

"A MOVIE ABOUT TRIUMPHING  
THROUGH ADVERSITY...  
IN YOUR HEART AND YOUR MIND."

THE PLAYLIST

"A HAUNTING PERFORMANCE...  
FOSTER IS FIERCELY COMMITTED."

THE WRAP

"A POWERFUL TALE...  
FOSTER GOES ALL IN."

DEADLINE

BEN FOSTER

HBO ORIGINAL

THE

# SURVIVOR

SOME FIGHT TO WIN.  
HE FOUGHT TO LIVE.

NEW FILM  
STREAMING APR 27

HBOmax

## ABOUT THE SURVIVOR

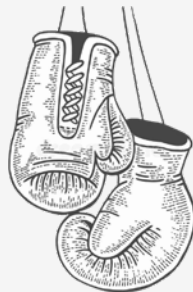
The film “The Survivor” directed by award-winning filmmaker Barry Levinson, is based on the true story of Jewish Holocaust survivor Harry Haft. Portrayed by actor Ben Foster, Harry is haunted by his experience of being forced to use his skills as a boxer to survive Auschwitz. Harry’s moral and physical strength are tested to the limits, as he fights in order to survive.

The film not only acknowledges moral ambiguity but is completely built around it. Discussion and learning around the film can examine what happens to ethics and morals when everything is stripped away from you. Questions can explore resilience and how people are able to adapt to the most difficult situations.

The Film Discussion Toolkit includes questions for conversation and reflection in addition to activities designed for high school and college students or adults.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Foster understanding of the impact of World War II and the Holocaust on Jewish lives and communities in Europe, the U.S. and beyond into the present day.
- Use empathy, compassion, and human interest as a means of teaching about historic events.
- Explore the contemporary relevance of “The Survivor.” Amid the stunning rise in hate, nationalism, and antisemitism globally, “The Survivor” provides important lessons about the horrors of the Holocaust and the enduring trauma amongst survivors, their relatives, and the Jewish community - it is more vital than ever.
- Explore how “The Survivor” uses a nonlinear narrative structure and other cinematic devices to dig into Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and its effect on Harry Haft’s life.
- Discuss the cost of survival - what happens to ethics and morals when everything is stripped away from a person?
- Identify how stories like Harry Haft’s are reflected in today’s world in other marginalized communities.
- Explore our fascination with survivor stories, real and fictional.



# FILM DISCUSSION GUIDE

Viewers are encouraged to explore the themes below and topics related to the film both before and after they watch it. The activity and discussion ideas below can be used to prepare audiences for viewing the film or to continue the exploration individually or in groups afterwards.

## 1. HATE AND ANTISEMITISM

Hitler and the Nazis persecuted people based on their religious, racial, ethnic, cultural, and political backgrounds in addition to targeting other marginalized communities, such as people with disabilities and members of the LGBTQ community. In 2020, the ADL recorded a total of 2,024 attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions across the country, the third-highest year on record since the ADL started tracking such data in the 1970s.

- How have individuals and communities throughout history been persecuted for their ethnic and religious backgrounds, and beliefs?
- How does “The Survivor” explore the hate and antisemitism that lead to the Holocaust?
- Discuss the way Nazi Dietrich Schneider talks about the Holocaust. How does he rationalize the horrors of the concentration camps? How does he express hate and antisemitism? Where do we see similar rhetoric today?
- Have you experienced intolerance in your own life? Have your friends or family?
- How does hate towards “others” manifest itself today?
- What is the legacy of Nazism today?

## 2. SURVIVING THE UNIMAGINABLE

“The Survivor” not only explores how Harry Haft survived the horrors of the Holocaust, but how he continued to fight to survive the trauma that followed him for the rest of his life. In the flashbacks to his time at Auschwitz and his fights at Jaworzno, we see Harry forced to make terrible choices and participate in acts that he finds morally reprehensible just to stay alive. These memories haunt him as he attempts to put his life back together.

A [recent study](#) shows that a high percentage of Holocaust survivors suffer from significant life-long debilitating PTSD, often accompanied by psychosis and other serious mental health disorders. For these survivors, the memories are a lifelong burden that they are unable to escape, and often reluctant to share. [Other studies](#) have concluded that the descendants of Holocaust survivors may be genetically predetermined to be at a high risk for developing PTSD, meaning that the psychological effects of World War II may be seen for generations to come.

- How does “The Survivor” explore the effects of PTSD on Harry Haft’s life?
- How does Harry’s wife, Miriam, challenge Harry to acknowledge his mental health and work on facing it?
- What happens to ethics, morals, and personal beliefs when everything is stripped away from you? How should we be discussing the actions a person takes to survive a traumatic situation? How does this contribute to PTSD and a reluctance to share survival stories?
- Where might people be forced to make similar decisions today?
- The film takes place after the Holocaust, telling the story of Harry’s time in the camps through flashbacks. How does that shape what it means to be a survivor?
- How does this story differ from other Holocaust stories you have seen in film? Are we accustomed to seeing the stories of Jews who have survived?
- What are examples of similar stories in popular culture, where people are forced to make terrible decisions to survive? Why do we find these stories so interesting?

### 3. THE HOLOCAUST AND WORLD WAR II

According to a 2018 poll, 22 percent of millennials said they haven’t heard of the Holocaust or are not sure whether they’ve heard of it – twice the percentage of U.S. adults as a whole who said the same. Meanwhile, 66 percent of millennials could not identify what Auschwitz was.

- Why do you think fewer young people know about the Holocaust, and how can we teach new generations about the horrors of the Holocaust?
- Why is it important that people learn about historic tragedies like the Holocaust?
- How does it affect society when some people are not educated on events like the Holocaust?
- How can movies like “The Survivor” serve to remind people about the events that transpired during World War II, as well as the lasting effects of those events?

## 4. THE ARTISTIC MEDIUM OF THE SURVIVOR

“The Survivor” makes use of several cinematic devices including a nonlinear narrative, sections in both black and white and color, and a powerful score by Hans Zimmer. These artistic choices are made to highlight certain themes in the story.

- Why do you think the flashbacks are in black and white? How did the change in coloring make you feel? What did it make you notice?
- The story jumps between three time periods - Harry’s time in the concentration camp in 1943, his preparation for his fight with Rocky Marciano in 1949, and his reconnection with Leah in the 1960’s. What themes are highlighted by telling the story in this way? How would it have been different if it had been told in chronological order?
- How did the score underline the themes of the film? Did the music make any scenes especially memorable?
- How can film be an effective medium to tell important stories?
- How do we know when a work of art is effective?
- What are other films about historic events that have used similar artistic devices effectively?
- Why is it important to make films about historic events and people?



Some fight to win. He fought to live.  
#TheSurvivor premieres April 27 on @hbomax.

# ACTIVITIES

[USC Shoah Foundation](#) has developed Interactive digital activities for middle, high school, and college students to help them better understand the Holocaust and what survivors experienced inside and outside the camps. These resources can be utilized by adults as well.

- [Arrival at Auschwitz - Images and Individual Experiences](#) - In this activity, students will consider the personal experiences of those who arrived on the ramp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. They will explore images from the Auschwitz Album, showing the arrival of Hungarian Jewish men, women and children in 1944, as well as listen to survivors who endured a similar process.
- [A Conversation with Pinchas Gutter - Dimensions in Testimony](#) - In this activity, students will be introduced to the interactive biography of Jewish survivor, Pinchas Gutter and will engage with him through USC Shoah Foundation's Dimensions in Testimony technology. Students will learn the techniques for having a conversation with a survivor and how to construct questions appropriately to elicit personal, historical and universal thematic responses.
- [Auschwitz-Inner Strength, Outward Resistance](#) - Through an analysis of testimony, students learn about the resistance efforts that took place in the Auschwitz camp complex and about the meaning of resistance in the context of the Holocaust.
- [Humanizing the Other](#) - This activity for college students is about humanizing the "Other," various groups who often are categorized in an "us v. them" paradigm and subsequently treated as less than human. In "Humanizing the 'Other,'" students will learn about the origins and experiences of dehumanization and othering and extrapolate universal experiences found in specific testimonies.
- [Echoes & Reflections Timeline of the Holocaust](#) - Designed as a resource for students, the timeline chronicles key dates in the history of the Holocaust from 1933-1945. Throughout the timeline, students can click on specific events to deepen their learning with additional information about the primary source including clips of testimony from witnesses and survivors. This resource was developed by USC Shoah Foundation, Yad Vashem, and ADL.

# TIMELINE OF EVENTS

## BEFORE 1933

World War I (1914–1918) devastated Europe and created new countries. The years that followed saw the continent struggle to recover from the death or injury of tens of millions of soldiers and civilians, as well as catastrophic damage to property and industry. In 1933, 9.5 million Jewish people lived in Europe (1.7% of the total population) working and raising families in the harsh reality of the worldwide economic depression. German Jews numbered about 500,000, or less than 1% of the national population.

## 1933-1938

Following the appointment of Adolf Hitler as German Chancellor on January 30, 1933, the Nazi state (also referred to as the Third Reich) quickly became a regime in which citizens had no guaranteed basic rights. The Nazi rise to power brought an end to the Weimar Republic, the German parliamentary democracy established after World War I. In 1933, the regime established the first concentration camps, imprisoning its political opponents, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others classified as "dangerous." Extensive propaganda was used to spread the Nazi Party's racist goals and ideals. During the first six years of Hitler's dictatorship, German Jews felt the effects of more than 400 decrees and regulations that restricted all aspects of their public and private lives.

## 1939-1941

The Holocaust took place in the broader context of World War II. On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Over the next two years, Nazi Germany and its allies conquered much of Europe. German officials confiscated Jewish property, required Jews in many places to wear identifying armbands, and established ghettos and forced-labor camps. In June 1941, Germany turned on its ally, the Soviet Union. Often drawing on local civilian and police support, Einsatzgruppen (mobile killing units) followed the German army and carried out mass shootings as it advanced into Soviet lands. Gas vans also appeared on the eastern front in late fall 1941.

# TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1942-1945

In a period marked by intense fighting on both the eastern and western fronts of World War II, Nazi Germany also intensified its pursuit of the “Final Solution.” These years saw systematic deportations of millions of Jews to increasingly efficient killing centers using poison gas. By the end of the war in spring 1945, as the Germans and their Axis partners were pushed back on both fronts, Allied troops uncovered the full extent of crimes committed during the Holocaust. It is during this time period that the black and white sections of “The Survivor” take place. It was in 1943 that Harry Haft was imprisoned at Auschwitz and recruited to become a boxer at the Jaworzno labor camp, where he fought until 1945. In 1945, Harry Haft managed to escape from the death march to Germany that the survivors of the camp were forced to take.

AFTER 1945

By May 1945, the Germans and their collaborators had murdered six million European Jews as part of a systematic plan of genocide—the Holocaust. When Allied troops entered the concentration camps, they discovered clear evidence of Nazis’ mass murder. Soldiers also found thousands of survivors—Jews and non-Jews—suffering from starvation and disease. For survivors, the prospect of rebuilding their lives was daunting. With few possibilities for emigration, tens of thousands of homeless Holocaust survivors, including Harry Haft, were housed in displaced persons (DP) camps. In the following years, many international and domestic courts conducted trials of accused war criminals.

Harry Haft emigrated to the U.S. in 1948 and began a career as a boxer. He competed until his fight with Rocky Marciano on July 18, 1949. After losing the fight he retired, married Miriam Wofsoniker, and opened a fruit and vegetable store in Brooklyn.



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- USC Shoah Foundation develops empathy, understanding, and respect through testimony. Access their resources at [sfi.usc.edu](https://sfi.usc.edu)
- [Watch Harry Haft's Testimony](#)
- [Sacha Baron Cohen's Keynote Address at ADL's 2019 Never Is Now Summit on Anti-Semitism and Hate](#)
- [Los Angeles Holocaust Museum's Educator Resources](#)
- [The Tikvah Podcast: Dara Horn on Why People Love Dead Jews](#)

## REBOOT

Reboot is an arts and culture non-profit that reimagines and reinforces Jewish thought and traditions. As a premier research and development platform for the Jewish world, we catalyze our Reboot Network of preeminent creators, artists, entrepreneurs and activists to produce experiences and products that evolve the Jewish conversation and transform society.

## USC Shoah Foundation

USC Shoah Foundation's mission is to develop empathy, understanding, and respect through testimony. Founded in 1994 by Steven Spielberg, USC Shoah Foundation began as a project to preserve the stories of survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust. Today USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive is the world's largest archive of oral testimony on genocide, housing 55,000 testimonies conducted in 65 countries and 43 languages. USC Shoah Foundation is also a global leader in Holocaust education, reaching millions of learners around the world each year. For more information, visit [sfi.usc.edu](https://sfi.usc.edu)

Special thanks to Crispin Brooks, Curator of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute's Visual History Archive



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