

# THE NUMBER ON GREAT GRANDPA'S ARM

---

## Lesson Plan for Grades 3–5

---

## Goal:

Students will understand some basic elements about life during the Holocaust, using the film *The Number on Great-Grandpa's Arm*

---

## Key Standards:

Common Core  
Standards SL.3.2,  
SL.3.6, L.3.1-3.4, L.3.6,  
W.3.2, W.3.4

---

## Materials Required:

HBO's *The Number on Great-Grandpa's Arm* documentary ([hbo.com/documentaries/the-number-on-great-grandpas-arm](http://hbo.com/documentaries/the-number-on-great-grandpas-arm)), Student Activity sheet, map of Europe

---

## Time Required:

One to two 45-minute class periods

---

---

## INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Explain that students will learn about a very difficult time in history by watching the documentary *The Number on Great-Grandpa's Arm*. They will see Elliott, a ten-year-old, and his great-grandfather, Jack, who lived through what is known as the Holocaust.

[For teacher's use, visit [mjhnyc.org/guide](http://mjhnyc.org/guide) for glossary, timeline, and background information]

2. Say to students that life was in some ways the same and in some ways different for kids in Poland in the 1930s. As you watch, think about this question: "What are some things about Great-Grandpa Jack's life as a kid that are the same as yours?" [Show the class video excerpt 1:34 – 4:27]
3. After viewing, reiterate the question and clarify that they are thinking about Great-Grandpa Jack's life in Poland in the 1930s, rather than the contemporary video of ten-year-old Elliott. In discussion, elicit some things they noticed that are the same (some possible responses might include: the games, they went to school, had friends, went swimming, had a happy family). Ask students:
  - Even though Poland is far from the United States, some things looked the same. What are some of those things? (Some possible responses might include: the trees, the sun, clothing, the buildings, the streets)
  - What are some things you noticed that are different?
4. Explain to students that in the next clip they will learn more about Jack's father. [Show the class video excerpt 4:29 – 5:00] After viewing, ask students:
  - What does Jack's father do for a living?
  - How does Jack describe his father?
5. Distribute Student Activity Sheet and ask students to respond to the questions in writing as they view the film. For older students, consider distributing before screening the excerpt so that they may take notes on the handout. Record answers to questions above on the board or chart paper if it will be helpful for spelling during the writing activity.
6. Distribute a map of Europe or display in front of classroom. Say to students: When Germany invaded Poland, life changed.
  - Can you find Poland on the map? On your Activity Sheet, write the names of the countries that border Poland.
  - Do you notice Germany borders Poland? It is on the western side of Poland. The German Army invaded Poland in 1939 and this was what we call the start of World War II. The Nazi government was in power and life for Elliott's Great-Grandpa Jack changed.
7. Explain that Jewish people living under Nazi rule had everything taken away from them and they were separated from other people. [Show the class video excerpt 5:21 – 7:58]
  - After viewing, ask students what they noticed. What were some things that happened to Jewish people under Nazi rule? How did Jack's life change when the Nazis took over Poland? What were some things Jack lost? What do you think he missed most?
  - Elliott asks if Great-Grandpa Jack remembers seeing some of the terrible things happen. How does Great-Grandpa Jack reply? How do you think Great-Grandpa Jack feels as he talks about these difficult things with Elliott? How do you think Elliott feels?
  - Ask students to respond in writing to the question "How do you feel when you talk about difficult things with someone close to you?" on the Activity Sheet.
8. Explain to students that it was a confusing and scary time. Jews didn't know what would happen next. When Great-Grandpa Jack was 14 years old, he was arrested by the Nazis. His father came to say goodbye. He knew Jack was strong and that he would probably be made to work as a slave by the Nazis, but he didn't know what would happen to the rest of the family who weren't taken to slave labor. Jack was scared. [Show the class video excerpt 8:00 – 9:10]
  - After viewing, ask students what they noticed. How do they think Jack felt when he saw his father? How do they think Jack's father felt seeing Jack?

9. Explain to students that Jews were sent away to concentration camps, where they had to do slave labor. [Show the class video excerpt 10:35 – 11:32]

- After viewing, ask students what they noticed. What are some things that happened to Jewish people in concentration camps?
- Ask students to partner with someone and explain what they understood about Jack's father sending him the hat with the money hidden inside when Jack was in the concentration camp. Have some students share and correct any misunderstandings.

10. Explain to students that some Jews had numbers tattooed on their arms when they arrived at the Auschwitz concentration camp, and that the Nazis used that number instead of their name. [Show the class video excerpt 12:15-12:43]

- After viewing, ask students what they noticed.
- Why do you think the artist shows the people fading away, with just the numbers remaining?
- How do you think Jack felt when they tattooed the number on his arm?

11. Explain to students that Germany lost the war and when World War II ended, all of the Jews who were in concentration camps, like Jack, or in hiding, were now free. Many of them left Europe because it was too painful to stay in the place where so many bad things had happened to them. Jack got married, came to the United States, and opened a fish store. [Show the class video excerpt 15:25 – 16:05]

- After viewing, ask students what they noticed.
- What do you think liberation meant to Jack? What emotions do you think Jack had? (He was happy he was free, but heartbroken that his family did not survive and his home and possessions were gone.)
- Why does Jack feed anyone who is hungry, whether they have money or not? What does the man mean when he says that Jack knows what it is like to be hungry?
- Explain to students that Jack's story is an example of how one person whose freedom was taken away from him does what he can to relieve the suffering of others. He helps make the world a better place.

12. Explain to students that many people – and Elliott and his family most of all – look up to his great-grandfather, Jack. [Show the class video excerpt 16:37 – 16:54]

- What does Elliot mean when he says that Jack is his family's hero?
- Do you have someone in your life who is your real-life hero? Why are they your hero?

### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

1. Interview an adult in your life about a time that they faced a challenge or struggle. What did they learn from it? What advice can they give you about facing challenging times?
2. View one of the other survivor interviews on the HBO website ([hbo.com/documentaries/the-number-on-great-grandpas-arm](http://hbo.com/documentaries/the-number-on-great-grandpas-arm)). Prepare a short presentation about that survivor, including an illustration of something they describe in their interview. Your presentation should also include the lesson the survivor passes along at the end of their interview.
3. Write a letter to Elliott or his Great-Grandpa Jack. Tell them your thoughts and feelings about their family history. Ask them any questions you have.

# STUDENT ACTIVITY SHEET

THE  
NUMBER  
ON GREAT  
GRANDPA'S  
ARM

Map Activity

Can you find Poland on the map? Write the names of the countries that border Poland.

Rise of Hitler/  
Nazis and Ghetto  
[5:21 – 7:58]

What were some things that happened to Jewish people under Nazi rule?

Elliott asks if Great-Grandpa Jack remembers seeing some of the terrible things happen. How does Great-Grandpa Jack reply?

How do you think Great-Grandpa Jack feels as he talks about these difficult things with Elliott? How do you think Elliott feels?

How do you feel when you talk about difficult things with someone close to you?

Arrest  
[8:00 – 9:10]

How do you think Jack felt when he saw his father?

How do you think Jack's father felt when he saw Jack?

**Concentration  
Camps**  
[10:35 – 11:32]

What are some things that happened to Jewish people in concentration camps?

Explain what Jack's father sent to him in the concentration camp.

**The Number**  
[12:15 – 12:43]

Why do you think the artist shows the people fading away, with just the numbers remaining?

How do you think Jack felt when they tattooed the number on his arm?

**Jack's Store**  
[15:25 – 16:05]

Why does Jack feed anyone who is hungry, whether they have money or not?

What does the man mean when he says that Jack knows what it is like to be hungry?

**Hero**  
[16:37 – 16:54]

What does Elliott mean when he says that Jack is his family's hero?

Do you have someone in your life who is your hero? Why are they your hero?