.stm>



## ANNEX B: MESSAGE DISCOVERED NEAR THE AUSCHWITZ CAMP IN 2009

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### DEBATE

+++Dehumanisation  
(the numbers) and  
humanity (the  
individual defined by  
his name and  
surname)  
juxtaposed+++

+++Writing, an  
affirmation of  
existence, an act of  
humanity+++

**Organise a debate** on the following points:

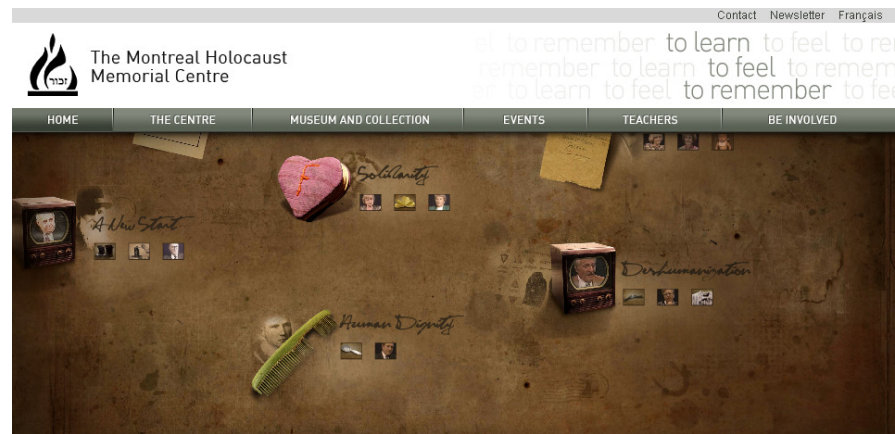
- Why did the author of the note mention the **prisoner numbers**? And the **names and surnames**?
- **Why** was this note written, put in a bottle, and hidden in a wall? What do you think of this act?
- What does this note have **in common** with the *Heart of Auschwitz*?
- In a book on the bits of paper, objects, and other items hidden by the Auschwitz prisoners, a researcher speaks of “**bottles cast into the earth**” (*Images in Spite of All*, Georges Didi-Huberman, University of Chicago Press, 2008, p. 6). What do you think of this expression? What do you understand by it?
- What would you do with this note now that it has been discovered? To what purpose?



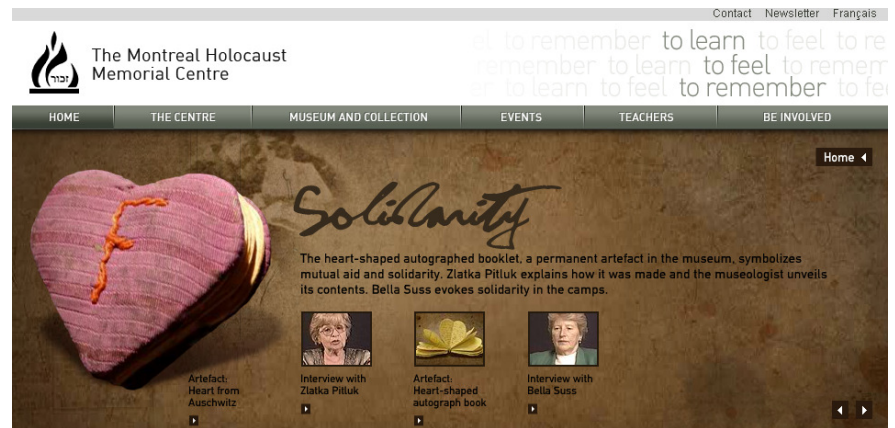
# ANNEX C: WEBSITE [WWW.MHMC.CA](http://www.mhmc.ca)

## HOME PAGE

- Access to excerpts from survivors' life stories and to artifacts from the Museum collection:



- Access to an area dedicated to the concept of solidarity and the *Heart of Auschwitz*:



## TEACHERS' PAGES

- Pedagogical activities in the classroom:

<http://www.mhmc.ca/en/pages/in-the-classroom>

- Pedagogical activities in the Museum:

<http://www.mhmc.ca/en/pages/at-the-Museum>

- Teaching resources: <http://www.mhmc.ca/en/pages/teaching-resources>

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

<p><b>CONCEPT AND DESIGN</b></p>	<p>Emmanuelle Sonntag, Education Coordinator (MHMC)</p>
<p><b>TEACHERS PARTICIPATING IN PILOT PROJECTS</b></p>	<p><b>Jean-Louis Stevenin</b>, école Lambert-Closse (Grade 6)  <b>Ariane Tremblay</b>, école Le Carignan (Grade 5)  <b>Hélène Massé</b>, école Fernand Séguin  <b>Amélie Drouin</b>, école Le Carignan (Grade 5)  <b>Marie-Ève Labonté</b>, école Le Carignan (Grade 5)  <b>Mélanie Blondin</b>, école Honoré Mercier (Grade 6)  <b>Marie Germain</b>, école Christ Roi (Grade 6)  <b>Laurence Assouline</b>, Beechwood Elementary School (Grade 6)  <b>Michel Bourgeau</b>, école Sainte-Anne (Grade 6)  <b>Vanessa della Valle</b>, Mary Gardner School (Grade 5)  <b>Tracey Blonder</b>, Mary Gardner School (Grade 6)  <b>Carole Touchette</b>, Westpark School (Grade 6)</p>
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<p><b>RESERVATIONS, CONTACTS AND COMMENTS</b></p>	<p><b>The Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre (MHMC)</b>          5151, chemin de la Côte-Sainte-Catherine          Montréal (Québec)          H3W 1M6          Canada          (514) 345-2605  <a href="mailto:info@mhmc.ca">info@mhmc.ca</a>  <a href="http://www.mhmc.ca">www.mhmc.ca</a></p> <p>Through its Museum, commemorative events, and educational initiatives, the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre informs and sensitizes people of all ages and backgrounds to the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, racism, hatred, and indifference. The Centre promotes our collective responsibility to respect diversity.  <i>The Heart from Auschwitz</i> - Elementary Level Cycle Three / 2009-2010 All rights reserved</p>

