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**Category:** Year 11 – 13

**Topic:** The impact of the Holocaust was felt globally. Explain how Holocaust survivors adapted to life after liberation and describe the contributions they have made to the post-Holocaust world.

Beginning in September 1933, the Holocaust occurred throughout the duration of World War II. Although it officially ended in September 1945, the liberation of the camps was like a double-edged sword, things got worse before they became better. A systematic persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews at the hands of the Nazi regime, the Holocaust had catastrophic results for the Jewish population. Hitler's ideology allowed totalitarian anti-semitism to reach its peak genocidal extreme. It was used as a crucial element in attempting to transform and reconstruct both Nazi Germany and the international order of society. Those few who survived suffered terribly yet managed to build a life for themselves and contribute immensely to the society we live in, post-liberation.

Liberation proved to be a painful experience for many Holocaust survivors. The shift from living life under a reign of constant terror, starvation and annihilation of rights to the beginning of a new 'normal' life was frequented as traumatic. Tens of thousands of survivors died due to overeating and exhaustion within the first week of liberation. As a result, Holocaust survivors sought to leave Europe and create new lives elsewhere.

Displaced persons camps were established in Austria, Italy and Western occupation zones of Germany where over 200,000 Jews were held. Following the creation of the state of Israel, western countries adopted more lenient regulations regarding the immigration of Holocaust survivors. This led to the majority of these DP camps closing by the end of the 1950's. Integration into these countries proved to be incredibly difficult for most survivors as they encountered plenty of problems along the way. Few were interested in hearing their stories and testimonies, and they were forced to face temporary housing issues, a lack of income and the refusal to be accepted. It was difficult to move forward in

the initial period after liberation, but move forward they did.

Viktor E. Frankl is a Holocaust survivor who has contributed greatly to today's modern society. Viktor spent three years in Auschwitz, Dachau and was taken to other, smaller concentration camps as a teenager. Once liberated, he was able to begin his new life, becoming a Professor of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Vienna Medical School. He was the founder of what has come to be known as the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy - The School of Logotherapy. His works have been classes as '*the most important contributions in the field of psychotherapy since the days of Freud, Adler and Jung*' by Sir Cyril Burt, ex-President of the British Psychological Society. Frankl received the degrees' of Doctor of Medicine and Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Vienna. Honorary doctoral degrees were bestowed upon him by twenty-nine different universities and he was a guest lecturer all over the world. His books have been translated into over twenty-three different languages.

Viktor's time in the concentration camps deeply affected his understanding of reality and the meaning of human life and existence. His most popular novella, *A Man's Search for Meaning*, details his experience in the camp and the development of logotherapy. Logotherapy was created by Viktor and he states that '*its aim is to unlock the will to meaning in life.*' He found that people tended to ponder the meaning of life when he himself thought it quite clear that, '*it is life itself that asks questions of man.*' From then he discovered that the primary motivational force of an individual is to find meaning in life. Viktor discovered through his experiences in the camp that life can be meaningful and fulfilling in spite of being in the harshest of circumstances. He moved on to conduct research and share it with the rest of the world in order to delve in-depth into psychological understanding and encourage the overall pursuit of happiness.

Elie Wiesel is also an example of a Holocaust survivor who successfully told his story. He wrote a highly acclaimed memoir about his time in the Auschwitz camp called *Night* as well as several other memoirs. He was born a Jew in Romania but migrated to the United States of America after his liberation. In his later years Elie became an outspoken human rights activist and advocate for holocaust education, being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. He has over forty internationally acclaimed works of fiction and nonfiction and

was also awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the United States of America Congressional Gold Medal and the French Legion of Honour. Elie stated in a past interview with the *Times* in 2006, *“My mission has not changed, because I don’t think the world has changed,”* he said. *“In the beginning, I thought, maybe my witness will be received, and things will change. But they don’t. Otherwise we wouldn’t have had Rwanda and Darfur and Cambodia and Bosnia. Human nature cannot be changed in one generation.”* He strove to raise awareness and implement changes in the way society thinks and feels, forever pushing to ensure that genocide and mass discrimination never occurred on such a large scale again. Wiesel became chairman of the United States Memorial Holocaust Council in 1980, retiring from the position in 1986.

Elie is one of many Holocaust survivors who wished to make his story known. Few things did he consider more important than ensuring no one else had to go through the unforgettable horror he did ever again. His works became a focusing point for Holocaust literature, culminating over time. Documentaries have been made, countless books written, interviews held, awards given and speeches given by Holocaust survivors. After their liberation, most migrated to Israel and were then given many opportunities to be held under the public eye. Their struggles have been heard world-wide, their influences remaining strong. One-by-one, their experiences, their memories and their inspirational stories are grabbing hold of today’s society, encouraging them to rethink and alter their extremist views. As the number of Holocaust survivors dwindle, it is more important than ever to learn and pass on their stories to future generations.