



Curriculum Guide

The Ballerina of Auschwitz

By Dr. Edith Eva Eger

With Esmé Schwall

About the Book

In this young adult edition of the bestselling, award-winning memoir *The Choice*, Holocaust survivor and renowned psychologist Dr. Edith Eger shares her harrowing experiences and gives readers the gift of hope and strength.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS: READING, WRITING, AND RESEARCHING

Prereading Activity

As a prereading activity, readers should complete an anticipation guide structured in the following manner:

<i>Before Reading</i>	<i>After Reading</i>	<i>Statements</i>
		When in danger, it is best to play it safe rather than take a risk.
		In a survival situation, one must make decisions that are best for them, even if harm may come to others as a result.
		Losing some individual freedom is acceptable if it benefits the community or society as a whole.
		A civilized society would ensure that its functions never allow a child to be harmed intentionally.

- Instruct readers to complete the guide by placing a “+” sign in the box next to the statements for which they agree, and a “0” next to those for which they disagree. They must commit to agreement or disagreement—there are no conditional responses. Students should be assured that there are no correct or incorrect positions.
- Once they have had the opportunity to complete the guide, read each statement aloud and have individuals who agree show it by standing or raising their hands. Each reader should be permitted to provide their rationale for agreeing if they wish.
- Repeat this process after reading the book, with individuals being given the opportunity to provide their rationale for keeping or changing their positions.

- This activity can be effectively coupled with a KWHL chart that examines the events of the Holocaust. For an example of a KWHL chart, you are welcome to use a free resource like this one provided by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/ela/bank/RI.KID_K-W-H-L_Chart.pdf)

Discussion Questions

1. Extend the reflections from the reading anticipation guide by posing any of the following questions (be sure to remind readers there are no right or wrong answers):
 - How do we cope with the unimaginable? What happens if we don't?
 - What can we learn about ourselves and others in the midst of a crisis?
 - What can we do to try to better understand others' histories?
 - How does writing one's story shape the present, past, and future?
 - What can the Holocaust teach us about our own and others' humanity?
 - Is hope enough to survive seemingly insurmountable conditions?
2. In the author's note, Dr. Eger states, "I've been writing this book for nearly eighty years. When I was sixteen, enduring firsthand the horrors of the Holocaust . . . I was already writing with you in mind. I was longing to share with you the tools that helped me survive the unthinkable, longing for you to know that a story of humans' capacity for evil is also a story of our inexorable capacity for hope." Considering what you learned through her shared memories in *The Ballerina of Auschwitz*, how do her experiences share these capacities?
3. After arriving at Auschwitz, Dr. Josef Mengele forces Edie to dance for him to "The Blue Danube." Discuss the power and residual effect of this moment on Edie's life.
4. In her memoir, Edie offers instances in which SS officers were kind to her and helped save her life. Why do you think she shares these positive glimpses of generally cruel treatment? How do they shape your understanding of her experience in the camps?
5. How does Edie's relationship with Eric compare to her relationship with Béla? How was each relationship uniquely essential for her survival? What needs did each relationship fulfill?
6. Is Edie's optimistic worldview justified or is she naive? Discuss events in the memoir that support, contradict, or qualify her belief in others.

7. What do you make of the way in which Béla approaches their experiences versus how Edie does? Are there ways in which his attitude serves her well?
8. In *The Ballerina of Auschwitz*, Dr. Eger helps readers understand that there is no hierarchy of suffering, a statement she maintains after sharing her story of barely surviving the Holocaust. Do you agree? How does she demonstrate this belief throughout the book? How does she put her own suffering on the same level as others' suffering?
9. Though it's a personal memoir, *The Ballerina of Auschwitz* can also be considered a coming-of-age story. Discuss specific examples from the text that illustrate Edith's change in maturity over time.
10. Before being taken from her home and imprisoned in a death camp, Edie entrusted a beloved photograph of herself to a friend. She said she had no premonition of what was to come but felt a need to preserve evidence of her life. How important do you think that photograph was in Edie's healing process? In what ways do you preserve evidence of your life?
11. *The Ballerina of Auschwitz* is full of powerful and profound moments of healing, including when Dr. Eger chooses to forgive herself for inadvertently sending her mother to the gas chambers by identifying her as "mother," not "sister." These choices have enabled her to move forward and help others. Which moments resonated most with you?
12. Throughout the book, Dr. Eger provides a wealth of sage advice. What was most helpful to you personally?
13. Explain the significance of the title, *The Ballerina of Auschwitz*, the young adult edition of *The Choice*.
14. So often when we learn about the Holocaust—in fiction, nonfiction, movies, museums—the focus is on the horrors of the concentration camps. Rarely do we hear the role hope has played or about how victims work to rebuild their lives. What did you learn from Dr. Eger's memories of life after liberation in the epilogue? What was surprising to you?
15. In what ways is *The Ballerina of Auschwitz* so important and relevant today? What lessons might it teach us?

Extension Activities

1. Throughout *The Ballerina of Auschwitz*, the small cast of characters exhibits acts of both subtle and obvious bravery. Consider the individual actions of these people. Who do you believe to be the most courageous? Write a letter to that character explaining why you believe their actions are so brave.
2. What would you identify or describe as being part of “survival mode”? What kinds of things bring out in people the ability to endure very extreme hardships (like World War II or the Holocaust), and to overcome them?
3. In *The Ballerina of Auschwitz*, one of the most critical components of the memoir involves Dr. Eger’s choice to survive and support her sister Magda to do the same. From her perspective, what makes this choice so important? Compose a personal journal entry where you share your thoughts, and be sure to answer the following questions in your journal entry:
 - What are Edith’s motivations to help protect herself and her sister?
 - Why does Edith put herself at risk? What was to be gained or lost?
 - What role do the dreams of her beloved Eric play in sustaining Edie?
 - How have her own experiences to that point motivated her decisions?To culminate, share your reflections with other writers.
4. In *The Ballerina of Auschwitz*, Dr. Eger shares, “I feel a responsibility to share my story. To tell the truth about what happened so that we don’t ever forget—and also to share the legacy of hope and zest for life so that my parents and millions of others didn’t die in vain. I want the triumph and celebration of life to live on.” (Author’s note) While pain and suffering should never be compared, use Dr. Eger’s suggestion to share her story as an invitation to share your own by digging deeply and writing a memory of an experience that has provided you with an opportunity for personal growth.
5. Develop and execute a multimedia memoir to tell your own story. This personal memoir should address this essential question: How have various experiences and beliefs shaped my identity?
 - While allowing for artistic freedom, format choices are not limited to but could include creating a digital story with music and personal imagery, a podcast, or a narrative interview video stream.

Essential Quotes Analysis

The language that an author uses in their work is essential to getting across the intended meaning. Select four quotes from *The Ballerina of Auschwitz* that seem to signify key ideas that the author hopes that readers take from the text. These might be quotes spoken by individuals or might be from the narration, and page numbers should be included with the quotes. Have students develop a chart with the following four columns:

- Quote
- Page Number
- Relevance to the Novel
- Intended Meaning for Readers

The intended meaning should have relevance not only to the characters in the text, but to the lives of anyone who reads the book.

This guide was created by Dr. Rose Brock, an associate professor in the Library Science and Technology Department in the College of Education at Sam Houston State University. Dr. Brock holds a Ph.D. in Library Science, specializing in children's and young adult literature.

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