

SHOWTIME
presents

Airing Sunday, March 28, 1999, 8:00–9:35 p.m., ET/PT on Showtime.

Check local listings.

A Guide for Educators

The Devil's

A r i t h m e t i c

“Look, Listen and Remember!”

These three words represent the anguished pleas of millions of innocent Holocaust victims torn from their families and familiar communities and enveloped within the Third Reich's brutal concentration and death camp system. They also capture the collective message of the SHOWTIME ORIGINAL PICTURE FOR ALL AGES, *The Devil's Arithmetic*.

Based on the 1988 novel of the same name by Jane Yolen, with a screenplay by Robert J. Avrech, *The Devil's Arithmetic* tells the story of one Jewish family's personal and spiritual connections to the Holocaust. This

highly charged drama, from Executive Producers Mimi Rogers and Dustin Hoffman, brings to the screen two of the most important, yet least understood, themes of the Holocaust: Jewish life in Europe on the eve of war and the extermination of more than one million children as part of the Nazi government's plan, known as the “Final Solution,” to eliminate Jews from occupied Europe.

Director Donna Deitch artfully draws together two very different worlds: the contemporary world of Hannah Stern (Kirsten Dunst), a typical '90s teenager growing up in New York, and the wartime world of Nazi-occupied Poland as experienced by Hannah's Aunt Eva (Louise Fletcher). Hannah's detachment from her family's religious and cultural traditions underscores the urgency felt by her Aunt Eva, a Holocaust survivor, to pass on the experience of European Jewry during the Nazi period so the lessons of the past will be remembered. In a remarkable journey that transcends time, Hannah confronts and meets the age-old challenge of her people—to “always remember.”



HOLLY STEIN

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Additional Airings:
March 30, 9:00–10:35 p.m., ET/PT
April 7, 8:00–9:35 p.m., ET/PT
April 10, 1:45–3:20 p.m., ET/PT
April 23, 6:15–7:50 p.m., ET/PT
Check local listings.

The Devil's Arithmetic

“Look, Listen

Tips for Using This Guide

The Devil's Arithmetic highlights a number of Holocaust themes or topics for research, including Jewish life in Eastern Europe before the war; the loss of more than a million children as part of the “Final Solution”; antisemitism; nineteenth century racial theories; the impact of the Versailles Treaty; the Rise of the Nazi Party, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi hierarchy; the Weimar Republic; the Path to Power; Kristallnacht; and the Holocaust years, 1939–1945.

Prior to Viewing: Review one or more of the above themes. Create a matrix of what students know and understand about the Holocaust. Use the synopsis to familiarize yourself and your students with the storyline and characters in *The Devil's Arithmetic*.

After Viewing: Use the discussion questions and student activities in this guide to check students' understanding and encourage further exploration into the themes of the Holocaust. Compare what students have learned with the matrix of prior knowledge.

Note to Teachers: *The Devil's Arithmetic* contains scenes that may be difficult to watch, especially for a younger audience. They are depicted in order to portray the historical significance and importance of Nazi brutality and Jewish resistance. Teachers are encouraged to preview the film and resources before classroom use.

The Devil's “ARITHMETIC”

In a Nazi death camp, the arithmetic of living one day, plus one day more, represents a way of resisting the Nazi's “Final Solution” and a formula for defeating the “Devil.” Yet, the Devil has devised a formula of his own. The addition of new inmates as each transport arrives means that others must be killed, or “subtracted,” by being sent to the gas chambers. From veteran inmate ranks, the Nazis “choose” those sick in body and mind for extermination. Thus, the Jewish people continually decrease as the Nazi Devil subtracts names from the ever-changing roster of the condemned.

Academic Areas

Social Studies, History, Sociology, Psychology, English, Language Arts, Literature

Grade Levels

Middle School, High School, College

Learning Objectives

After viewing the program and participating in the activities and questions in this guide, students will be able:

- To discuss the nature of Jewish communities in Poland on the eve of World War II.
- To examine the relationship between the powerful and the powerless, including methods of oppression and resistance.
- To understand and appreciate the pleas of Holocaust survivors to “remember.”

Educational Goals

- To understand the Jewish experience on the eve of World War II and throughout the Holocaust years, 1939–1945.
- To understand the human challenge of acquiring empathy, which centers on historical and cultural understanding.
- To understand how we are all connected to a collective past.

Synopsis

The Devil's Arithmetic is more than a history lesson; it is a discovery of the historical roots of a people and a reminder of how we must all remember the horrors of the Holocaust so that its lessons will not be lost to time.

Hannah's journey begins in the present during a ritual in the Passover Seder as she symbolically opens the front door to allow the prophet Elijah to enter. When she steps across the threshold, Hannah crosses into the unfamiliar, former world of wartime Poland.



There Hannah finds herself in the company of a young girl, Rivkah (Brittany Murphy), and Rivkah's mother, Mina (Lilo Baur), who believe that she is their cousin and niece from Lublin.

Though confused by her new surroundings,

Hannah assumes the role of Rivkah's young cousin, “Channa.” Later, as they celebrate a traditional Jewish wedding, German soldiers invade and order the guests to climb onto the waiting trucks. Despite Hannah's warnings that they will all be killed, Rabbi Gershon (Paul Freeman) assures those assembled that the Germans will honor their promised resettlement. Soon they—and Jews from all over Europe—come to understand the depth of Nazi deception as deportation and resettlement turn into slave labor and extermination.

Within the barbed-wire-enclosed camp, Hannah studies the bluish tattooed numbers on her arm, symbols of her living nightmare. Among the horrors of the camp, she and the others are forced to witness a favorite form of Nazi discipline—public execution—as her friend Ariel (Nitzan Sharron) is hanged. Forearmed with knowledge of the future that Rivkah will survive the war and change her name to Eva, Hannah assumes Rivkah's identity when Rivkah is “chosen” for the gas chamber by the cruel Commander Krieger (Philip Rham).

As gas pellets fill the death chamber, Hannah begins to arouse in the present day. She is uncertain whether she has awakened from a dream or truly experienced the Holocaust as Aunt Eva's young cousin, “Channa,” who died in the death camp and after whom Hannah was named. Yet, Hannah is forever transformed by the profound reality of her journey. She recognizes that the word “chosen” has many meanings. Moreover, she comes to understand the great responsibility of post-Holocaust generations to “**Look, Listen and Remember!**”





and Remember!"

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Time, Continuity and Change

In exploring this theme, individuals seek to understand the past and develop a historical perspective and appreciation for their place in and over time.

■ How do films such as *The Devil's Arithmetic* help us to understand a "real" historical event such as the Holocaust? Discuss the notion that novels are composites of people and events. Why is it so important for the next generation to remember that millions of Jews were killed in concentration or death camps? Discuss what steps the viewer or reader might take in checking the content for historical accuracy.

Power, Authority and Governance

In exploring this theme, students confront questions such as: What is power? What forms does it take? What is legitimate authority? How is power gained, used and justified?

■ In *The Devil's Arithmetic*, aesthetic concepts are used to portray the role of the powerful (the Nazis) versus the role of the powerless (the Jews) within the framework of the Nazi death camp system. How does the camera convey the power and might of the Nazis? Aside from weapons, how did the Nazis have control and power over the Jews in camp? In what scenes does the film demonstrate Jewish dignity and sacrifice as a resistance to Nazi brutality?

Individual Development and Identity

In exploring this theme, students examine how personal identity and behaviors are shaped by culture, by groups and by institutional influences.

■ How does *The Devil's Arithmetic* help us to understand the nature of eastern European Jewish village life? In what ways is Hannah a "typical" American teenager? How does this vantage point affect her ability to connect with her Jewish heritage, both before and during her experience in Poland? Examine how Hannah's identity is further shaped by her fellow Jewish inmates.

Science, Technology and Society

In exploring this theme, students unearth the connections between science and technology and historical and social occurrences, those both anticipated and unexpected.

■ German technological "advances" such as the invention of Zyklon B gas for use in the gas chambers made the persecution and extermination of millions possible. Often, these atrocities were carried out through the use of deception and subterfuge. Identify other technologies in the 1940s in Germany that made the Holocaust possible. Discuss the use of metaphoric and euphemistic language such as "resettlement" or "Final Solution" in terms of the Nazi government's official policies regarding deportation and extermination.

The Devil's Arithmetic was filmed near Vilnius, Lithuania, in a ten-acre concentration camp, which was designed to resemble Auschwitz. The area is located just a few miles from one of the first sites of Jewish genocide, a series of large pits in the Ponary Forest where 70,000 Jews were shot to death in 1941 by German and Lithuanian soldiers.

Student Activities

- Make a list of Holocaust themes portrayed in *The Devil's Arithmetic* such as the deportation of Jews to slave labor, concentration or death camps; the daily life in the camps; the forms of degradation in the camps; or the nature of eastern European Jewish life. View one or more additional films about the Holocaust (see *Resources*). Using your list of themes, compare and contrast the films in terms of their historical context. How has your understanding of the Holocaust changed as a result of viewing these films? What questions regarding the themes of the Holocaust are left unanswered and require more investigation? Assign students to explore these topics.
- *The Devil's Arithmetic* opens with Hannah contemplating acquiring a tattoo. Unknown to her then, the idea of a tattoo will take on epic proportions in the surrealistic world of the Holocaust. What connection does Hannah make regarding the notion of a tattoo? What does this connection tell us about the historical element of language? Create a list of other words that have changed in their usage or meanings over time. Ask students to trace the meanings of one or more of these words. How does changing language challenge us to understand the past?
- *The Devil's Arithmetic* uses the compelling literary device of casting the main character into a parallel universe. Explore the use of this device in terms of purpose. What meaning does the story of the *Wizard of Oz* hold within *The Devil's Arithmetic* storyline? To what extent does the "make believe" element of Hannah's parallel experience affect your understanding of the historical content? Research stories of Holocaust rescuers (see *Resources: Rescuers of the Holocaust*). Invite students to create their own storylines with a third-generation non-Jew as the main character.

The Devil's Arithmetic and National Curriculum Standards

The Devil's Arithmetic illuminates four of the ten major themes that compose the National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: **Time, Continuity and Change** (Standard 2.2), **Individual Development and Identity** (Standard 2.4), **Power, Authority and Governance** (Standard 2.6), **Science, Technology and Society** (Standard 2.8). Visit the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) at www.ncss.org/standards/home.html for more information.

The questions and activities in this guide also correlate with English/language arts curriculum and the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) media literacy philosophical statement: "Being literate in contemporary society means being active, critical and creative users of print and spoken language, as well as the visual languages of film and television, commercial and political advertising, photography, and more." Visit www.ncte.org/standards for more information.

Resources

Children and the Holocaust/ Jewish Life in Europe Before the War

Books

- Dobroszycki, Lucjan. (1977). *Image Before My Eyes: A Photographic History of Jewish Life in Poland, 1864–1939*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Frank, Anne. (1958). *Diary of a Young Girl*. New York: Pocket Books.
- Klein, Gerda Weissmann. (1957). *All But My Life*. New York: Hill and Wang. (The written remembrances of young Gerda Weissmann and the Holocaust years)
- Kugelmass, Jack, and Jonathan Boyarin, eds. (1998). *From a Ruined Garden*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Richter, Hans Peter. (1970). *Friedrich*. New York: Holt, Rhinehart, & Winston. (A novel about a young Jewish boy during the Holocaust and told by his German friend)

“Why did the Germans and other European nationalities hate the Jews?”

Teachers: For answers and insight into this question, consult the book *Antisemitism Through the Ages*, by Shmuel Almog. Pergaman Press, New York, 1988.

Videos/Films

- *Camera of My Family: Four Generations in Germany, 1845–1945*. (1988). Anti-Defamation League, (800) 343-5540. The story of one woman's quest to find her family's history before and during the Hitler years.
- *Escape from Sobibor*. (1996). Social Studies School Services, Culver City, California. (800) 421-4246. Sobibor was one of six death camps in Poland.

- *Fragments of Greatness*. (1989). Union of American Hebrew Congregations, New York. A history of the Jews through artifacts.
- *Image Before My Eyes*. (1988). AXON Video Company. A photographic history of Jewish life in Europe before the war.
- *Schindler's List*. (1994). Baker & Taylor. Media Basics, (800) 542-2505. A free 64-page study guide, *Facing History and Ourselves: A Guide to the Film Schindler's List*, is available by contacting Facing History and Ourselves, 16 Hurd Road, Brookline, MA 02445, (617) 232-1595.

Rescuers of the Holocaust

To provide another perspective on the Holocaust and to learn more about non-Jewish Holocaust rescuers, read or watch:

- *Rescuers: Portraits of Moral Courage in the Holocaust*, by Gay Block and Malka Drucker (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1992)
- *Rescuers: Stories of Courage* (1997). Available on Paramount Home Video (check your local video retailer). A KIDSNET-produced study guide to this film is available at www.kidsnet.org.

World Wide Web

- L'CHAIM — A Holocaust Web Project www.charm.net/~rbennett/l'chaim.html
- The Nizkor Project www.nizkor.org/hweb/
- Desert Holocaust Committee, Palm Springs A major link to other Holocaust Websites. www.palmsprings.com/points/holocaust/

- An Illustrated History of the Holocaust www.fatherryan.org/holocaust/

Organizations

For more information regarding the Holocaust and Holocaust organizations, contact:

- The Association of Holocaust Organizations, Queensborough Community College, The City University of New York, Bayside, NY 11364-1497, (718)225-0378, hrcaho@worldnet.att.net.
- The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, S.W., Washington, DC 20024-2156, (202) 488-0400, education@ushmm.org, research@ushmm.org, library@ushmm.org, archive@ushmm.org.
- Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, P.O. Box 3168, Los Angeles, CA 90078, (800) 661-2092, www.vhf.org.

Most public libraries are well stocked with nonfiction accounts of the Holocaust. Students can choose survivor testimonies such as those listed in the resource section, or any number of historical and biographical accounts, to check for historical accuracy. In addition, teachers and students can purchase bibliographies on the Holocaust, which will assist them in putting together a reading list. To order, contact www.holocaustedu.org.



The Devil's Arithmetic educators' guide was written by Karen L. Riley, Ph.D., Auburn University at Montgomery, and produced for Showtime Networks Inc., by KIDSNET, a national resource for children's media in Washington, DC. Consult the KIDSNET monthly *Media Guide* for information about educational programming for children in preschool through high school. The KIDSNET Website at www.kidsnet.org contains *Media Guide* listings, media alerts, online study guides and other information about educational programming.

Off-Air Taping Guidelines/Video Availability

The Devil's Arithmetic is an important part of Showtime Networks Inc.'s commitment to Cable in the Classroom, the industry-wide effort to offer commercial-free, curriculum-based programming for school use. Teachers may record *The Devil's Arithmetic* for use in the classroom for instructional purposes only. Videotapes may be retained for 2 years from the date of recording. Requests for videotapes must be made in writing on school letterhead only to: Cable in the Classroom Coordinator, c/o Corporate Communications, Showtime Networks Inc., 1633 Broadway, 17th Floor, New York, NY 10019.



The Devil's Arithmetic educators' guide is available Online at www.showtimeonline.com and www.kidsnet.org. This guide may be reproduced for educational purposes.

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SHOWTIME Presents A PUNCH 21 and MILLBROOK FARM Production
A DONNA DEITCH Film • KIRSTEN DUNST "THE DEVIL'S ARITHMETIC"
BRITTANY MURPHY With MIMI ROGERS and LOUISE FLETCHER as "Aunt Eva"
Supervising Music Producer SPENCER PROFFER • Music by FREDERIC TALGORN
Edited by ROBIN KATZ • Director of Photography JACEK LASKUS
Co-Executive Producer ROBERT J. AVRECH • Produced by MURRAY SCHISGAL and LEE GOTTSZEN
Executive Producers CHRIS CIAFA JAY COHEN MIMI ROGERS DUSTIN HOFFMAN
Based upon the Novel by JANE YOLEN
Screenplay by ROBERT J. AVRECH • Directed by DONNA DEITCH



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