

## **Integration of the Shoah into the Teaching of Literature at the First Level of Primary Schools: Presentation of the Research Investigation**

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### **Abstract**

*The main purpose of our quantitative research study is choosing, verifying and publishing a series of texts focused on the Shoah (Holocaust) and developing a methodological guide where teachers can find possible ways of working with the texts that have been selected in teaching. One partial objective is to demonstrate that texts about the Shoah can be utilized in teaching at 1st grade of elementary school, given the appropriate choice of texts, and the appropriate choice of methods. The respondents of the questionnaire survey are pupils of the 1st grade elementary schools in the Olomouc region. The statistics from the Annual Report on the State and Development of the Education System in the Olomouc Region show that there were 30,144 pupils in the first cycle in the school year 2021/2022 in the Olomouc Region. We believe that this specifically targeted collection will not only help raise awareness of the different ways the Shoah theme can be integrated into elementary school education, 1st grade, but will also, to some extent, help alleviate the angst or concerns of those teachers dealing with the mostly abstract events of the Shoah. We hope that a practically illustrated collection of texts can help citizens of democratic societies to see the roots of different types of intolerant behaviour and actions and therefore to prevent to some degree.*

**Keywords:** shoah; holocaust; quantitative research; primary schools; teaching literature education; shoah-texts

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## Introduction

In this paper, we present a research investigation, the aim of which is to verify the compilation of a monothematic anthology of texts with the theme of the Shoah, through the prism of their implicit pupils, i.e., pupils of the first level of primary schools and teachers who teach at this level of education at the time of the implementation of the research investigation. Like *Teoria da História e História da historiografia: exercícios de pesquisa* (Morais & de Souza Neto, 2022), the anthology's central aim is to integrate intentional texts about the Shoah into the curriculum, considering the different cognitive abilities of students in different grades, in our case primary school pupils. The importance of language and words in shaping historical events like the Shoah is highlighted, emphasizing the ethical responsibility of using words in combat, destruction, or redemption. De Kesel (2016) states that many scholars consider the term Shoah to be a more accurate description of the persecution and murder of European Jews between 1933 and 1945 compared to the term Holocaust, which has religious connotations that do not reflect the actual events. Shoah, a term meaning catastrophe in Hebrew, refers to the genocide of six million Jews by the Nazis during World War II. The memory of the Shoah plays a significant role in shaping Jewish identity and influencing social beliefs (Jackson, 2020). Increasingly, scholars are taking a microhistorically approach to the study of the Holocaust, focusing on the perspectives of both victims and perpetrators and the common but criminal nature of the violence involved (Von Braun, 2021). The Holocaust refers to the historically significant and transnational genocide that targeted European Jews during World War II, orchestrated by the Nazis but in which various other countries participated (Assmann, 2010). It involves a complex series of events, including social exclusion, deportations, concentration camps and extermination, with victims scattered across continents (Dwork & Van Pelt, 2003). For the purposes of paper and in this research inquiry, we view the terms Shoah and Holocaust as synonymous.

We have been guided to compile this anthology by the constant relevance of the events of the Shoah for contemporary society. Perelberg (2022) states that the events of the Shoah are of considerable importance to contemporary society because they have influenced various aspects of culture, education and politics. In addition, Patt (2017) adds that the horrors of the Shoah contributed to the suppression of anti-Semitism on a global scale, although outbreaks of virulence persist. Regarding the importance of these events in education, Rodman (2019) notes that Holocaust education is embroiled in political controversies and serves as a tool to promote human rights, combat discrimination, and channel social behavior. Acedo (2010) adds that Shoah remembrance also affects cultural representations and identities, raising concerns about trivialization and the Holocaust industry.

Based on the relevance of the events of the Shoah for contemporary society, we are of the opinion that it is necessary for pupils at all levels of education to be acquainted with the warnings that this lineage of the Second World War presents to us, probably adequate to their age and related aspects (cognitive and emotional development, etc.). Tiburzi (2023) states that incorporating Shoah events into the primary school curriculum involves using interdisciplinary approaches such as combining history, poetry, art and music to effectively engage young learners. Mašát, Sladová, Šmakalová, and Bínová (2020) add that emphasis on the didactic use of visual material, including photographs and illustrations, is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the historical event and its complexity. Following the example of Israeli public schools, educational systems can adopt effective methods in teaching about the Shoah and the Holocaust that convey the significance of these events and promote critical thinking and historical knowledge in young students (Mašát, 2019a, 2019c).

Mašát, Sladová, Šmakalová, and Bínová (2020) state that teaching about the Shoah in primary school involves various effective methods. Careful planning of teaching practices, considering factors such as historical accuracy, appropriate selection of materials, and avoidance of emotionally upsetting content, is essential to ensure effective teaching about the Holocaust while considering the complexities of Holocaust education (Tiburzi, 2023).

## **Research Methodology**

The first step in the research will be to choose suitable texts, to which the theme of the Shoah will be applied. Excerpts of the phenomena will be extracted from intentional narratives, which will be analysed in detail. For each excerpt, there will be a set of closed questions – this will include another option for pupils to write an answer to the question, in order to determine the level of understanding of the text to the primary school level – and the popularity of the chosen publications will be tracked in the research sample. Before the respondents start filling in the anonymous questionnaire, they will work with selected literary samples. The selected sample and methodological guidelines will be sent to teachers. After the teaching session, teachers will be interviewed about how they find the methodological tool (method sheet) to work with, a discussion will be developed about necessary/possible changes based on teachers' experiences from practice, etc. (the researcher will be present in the relevant sessions). The approaches to text will be selected in accordance with the results of a research, which included the opinions of teachers of Czech Language and Literature from the lower-secondary schools on the inclusion of the Shoah theme in the course of Literature Education. The first section of the questionnaire was related to the didactic procedures that the tested teachers applied in the field of

Literature Education (Mašát, 2019b). We would like to employ the methods to the sample demonstrated by the teachers, otherwise we would depart too much from the reality of education in the primary schools in the Czech Republic. The selected approach can enhance the pace of implementing the monothematic anthology in practice.

Because it can be used as a research methodology, the questionnaire survey method was chosen because it has the following advantages: It gives an organized and systematic approach to gathering the information (Piterenko, 2013), Questionnaire testing (cognitive testing and pilot surveys) ensures that the content, interrater and reliability (Arundel, 2023) are producing quality data. Last but not least, they are low cost, less labor intensive than other forms of survey tools and offer standard responses so data compilation is easy (Akingbade Waidi, 2016).

One of the set of texts to be utilised in a research investigation will be verified or falsified depending on the discovery and answers of the students who include in the research. The third part is submission of the final version of the anthology for the review process—this is a prerequisite for its publication.

## **Respondents**

Children from the first grade in primary schools will be the subjects of this study, they will be selected by random stratified sampling from the list of primary schools in selected Region of Olomouc. We attempt to be able to get a representative sample of learners from all grades in the first standard of Primary School. It should be noted, however, that, at each grade level, there will be three passages each year (two prose and one poetry) selected for verification. The first-grade students (respondents) of the primary school from the Olomouc Region will be the recipients of the questionnaire survey. The Pupil count at the first cycle is 30 144 pupils (data for the school year 2021/2022 from the Annual report on the status and development of the education system in the Olomouc Region). To meet the representativeness of the sample there were a maximum of 100,000 pupils with 1.5% of these tested according to Katriak (1975). Quota Stratified Sampling will be done. There will be a total of 457 first grade primary school students tested (See table 1).

Table 1

<b>district</b>	<b>1. year/ sample size</b>	<b>2. year/ sample size</b>	<b>3. year/ sample size</b>	<b>4. year/ sample size</b>	<b>5. year/ sample size</b>	<b>total/ sample size</b>
<b>Jeseník</b>	306/5	317/6	313/6	313/6	343/5	1592/28
<b>Olomouc</b>	2401/36	2483/37	2433/36	2336/35	2594/39	12247/183
<b>Prostějov</b>	1071/16	1026/15	1019/15	1028/15	1088/16	5232/77
<b>Přerov</b>	1112/17	1134/17	1076/16	1135/17	1165/17	5622/84
<b>Šumperk</b>	1104/17	1072/16	1143/17	1036/16	1096/16	5451/82
<b>total/ sample</b>	5994/91	6032/91	5984/90	5848/89	6286/96	30144/457

Number of pupils and classes in primary school by grade – regular classes in the school year 2021/2022.

### **Selected Excerpts: Demonstrative Selection**

#### **1<sup>st</sup> year**

Pupils from the first year of primary school will be presented with the picture below (see picture 1) as part of the questionnaire.

Picture 1



Source: Klíma, 1998.

As part of the questionnaire, they will answer the following questions in the questions related to this depiction:

1. What does the boy in the picture look like?
  - a) he is sad
  - b) he is cheerful
2. What did you notice most about the picture?
  - a) food
  - b) a toy
  - c) clothing
3. How do you like the picture?



**2<sup>nd</sup> year**

Students from the second year will, among other things, answer questions related to the picture below (see picture 2). This is a watercolour by Helga Hošková-Weissová, who arrived with her parents as an eleven-year-old in the first transport in December 1941. She captured life in the Terezín ghetto in her drawings. Children in the ghetto drew under

the guidance of the painter Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, who hid them. About five thousand drawings were found after the war in the attic of a children's home.

Picture 2



*Ivoře (Q 306), Terezín, 1943  
ba perem, akvarel, 155 × 217, PD: 13. VII. 43 / hw*

Source: <https://www.pametnaroda.cz/cs/magazin/pribehy/prvni-transport-do-terezina-komando-vystavby-aufbaukommando>.

1. What did you notice most about the picture?

- a) old people
- b) stars
- c) numbers

2. How do you feel about the picture?

- a) cheerful
- b) sad

3. How do you like the picture?



**3<sup>rd</sup> year**

Respondents from the third year will, among other things, work with the poem below, the author of which is Zdeněk Ornest, who was forcibly interned in the Terezín

concentration camp. The poem, including its video recording, is available on the website of the magazine Vedem (<http://vedem-terezin.cz/basne-povidky.html>).

### GOODBYE, SUMMER

I would like to bid adieu like you, single,  
and a stroll through the orchards,  
Together with the river and fruits. In addition to the river and fruits.  
we were once when we were likely, when I was not,  
as I am now, broken.



I would like to say good-bye to summer as you say good-bye to summer.

Transparent and unobstructed from the sun.

To kiss the withering flower for a moment or two. I can't, I can't, I'm locked in a dungeon

Orče (Zdeněk Ornest)

The following questions will be postulated about the poem:

1. Is the poem happy or sad?

- a) cheerful
- b) sad

2. What colour does the poem remind you of the most?

- a) black
- b) white
- c) yellow

3. How do you like the poem?



**4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year**

The questionnaires for the fourth and fifth grades will have an identical content composition, to verify or falsify one of the pre-research hypotheses, namely that pupils from the fifth grade achieve a higher level of understanding and interpretation of examples and poems with the theme of the Shoah than pupils from the fourth grade. Fourth and fifth graders interpret Shoah-themed texts differently based on their receptive and cognitive abilities (Mašát & Šmakalová, 2020). Research on the reception of such texts among pupils shows different degrees of popularity and interpretation in different age groups (Hommet, 2019). In addition, teaching about the Shoah at the primary school level is a challenging topic that raises debates among educators, with some using children's literature to address the Holocaust to improve understanding through specific strategies used by authors (Mašát & Šmakalová, 2020). Understanding the emotional impact of such texts on high school students is also essential, as emotions can act as facilitators or barriers to learning about historical events such as the Shoah (Pincemin et al., 2016).

**MEMORY ON THE DOORSTEP**

How many years has it been?

Since I last saw

Petrin Hill was in the background as the sun went down.

That the eyes that filled with tears kissed that Prague,

as it was shrouded in evening shadows.

For almost a year

I have been living in a most hideous hole,

with only a few streets for your beauty.

As wild as a lion in a cage.

Praha, the stone fairy, I remember!

1. What colour does the poem remind you of?

a) red

b) grey



c) white

2. What does Prague remind the poet of?

a) stone

b) tears

c) a fairy tale

3. How do you like the poem?



Each questionnaire will end with the following questions:

What did you like the most?

a) the first sample

b) second sample

c) the third poem

I am

a) a girl

b) a boy

I go to

a) 1<sup>st</sup> year

b) 2<sup>nd</sup> year

c) 3<sup>rd</sup> year

d) 4<sup>th</sup> year

e) 5<sup>th</sup> year

Do you read in your free time, or do your parents read to you, or do you browse books?

a) yes

b) no

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

The contribution was devoted to the presentation of a research investigation, the aim of which is to verify the content composition of a monothematic anthology of texts with the theme of the Shoah, which will be dedicated to pupils in the first grade of primary schools. We are confident that at this level of education students can be engaged with this line of events in the 2nd World War using literary samples or other artistic artefacts with appropriate choice of methods.

The research will be carried out by means of a questionnaire survey, both among pupils of the first grade of elementary schools and among teachers who teach at this level of institutional education. The questionnaire will be unique for students from different years of the first grade, with the exception of the fourth and fifth years: these respondents will fill in the same questionnaire, because one of the research goals is to verify or falsify the hypothesis that students from a higher year are able to achieve a greater level of understanding or interpretation not only a demonstration with the theme of the Shoah.

We are convinced that the resulting specifically focused anthology can not only increase awareness of the various possibilities of implementing the Shoah theme into teaching at the first level of elementary schools, but at the same time it can to a certain extent eliminate the anxiety or fears of the relevant educators about including the largely abstract events of the Shoah in educational practice. We hope that a practically proven monothematic set of texts can increase the ability of citizens of democratic societies to recognize the germs of various forms of intolerant behavior and actions, and thus prevent them to a certain extent.

## **Recommendation**

1. Acquainting pupils of the first grade of elementary school with the theme of the Shoah, both literary and otherwise, is suitable with adequately chosen methods and forms of teaching.
2. The most appropriate mediator between the events of the Shoah and non-readers or beginning readers is images.
3. The key task in presenting the events of the Shoah to students is played by their teachers, who should consider the age of the students and the goal (implication) of the Shoah phenomenon for contemporary society.

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