

ABOUT VISUAL HISTORY

- Each visual history testimony in the USC Shoah Foundation Institute’s archive consists of a videotaped interview with a single Holocaust survivor or other eyewitness (e.g. aid provider, rescuer, liberator) speaking about his or her entire life before, during, and after the Holocaust, and guided by questions from an Institute interviewer. The interviews were recorded on videotape between 1994 and 2001; they average 2 hours and 30 minutes in length.
- In their testimonies, survivors and other witnesses speak not only about the tragedy that befell them and those they loved, but also about their childhood experiences and day-to-day life, their traditions, their friendships, and their family. These life stories have an important educational value, not only because they support the study of the Holocaust, but also because they often broach questions of fairness, justice, labeling, or scapegoating, just to name a few—issues that adolescents confront in their daily lives.
- Video is an engaging educational medium for today’s students, and one to which they readily respond. Video testimonies also give students an important and rare opportunity to connect with a survivor or other witness to the Holocaust. When watching testimonies, students see for themselves a real face, a real voice, which helps them understand that behind each statistic and each fact, is a person. Students can develop an immediate and intimate bond with the person on the screen and become personally and emotionally affected. This opportunity to affect students provides an opening for learning, and for that learning to be sustained even after students leave the classroom.
- Visual history testimony, when combined with a standard written curriculum and provided with the proper historical context, is an unparalleled primary source material for teachers. It can be used in a classroom setting to get young people to think about their behaviors and biases today, and to inspire dialogue about their role in the history that is currently being made.
- Visual history can enhance and augment not only the study of history, but also literature, current events, and other often-taught topics such as character education, diversity awareness/anti-bias education, and conflict mediation. However, it cannot replace the need for educators to provide a proper historical context to surround the use of testimonies in the classroom.