

## **Lesson Plan**

### **Three True Stories, Three Testimonies: People Who Survived the War – Stories of Survival, Loss, and Love in the Shadow of a Difficult Fate.**

#### **What can their experiences teach us in the face of today's challenges?**

**For what are we really, if not the sum of what has happened to us? – James Patterson**

This lesson plan was created to help children and young people understand that despite different times, values such as strength, courage, perseverance, love, and coping with difficulties are timeless. Contemporary challenges, such as social pressure, emotional difficulties, or problems related to various kinds of existential crises, also require courage and resilience. Showing how people coped in extreme conditions of war, captivity, and an uncertain future can help young people better understand how to overcome problems, where to draw strength and joy from life, and how to appreciate what they have.

The stories included in this plan are true, based on the experiences and life stories of the author's family members. None of the mentioned individuals are still alive; all information comes from conversations with both the heroes themselves and their living children. The plan includes commemorative photographs from wartime and later periods.

The plan can be modified and adapted to the specific group of students.

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#### **Target Group:**

Students aged 10–15.

#### **Lesson Objectives:**

1. To introduce students to the stories of people who survived World War II.
  2. To understand how wartime experiences shaped the lives of the protagonists and values such as courage, love, strength, and perseverance.
  3. To show the importance of passing on history to future generations.
  4. To compare different experiences of people who survived the war.
  5. To make students aware of the importance of remembering the past and appreciating the stories of our ancestors.
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## Introduction to the Topic:

The teacher begins the lesson by discussing the topic of war and its impact on people. It is emphasized that war is not only destruction and suffering but also survival, courage, and strength. It is noted that passing on the stories of ancestors is essential to never forget those difficult times.

Question for students:

“Do you know the war experiences of your ancestors? Are there stories in your families about the war that have been passed down from generation to generation?”

Students who want to share their stories can talk about what they know about their relatives' experiences.

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## Division into Groups and Presentation of Stories:

Students are divided into three groups, each receiving one of three true stories:

1. **Mary's Story** – A young girl forced into forced labor in Germany during World War II.
2. **Joseph's Story** – A man who survived a German camp and medical experiments, trying to rebuild his life after the war.
3. **Felix's Story** – A soldier who escaped from a POW camp and hid in his family home throughout the war.

Each group is tasked with:

- Reading the assigned story.
  - Taking notes.
  - Preparing a short presentation for the class, answering the questions:
    - Who were the characters in the story?
    - What challenges did they have to overcome?
    - What do their experiences say about courage, love, strength, and perseverance?
    - What emotions accompanied the protagonists during the war and after it ended?
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## Group Work and Presentations:

Groups present their stories, while the rest of the class listens and takes notes on key information. The teacher provides photographs of the people depicted in stories and encourages students to match them to the stories based on details presented by the groups.

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### **Comparing Stories and Discussion:**

After the presentations, the teacher leads a discussion by asking:

- What common features do these stories have?
  - What are the differences between them?
  - How did wartime experiences influence the lives of the protagonists?
  - What character traits helped them survive in such extreme conditions?
  - What contemporary challenges require similar values?
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### **The Importance of Passing on History and Remembering the Past:**

The teacher emphasizes that the stories presented in this lesson are authentic and that the past influences the present.

Question to students:

“Do you agree with the words: 'For what are we really, if not the sum of what has happened to us?'”

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### **Ending the Lesson:**

Students share their reflections on what they learned from the heroes' stories.

The teacher encourages students to talk to their families about their history and to appreciate values such as courage, love, and perseverance.

Moral: The stories of our ancestors are a treasure trove of knowledge and strength that helps us understand ourselves and the world.

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### **Story No. 1 (Grandma Marysia)**

My name is Marianna, and I was born in a village near Konin in the Wielkopolska region. I was the youngest of six siblings. My father died when I was only nine

months old. Life in the countryside in the 1930s was not easy; I had to work a lot and help my mother support the family. I went to school but had to stop my education in the 7th grade of elementary school when the war broke out in 1939. I was only 14 years old, and my life suddenly turned upside down.

One day, an order came that my sister had to be forcibly sent to Germany to work. My sister was of frail health, so my mother decided that I would go instead of her. No one asked me for my opinion; no one wondered if I could handle it as a young teenage girl who had never traveled further than the nearby town of Konin. I had no choice; it was wartime, and I had nothing to say. I only prayed that I would end up in a good place. There were so many stories about how poorly Poles were treated in Germany, how many never returned because they were worked to death by German farmers and suffered from starvation.

The German authorities issued me a passport, and I went. The journey was long; I don't even remember how long it took. The train had no seats; I stood the entire way, rationing the food I had taken from home so it would last several days. I was terribly afraid.

When we arrived in a small German town called Dedeleben, along with a few other people, the farmer who we were to work for showed us the barrack where we would spend the next few years of our lives. The beds were covered with straw, a blanket to cover ourselves, a small table, and there was no light or water. I stayed there for over two years.

I worked hard every single day, even on Sundays. I mostly worked in the fields, but sometimes I helped in the kitchen or cleaned. All this work was done for free; no one paid us, and we only received food, which was often poor and in small portions. I remember once we only had flour to eat, and we tried to make something out of it, but we were so hungry that we didn't even mind that there were bugs in it. We had no choice—either hunger or bugs...

There were also some pleasant moments. Despite all the coercion, hard work, and lack of freedom, we tried to laugh, sing, help each other, and support one another. I even experienced my first platonic love there. It was an Italian man who was a friend of the farmers, and as part of my duties, I would iron his trousers. He was very handsome and smiled at me beautifully. We never met again after the war.

I survived and returned home, having had only letter-based contact with my family during that long time. When I returned, I was very sick, skinny, and weak. But I was happy the war was over and that I could finally live a normal life. The experiences of forced labor stayed with me for my entire life and often returned in my memories. But they also made me stronger; I knew I could handle anything that came my way.

After the war, I met my husband, Józef. Together we ran a farm, raised six children, and tried to rebuild our lives after the traumas of the war. Sometimes, I would return in my thoughts to those days, but I never allowed the pain of the past to take away

my joy for the future. Today, my grandchildren and great-grandchildren listen to these stories, and although for them it is just history, for me, it was my entire life.

I hope that the memory of those times will not fade away and will teach future generations to value peace and freedom, something I was deprived of for so long.

## **Story No. 2 (Grandpa Józef)**

My name is Józef, and I was the husband of Marianna from Story No. 1. I was born in a small village in Wielkopolska. My life was no different from that of my peers—working in the fields, attending school, and then training to become a blacksmith. At that time, it was a very necessary profession, not only for shoeing horses but also for making various metal items.

When World War II broke out, my brother and I were taken to the front, and from there, I ended up in captivity in the Dachau and Oranienburg camps. It was a very difficult time for me. I was in a camp where medical experiments were conducted on prisoners. Unfortunately, I was taken as a experiment and I remember how some fluid was injected behind my ear to see how long I could endure without developing an infection. This left lasting consequences for me later in life. Until the end of my life, I felt pain in that ear and had hearing problems.

The camp was crowded with people; dozens of us slept in one room, and we were often hungry. We were exhausted by the work and the conditions in the camp. I saw things there that no one should ever know about, let alone experience. People died right next to me, some from exhaustion, others as a result of the experiments.

I remember an old man who always encouraged us, even though he could barely stand on his feet. He would say that we had to survive, that one day we would return home. Those words were what allowed me not to lose hope. But not everyone managed to keep that hope. I lost many fellow prisoners, and their faces haunted me long after the war.

After the camp was liberated and we were freed, I returned to my family home. The journey back to Poland took many days; we often walked for miles because trains were either not running or were overcrowded with soldiers returning home.

I didn't want to talk much about what happened during the war. It was a difficult time for me, and I wanted to forget about it. Besides, most people back then had similar stories, and I didn't feel like I was anyone special. No one felt sorry for themselves; everyone just wanted to return to normal life and start living as before, without those painful memories and endless contemplation.

Everyone had lost someone, everyone had experienced their own tragedies, many were hungry, and many had no place to return to because the war had taken

everything from them. So why would I dwell on my own fate? I just wanted to live and be free without the past haunting me.

When I returned in 1946, I married Marysia from a nearby village. We had six children and ran a farm. I also had a forge where I continued my work as a blacksmith. I was the only blacksmith in the village, so I never lacked work. I even made a metal swing for my children, which later became a favorite for my grandchildren.

I did not live long enough to see many of them grow up. I died relatively young, probably because of the wartime experiences that affected my health.

The farm into which I poured my heart, hard work, and most of my life was later confiscated and, along with the entire village, razed to the ground. Nothing remains of it. It exists only in memories, in photographs, and in old films. I'm glad I didn't live to see that happen. I don't know if that wouldn't have been worse for me than the wartime experiences.

Today, there is no trace of my work, my forge, or my home, but the memory of me remains in my children and grandchildren. My life was full of hardships, but I regret none of it.

### **Story No. 3 (Grandpa Feliks)**

My name is Feliks, and I come from a small, charming town in Wielkopolska. I always loved learning, and I chose to become a professional soldier as my future career. I attended an officer cadet school and quickly rose through the ranks of the military. I never expected that war would soon shatter my life plans.

As a soldier, I was recruited to fight at the very beginning of the war, and after a few months, I was captured and placed in a German prisoner-of-war camp located in Poland. I managed to escape, but that also meant that if I was caught again, I would face an immediate death sentence for attempting to escape.

Fate allowed me to return to my hometown, where my mother came to my aid. She hid me in the attic of her house. I spent the entire war there and only emerged when it ended in 1945. You might ask what a person can do for so many years while sitting in one place and how not to go insane when outside, another summer comes, but you cannot go out to enjoy the sun and the company of other people.

My way of surviving was learning, including languages. During that time, I learned German, French, improved my Latin, and read a lot. My mother would bring me newspapers and books whenever she could.

Through a small window hidden in the roof of the attic, I observed what was happening outside. The hardest thing for me was watching Halinka, my love whom I had met before the war and with whom I had planned a future, walking to church on Sundays. She didn't know I was alive or that I was watching her from a distance. My heart broke with longing, knowing I couldn't run to her and tell her that I was so close.

I felt very lonely, but I knew I had to survive, that I could make it, and that one day it would all be over. The lack of people, companionship, laughter, fresh air, and normality deeply affected my later life. Even after the war, I often caught myself enjoying solitude, withdrawing from people, and often locking myself in a room with a book as if I wanted to escape from the world.

After the war ended, I married Halinka, and we had three sons. And while my family life was going well, unfortunately, the war took away my good name and my military career. False accusations by the new authorities left me with no chance to return to the military. I had to work in places where I often found no satisfaction or fulfillment, and my ambitions had to yield to the harsh reality.

The memories of those difficult years will always be a part of me, but I learned to live with them without allowing them to dictate my future. Over time, I understood that although war can destroy everything, nothing could take away my family and the love I was fortunate enough to experience. And that alone was enough to feel that, despite everything, my life had meaning and was important.

Photos



Babcia Marysia z autorką scenariusza (swoją wnuczką)





Dziadek Feliks z wnukami



1	2	3	4	5	6
Name und Sitz des Betriebes (Unternehmen) (Firmenstempel)	Art des Betriebes oder der Betriebsabteilung	a) Tag der Bescheinigung b) Beschäftigung genau bis	Art der Beschäftigung (inoffiziell genau angeben)	a) Tag der Bescheinigung b) Bescheinigung des Arbeitsamtes	Unterschrift des Unternehmers
R. Krogas Erdbecken	Land- wirtschaftl. Betrieb	1. 5. 43 Mischbau	Landwirtschaftl.	1. 5. 43	Dr. G. Krogas
		a)	a)	a)	
		b)	b)	b)	
		a)	a)	a)	
		b)	b)	b)	
		a)	a)	a)	
		b)	b)	b)	

Paszport niemiecki babci Marysi. Na zdjęciu ma 14 lat.



Dziadek Feliks przed wojną



Dziadek Felks z żoną i synem po wojnie





Dziadek Józef z kolegami

Dziadek Józef wracający z niemieckich obozów

