

## AFTER THIS

Alice Nelson

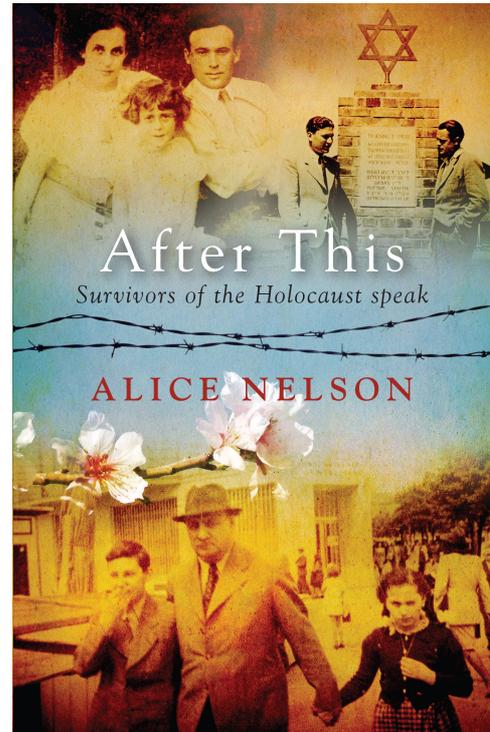
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Themes: World War II, the Holocaust, post-traumatic stress, family, immigration to Australia

Year level: Y10–12

### ABOUT THE BOOK

*After This* belongs to the fourteen survivors whose narratives are included in the collection: these are their stories, their memories. These testimonies detail the terrible and remarkable experiences of those who sought a new life in Australia following World War II. In the book's foreword, Arnold Zable notes that 'Each narrative is a recounting of specific events set in specific places, told matter-of-factly. The facts speak for themselves. The cumulative effect is riveting.' Alice Nelson, who worked with the survivors and their families to present the narratives, explains that 'As the Holocaust recedes in time and the last living witnesses to its terrible memory pass from the world, it becomes ever more important to listen to the stories of survivors.' Displaying enormous bravery in sharing their experiences, these survivors have ensured that, through the publication of this book, future generations of Australians can do just that.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alice Nelson is an Australian writer. Her first novel, *The Last Sky*, was shortlisted for *The Australian/Vogel's Literary Award*, won the T.A.G. Hungerford Award and was shortlisted for the Australian Society of Authors' Barbara Jefferis Award. She was named Best Young Australian Novelist of 2009 in the *Sydney Morning Herald's* national awards program. Alice works as a freelance journalist and teaches creative writing. She is currently completing her doctorate in the School of English and Cultural Studies at the University of Western Australia.



### STUDY NOTES

#### LITERACY: COMPREHENDING TEXTS THROUGH LISTENING, READING AND VIEWING

##### Before reading: texts in context

1. World religions: Judaism

Have students research and compile a report about Judaism using the following subheadings to structure their findings. (Useful resource: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism>)

- a. History
- b. Beliefs
- c. Texts
- d. Ethics
- e. Rites
- f. Customs
- g. Ceremonies
- h. Holy days

2. World conflicts: World War II (WWII)  
Have students research and compile notes to answer the following questions about WWII.  
(Useful resource: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo>)
  - a. Which nations were involved?
  - b. How/why did war break out?
  - c. What weapons and artillery were used?
  - d. Key events – create a timeline of WWII.
  - e. Write a brief biography of Adolf Hitler and create a timeline of his rise to power.
  - f. Using a blank outline map of Europe, chart the path of the German occupation. List the dates when each country was invaded. Note which countries were not annexed by Germany and why.
3. The National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi party)  
Have students research and compile notes to answer the following questions.
  - a. Who were the key members of the Nazi party and when was it established?
  - b. What were the beliefs and policies of this political party?
  - c. What social, economic and political factors in Germany contributed to the rapid growth of the Nazi party in the 1920s and 30s?
  - d. How/why do you think Hitler was so successful in his use of propaganda?
  - e. Define the term 'dictatorship'.
  - f. What was the Gestapo? What was the SS? Define the term 'police state'.
4. The Holocaust  
Have students research and compile notes to answer the following questions:
  - a. Define the terms 'racism' and 'anti-Semitism'.
  - b. Define the term 'the Holocaust'.
  - c. What reasons did the Nazis give for their anti-Semitic beliefs?
  - d. What was 'The Final Solution'?
  - e. Create definitions for the terms 'eugenics' and 'genocide'.
  - f. On a blank outline map of Europe, label the locations of the main Nazi concentration camps, extermination camps and killing sites. (Useful resource: [http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/learning\\_environments/sites\\_map.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/learning_environments/sites_map.asp))  
Select images of these sites that are suitable for your students and view these as a class.
  - g. What was the difference between a concentration camp and an extermination camp?
  - h. How many Jews were murdered in each country in Europe? What percentage of the prewar Jewish population did they constitute?
  - i. How did some non-Jewish people help save Jewish lives? What were the punishments if they were caught undermining Nazi orders?
  - j. Why were Jews forced to live in ghettos during WWII? Visit the 'Children in the Ghetto' interactive website and complete the online activities: <http://ghetto.galim.org.il/eng>
  - k. Six million Jewish lives were lost in the Holocaust. Research what other groups the Nazis persecute in World War II, such as Roma people ('gypsies'), homosexuals, political opponents and people with physical and mental disability. How many people belonging to these groups perished? Read about the Nazis' reasons for targeting these groups.
5. Australia's role in WWII  
Have students research and compile notes to answer the following questions:
  - a. How many Australian troops were sent overseas?
  - b. Where in the world were they sent?
  - c. Which battles did they participate in?
  - d. How many were killed/injured?
  - e. What was life like on the home front during WWII?

## Expanding vocabulary

6. Before reading the book, study the glossary on p. 282 as a class to clarify the meaning of Jewish terms used throughout the text (e.g. bar mitzvah, Kaddish, rabbi etc.).

## Yad Vashem (Israel's official memorial to the victims of the Holocaust)

7. Visit the Yad Vashem website and click on the link for 'Stories Behind the Names': [http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/learning\\_environments/stories](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/learning_environments/stories)
  - a. Select a story to read (e.g. a young Jewish man living in Poland in the 1930s).

- b. Consider what the family tree for this individual might look like by 2015 if they had survived the Holocaust. Reflect on how the extinguishing of **one** life in Poland during WWII had the effect of stopping **many tens of lives** that 'could have been' by 2015.
8. Invite students to create a map of their own family trees to share with their peers.
  - a. How do students define the term 'family'?
  - b. What is the importance of family to them?
9. Yad Vashem's extensive online Holocaust Resource Centre can be usefully integrated into Holocaust studies in class ([http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/resource\\_center](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/resource_center)). In particular, historical photographs are available by following the prompts under each of the following headings:
  - Antisemitism and Racism
  - The Nazi Rise to Power
  - Jews in Nazi Germany, 1933–1939
  - Isolation and Ghettoization
  - Nazi Camps
  - The Final Solution
  - Jewish Resistance
  - The Individual and the Family
  - Jewish Life in Nazi Europe, 1939–1945
  - Righteous Among the Nations
  - The Local Population
  - The World and the Holocaust
  - Holocaust Survivors

## Language and textual analysis; engaging and responding; reflecting

Suggested reading plan – alternate between:

- Reading chapters together as a class (allocating one page or one paragraph per student)
- Allowing students to read to one another in pairs or small groups
- Assigning independent reading for homework

Comprehension strategies to model and practise

- Inferring
- Summarising
- Identifying key ideas/themes
- Drawing conclusions

## Reader response journal

10. Have students keep a reader response journal throughout their study of *After This*. This document should record any important quotes and emotional reactions to each story, as well as any questions or discussion topics they may wish to raise in class. The reader response journal can also be used at the end of the unit to help students plan critical responses to the essay questions (providing a bank of significant quotes from which to structure their argument).

## Discussion points

*Foreword by Arnold Zable*

11. *The telling is straightforward. There is no artifice, no embroidery. Each narrative is a recounting of specific events set in specific places, told matter-of-factly.* (p. 7) Why do you think the stories are narrated in this manner (strictly without 'artifice')? How does it affect your reading?
12. *My parents, and many of their generation, split their lives between two periods: before the war and after the war. So it is with these accounts.* (p. 8) Why do you think many narratives of Holocaust survivors reflect this structure? Discuss with reference to the book's title.
13. *In many cases, it is only the urgent request of children grown to adulthood that prises open the Pandora's box.* (p. 9).
  - a. Why do you think many survivors of the Holocaust may not have wished to share their experiences with their children?
  - b. Why do you think their children and grandchildren may desire to hear these stories?

## Introductory essay by Alice Nelson

14. *[The survivors] are not abstractions, they are not anonymous faces to be flicked past in the all too familiar black-and-white photographs of the history books. They are daughters and sons and brothers and mothers and aunts and cousins – people who live out their lives in the peaceful suburbs of Australia.* (p. 13)
  - a. What are some of the challenges you face in comprehending and relating to large-scale atrocities such as the Holocaust?
  - b. Does focusing on an individual's narrative, as opposed to collective trauma, help you to better relate to the suffering of the victims? Why/why not? Discuss with a partner.
15. *No redemption could ever be possible and to speak of healing or catharsis belies the horrifying enormity of their experiences, but all the survivors who volunteered at the Holocaust Institute felt that their work was important and necessary.* (p. 17)
  - a. What difficulties might the survivors experience when retelling their stories, especially to an audience of strangers?
  - b. In what ways is the survivors' volunteer work *important and necessary*?
  - c. Do you agree with Nelson's claim that *no redemption can ever be possible*?
16. Research the history of the Holocaust Institute of Western Australia and the work it has carried out.
17. How do you think your generation and future generations can continue to fight against *apathy and forgetfulness* (p. 17)? Create a list of ideas.

## Betty Niesten

18. Betty grew up in Utrecht. Locate this city on a map of Europe and view some images of the city during the 1930s and 40s. Compare and contrast these with images of Utrecht today – how has it changed?
19. *My father was a staunch Democratic Socialist and politically left-wing.* (p. 21) What are the key beliefs of Democratic Socialism? What does the term 'left-wing' mean?
20. *I would have liked to go to university but at that time women were expected to just get married and have children.* (p. 21) Do you think these expectations have changed today in your society? Do they remain the same in other parts of the world?
21. *My father and brother were both very active in the Jewish National Fund* (p. 21). Research the history of this fund and the work it carried out.
22. *As the anti-Jewish laws were implemented gradually, we hardly noticed it. But then when a year passed, we began to see just how much life had changed. We were forbidden from riding bikes or using the tram. We also had a curfew.* (p. 23) Create a timeline of the anti-Jewish laws that were implemented in Nazi-occupied Holland.
23. What was 'the underground'? Research the Dutch resistance in World War II. How did the Nazis punish those who helped Jewish people hide or escape?
24. For Jewish parents in Holland, placing their child with a non-Jewish family was often the only hope to help them survive. What impact would this have had on families and on the child's identity?
25. *In order to blend in with the population, I bleached my hair and wore a small crucifix around my neck. I had obtained a false identity card from the underground and my name was Margriet van Loon.* (p. 27) What other measures did Jewish people take in order to hide from the Nazis?
26. *I often sat next to Nazi officers, which was dangerous considering I was Jewish, but my need to hear music was greater than my fear.* (p. 28) Why do you think Betty was willing to take such an enormous risk?
27. *After the liberation, the underground found two young German soldiers in the woods nearby and brought them to me ... They told me I could shoot these soldiers as retribution for what the Germans had done to my family during the war. They were just boys, around seventeen or eighteen years old, and I thought of the fact that they had mothers too. It simply wasn't in my nature to take away someone's life.* (p. 33) Do you think that this sort of violent 'revenge' would have helped Betty in her healing process? Why/why not?
28. *As the months passed, I began to learn that my immediate family – my parents, sister and brother – as well as many uncles, aunts and cousins, had all been murdered. I didn't know it then, but Holland had the highest Jewish death toll of any western European country.* (p. 33)
  - a. What was the estimated death toll in Holland during the Holocaust?
  - b. Betty states that her parents and sister were murdered at Auschwitz, while other family members died at Sobibor. Locate both camps on a map of Europe and view images.
  - c. What emotions do you experience when viewing these images? Discuss with a partner.
  - d. What was life like in Auschwitz? Research the living conditions, daily routines and jobs of the prisoners.

29. *Perth was such a primitive city in those days that if I could have crawled back to Holland I would have done so.* (p. 35)
- View some images of Perth in 1951. How is the city similar/different to its current form?
  - Why do you think so many survivors of the Holocaust wanted to leave Europe after WWII?
  - Why do you think Betty initially disliked her new home?
  - What kinds of challenges do you think she and other survivors would have faced as new immigrants in Australia?
30. *Having grandchildren has been a wonderful experience for me, because it was the first time in almost forty years that I had family again.* (p. 36) Why do you think the experience of having grandchildren is so special to Betty?
31. What reasons does Betty provide for her decision to share her story in this collection?

## Isaac (Henk) Piller

32. Isaac grew up in Amsterdam. Locate this city on a map of Europe and view some images of the city during the 1930s and 40s. Compare and contrast these with images of Amsterdam today – how has it changed?
33. *One day, while I was playing innocently with a friend in our street, his father came up and slapped me. He said, 'Stay away from my son, you little Jew.' ... This was my first experience of being made to feel different.* (pp. 39–40) Discuss with a partner a time in your life when you have been made to feel 'different'. How did this impact you?
34. *We were made to wear the yellow Star of David to show we were Jews and set us apart ... The parks even had signs stating: 'NO ENTRY TO DOGS AND JEWS'.* (p. 40)
- View images of the yellow Star of David that Jews were required to wear. (NB: The Nazis enforced different colours and designs of this badge in different parts of Europe.)
  - What is the significance of the Star of David in the Jewish religion?
  - What was the Nazis' aim in forcing all Jewish people to display such a badge on their clothing?
  - Laws prohibiting Jewish people from entering parks or sitting on benches (or, in some regions, sitting only on benches marked 'for Jews') were introduced gradually throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. Research the anti-Jewish legislation in the Netherlands from 1940 onwards – what other rights were Dutch Jews denied? (Useful resource: <http://www.annefrank.org/en/Anne-Frank/The-Nazis-occupy-the-Netherlands/Anti-Jewish-Decrees>)
35. Isaac states that his mother was gassed at Auschwitz on 19 November 1943 and that his grandparents were sent separately to Sobibor and gassed on 30 April 1943. (p. 42)
- Locate both camps on a map of Europe and view images.
  - What emotions do you experience when viewing the camps? Discuss with a partner.
  - What was life like in Auschwitz? Research the living conditions, daily routines and jobs of the prisoners.
36. *Daily we heard stories of whole families who had committed suicide by gassing themselves in their kitchens.* (p. 43) Why do you think some families chose to do this?
37. *We were not allowed to know where [our siblings] were going and we were afraid we would never see them again. We heard no news of them at all.* (p. 43) Why do you think families like Isaac's, whom the Dutch resistance helped hide, were not allowed to know where their siblings were taken, or hear any news of their fate? What impact would this have had on the children?
38. What do you think happened to Naomi after she was discovered hiding in the hole (p. 47)?
39. Isaac states: *This incident scared me so much I was unable to speak for some time.* (p. 47)
- Create a definition for the term 'post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)'.
  - Create a list of the symptoms of PTSD.
40. Describing his experience hiding in an attic for six weeks, Isaac states: *I was so miserable in that place, I wanted to die.* (p. 47) How do you think the human spirit endured in the face of such terrible experiences, or indeed in the conditions faced in the concentration camps?
41. *I was very upset and thought she did not want me anymore. I imagined that all my family were at home and that they'd forgotten about me. On that birthday I just went to bed and cried. I did not want to celebrate my birthday ever again. I'm in my seventies now and I still do not celebrate my birthday.* (p. 49)
- How does it make you feel to learn that Isaac is still unwilling to celebrate his birthday?
  - What other aspects of his experience during the Holocaust do you think could remain with him for the rest of his life?

42. *Looking back on my life I'm very fortunate to have left Holland because my brothers and sisters are still strongly affected by their experiences during the war. One of my brothers is still illiterate as he missed his schooling. Esther and Hartog had some education at the orphanage, but they didn't get proper schooling. We were all affected by the horrors of the war, but also by missing such a vital part of our education.* (p. 56)
- Why do you think immigrating to a new country may have helped many survivors make a 'fresh start' following their experiences in the Holocaust?
  - In what ways might the absence of education have impacted Isaac and his siblings as they moved into adulthood?
43. *I remained with the Geerlings family. They told me I was allowed to stay with them only if I agreed to become a Roman Catholic ... I travelled a long way to visit my brothers, but they weren't happy to see me, they used to think, 'Here comes the little Catholic boy.'* (p. 53) What role do you think religious persecution and prejudice played before, during and after the Holocaust?
44. *My gratitude goes to my parents for their unselfish act in handing us over so that we had a chance to survive. It must have been terribly hard for them, but they would be proud to see all their beautiful family, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren.* (p. 57) In what ways are children a continuation of their parents? In your opinion, how much of who we are comes from our ancestors? Discuss with a partner.

## *Fryda Grynberg*

45. Fryda grew up in a small town in Poland called Rutki-Kossaki. Locate this town on a map of Europe.
46. *When the Germans invaded Bialystok in June 1941, all the Jews were forced into a ghetto. This was located in an old part of the city. It was surrounded by a wall.* (p. 60)
- What is a 'ghetto'?
  - Why were Jewish people in many parts of Europe forced to live in ghettos during WWII?
  - Visit the 'Children in the Ghetto' interactive website to explore what life was like inside the ghettos of Nazi-occupied Europe. Complete the online activities: [ghetto.galim.org.il/eng](http://ghetto.galim.org.il/eng)
47. *We finally stopped at a concentration camp called Blizyn. The Nazis dragged us out of the wagons and shaved our heads and we were put to work.* (p. 62)
- Shaving the heads of prisoners was one method the Nazis used to remove any sense of personal identity and human dignity from the prisoners. What other methods did they use to dehumanise prisoners? (Useful resource: <http://www.theholocaustexplained.org/ks3/the-camps/daily-life/processing-and-routines/#.VRkKxDuUfqY>)
  - What kinds of 'work' were prisoners required to do at Blizyn?
48. *When the Germans wanted some fun or entertainment when they were drunk in the middle of the night, they would wake us, screaming in German 'All Jews out!' As we hurried from our barracks, confused and still half-asleep, the Germans would beat us with rubber batons for their amusement.* (pp. 62–63)
- Why were ordinary Nazi soldiers able to carry out such shocking abuses of power? How was the Nazi system, based on Nazi race theory, geared to give 'Aryans' symbolic and actual power over 'non-Aryans'?
  - What safeguards does our society put in place to prevent the abuse of power? Discuss examples.
  - How were such safeguards removed under Hitler's dictatorship? Create a timeline of key law changes in Germany from 1933 to 1945.
49. *During the gassing the noise was terrible. After a while it became silent. This went on non-stop for twenty-four hours a day. The ovens worked day and night, burning the bodies of those who had been gassed. The smell was unbearable. Many people became so depressed and frightened that they ran to the electric fences to kill themselves. Some committed suicide by cutting their wrists with glass because they couldn't take it anymore.* (p. 64)
- What was the procedure for victims facing the gas chambers?
  - What chemical did the Nazis use to murder their victims in the gas chambers?
50. *I did not feel that there was any anti-Semitism in Australia, but life was very hard and the government did nothing to help the refugees. We did not know the language and had no clothing or furniture, no handouts.* (p. 67) List some of the challenges that Holocaust survivors faced as new immigrants arriving in Australia.
51. *I have never returned to Poland and actually feel it was a mistake to go there after the war as it was too upsetting.* (p. 66) Why do you think returning to Poland immediately after the war was so upsetting? Why did Fryda decide to do it at the time (pp. 65–66)?

52. *Every day when I wake up I open my eyes and thank God. Then I say, 'The sun is shining for me.'* (p. 67) Why do you think Fryda is able to maintain such a positive and grateful attitude, despite her terrible experiences in the Holocaust?
53. *'I am like a rotten apple – fine on the outside but inside not so good,' Fryda once explained to a journalist from The West Australian newspaper.* (p. 70) What do you think Fryda may have meant by this?

## Bill Glatzer

54. Bill grew up in a small town called Horodenka in the Ukraine, on the border of Poland and Rumania (usually spelled 'Romania' today). Locate the town on a map of Europe.
55. *My father and I were included in a small number of 'useful' Jews who were still needed to work in the town.* (p. 76) Why did the Nazis choose to keep some Jews behind?
56. *Bill and Leah had two children – a daughter, Hanya, born in 1957 and a son, Ben, born in 1959. He was very open with them from a young age, educating them about the war and his experiences during the Holocaust.* (p. 83) Bill's openness with his children about his experiences during the Holocaust comes in contrast to the stories of the previous survivors. Why do you think this is the case?

## Rosalie Rothschild

57. Rosalie was born in Breda in the Netherlands. Locate this town on a map of Europe.
58. *The actual days of the war were terrifying. We experienced the horrific bombing of Rotterdam.* (p. 91) Research the details of this event in May 1940.
59. *We also had a radio, a forbidden item, and indeed dangerous if caught. It was hidden in our cellar. On it we heard news from England. This station, beamed across to us Dutch, was known as Radio Oranje. Despite the dangers we listened to this bringer of good tidings and bearer of our spirits when times were at their worst.* (p. 106) Why do you think radios were banned by the Nazis? What role did propaganda have in the war? How could it affect morale?
60. Rosalie mentions *the marvel of the five of us and how we had survived the war.* (p. 109). Why do you think Rosalie calls this a 'marvel'?
61. In what ways does the inclusion of Rosalie's photos and documents from the time contribute to your reading of her story?

## Rosa Levy

62. Rosa was born in the small Polish town of Rutki-Kossaki, about fifty kilometres west of Bialystok. Locate this town on a map of Europe.
63. *We learned that when the Germans first arrived in the town they had killed any able-bodied males that they had been able to find.* (p. 118) Why do you think they did this?
64. *The policeman who had beaten my grandmother was a cruel and sadistic man who loved to torment the Jews. He rode through the ghetto several times a day on his white horse. He particularly loved to target a young boy called Zeitki who had a heavy limp because his left leg was much shorter than his right leg.* (p. 121) Create a definition for the term 'sadistic'.
65. *As I walked through the streets of the ghetto I saw the bodies of dead children lying in the streets. Some of them had been covered with newspapers. It was so horrifying to me to see these children simply abandoned in the gutter. There was nowhere to bury them.* (p. 122) What emotions does this image evoke in you? Discuss with a partner.
66. What does Rosa state was *the price of a Jewish life* on p. 126?
67. *No one else in the farmer's household, including his wife, his mother-in-law or his farmhands, knew that we were hidden there. It was so dangerous for them to shelter us.* (p. 127) Why do you think the farmer kept this a secret from his family? Are you surprised by this level of secrecy? What was the punishment for families found to be hiding Jews?
68. Reread p. 128. What were the hardest aspects (both physically and mentally) of hiding in the hayloft for Rosa and her family? How did they attempt to overcome this?
69. *Those weeks after the war ended were so strange. Those who had survived were coming out of the camps and out of hiding, walking skeletons. They were searching for their families, for anyone they knew ... People had survived, they were happy. They danced in the street. But they were also haunted. So many of them couldn't bear life anymore. I remember one woman who had been forced to kill her baby. They had been in hiding and the baby wouldn't stop crying so they made her suffocate it. How could she live with what she had been forced to do? She killed herself when the war was over.* (p. 130) Create a definition for the term 'survivor guilt'. Why do you think so many individuals suffered from this?

70. *The end of the war wasn't the end of the hatred of the Jews. In March 1945, hostile Poles shot and killed my mother. She was only thirty-two years old ... My mother lay in the streets for days, while policemen watched over her body to make sure no one took it away. I was so distressed that I approached the policeman and asked him to kill me too because I had nothing to live for. He told me to come back that night when nobody was around and he would kill me.* (p. 131) Why did anti-Semitic violence continue in Poland even after the war had ended?
71. *No one wanted to stay in Europe after what had happened. Those first days were so difficult. We had no money and spoke no English. Some cousins in North Perth took us in and let us stay in one of their bedrooms.* (p. 132) Create a list of challenges you expect Holocaust survivors such as Rosa would have faced as new immigrants in Australia.

## Aaron Landau

72. Aaron grew up in the Polish town of Radomsko. Locate this town on a map of Europe.
73. *Russian and Polish soldiers were also hiding from the Germans in the woods and Partisan groups were organised. Our group of thirty Jews joined the Partisans.* (p. 141) Create a definition for the terms 'partisans' and 'guerilla warfare'. Who were the Partisans in WWII and in which parts of Europe did Partisan movements emerge?  
(Useful resource: [http://www.yadvashem.org/odot\\_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205704.pdf](http://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205704.pdf))
74. *In a few weeks the Russians organised an army of Poles under their command. I volunteered to join. I would have been conscripted anyway and I felt very strongly that I wanted to fight the Germans who had destroyed my family.* (p. 142) What is 'conscription'?
75. *As an act of defiance, I wrote my name in Yiddish on the wall of the Reichstag.* (p. 143). What is the Reichstag? How is this an act of defiance?
76. What actions does Aaron take in order to survive and rebuild his life after the war?

## Erica Moen

77. Erica grew up in Loosdrecht in the Netherlands. Locate this town on a map of Europe.
78. *My parents were socialists, in what was becoming a strong movement in those years, and did all they could to promote socialist ideas trying to obtain better living conditions for the poor.* (p. 147) What is socialism? Research its significance in Europe in the twentieth century. Note: ensure students do not confuse the terms 'socialism' and 'National Socialism (Nazism)'.
79. *I was then sent to another farm but now had lost all control and suffered from what can be called amnesia. I had no idea where I was and I was very frightened and anxious. If I saw a white cow I thought it was a white truck. I became hysterical and had to be moved through the Dutch underground to the city of Apeldoorn.* (p. 156)
  - Create a definition for the term 'post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)'.
  - Create a list of the symptoms of PTSD.
80. *I've never spoken about it before. People don't know about Holland but all conversations come back to it. We were always told not to talk about the war because no one wanted to hear. Dutch Jews who went to settle in other countries like South Africa immediately after the war warned visiting relatives not to mention their war experiences.* (p. 160)
  - Why do you think right after the war some families asked relatives not to talk about their war experiences?
  - Do you think sharing traumatic experiences with others helps the process of healing or does it hinder it? Discuss with a partner.
81. *Now my eldest son Martin wants to talk about it and bring it back. That is good but it is unpleasant for me because it makes me remember. People talk about six million who died. I can't comprehend the death of six million people.* (pp. 160–161) Do you think it is possible to comprehend large-scale atrocities such as the death of six million in the Holocaust? Why/why not? What methods/resources make it easier for you personally to relate to?
82. *I was young and happy and ready to accept everything. The house was like a castle to us. There was no electricity, no toilet, nothing. But we were free! I still have it in my bones. I want to be free. I'm lucky I'm free. I can do what I like. People don't realise what it's like to be free.* (p. 163) What basic freedoms do you think that you take for granted in your day-to-day life? Discuss with a partner.
83. *When I first came here I didn't want to be Jewish at all. I didn't want my children ever to go through the same experience, but you can't really stop being Jewish because people won't let you.* (p. 164) What do you think Erica means by *people won't let you*?

84. How does Erica represent Australia and the Australian people in her narrative (pp. 164–165)? Consider the following quotes:
- After the war in Holland I think everybody was crazy, like we'd been thrown over a wall and nobody could get over what had happened. I was lucky to get out and come to Australia. There are many people here from everywhere.* (p. 165)
  - I am a gregarious person and I love people. The Australian people are marvellous. Here, you get out of life what you put into it. I hold my head up high and speak my mind. I don't have to crawl in a corner because I'm a Jew, especially not here in Perth.*
85. *I'm a member of the National Council of Jewish Women and I've never been so happy in my life. I feel part of something, because I belong.* (p. 164) Erica has lost so much in the war – how does she create meaning again in her new life in Australia?
86. *For many years Erica would not talk about the war. Her son Martin was not aware of his mother's experiences, although he noticed that some things seemed to upset her and once saw her cry after seeing children playing with toy guns.* (p. 166) Why do you think this upset Erica?
87. *The Nazi experience had a considerable after-effect on my family in Holland and their attitude towards religion, and has split the family. My brother Lou and sister Sonja will have nothing to do with Judaism.* (p. 165) Why do you think Lou and Sonja have taken this stance?

### Kurt Ehrenfeld

88. Kurt grew up in Bratislava. Locate this city on a map of Europe.
89. *My parents became very anxious and depressed. They had lived through World War I as children and they could see another long war coming.* (p. 174) Why do you think the onset of WWII was particularly terrible for those who had lived through WWI?
90. *Our country was now being bombed by the Allies but Jews were not allowed to go into the air raid shelters to escape the bombing.* (p. 181) Research the statistics of civilian casualties in various European cities during Allied bombing attacks in WWII.
91. *The general population was not friendly to us. The Catholic priests used to preach about how terrible the Jews were, how they had killed Christ. There are very few Jews left in Slovakia.* (p. 187) Why was this anti-Semitism ingrained in many European countries even prior to and after the Nazi occupation?
92. *I think that humanity works in strange ways. The people who rise to power are not necessarily the ones who are best qualified to lead the people to a better place. Quite often it's the lunatics who rise to power. This is why there have been so many evil empires throughout history. The Nazi regime was one but there have been others since and there may be more in the future. If I have a message it is this: be on your guard.* (p. 187) Do you agree with this view? In your opinion, what other 'lunatics' have risen to power throughout history?

### Anonymous

93. Why do you think the individual to whom this story belongs has chosen to remain anonymous?
94. *I had just had my thirteenth birthday when war broke out. I remember the build-up. Father was reading the paper and I would see the cartoons. They depicted Jewish people with enormous stomachs and hooked noses. In front of them were drawn little victims.* (p. 195) View some of the Nazi propaganda materials that depicted Jews in this manner. What was the aim of the Nazi propaganda? How did Hitler use the media and technologies available at the time to maintain power and implement Nazi policies?
95. *I remember there was always a parcel with bread or some other food left where my sister worked. The parcels were left by a German soldier who would come to the fence and leave bread for my sister. It was the first time I had experienced that there were good people in the world. That bread played a big part in our diet thanks to that unknown soldier.* (p. 196)
- Why do you think this German soldier chose to risk his own safety to help this girl?
  - Research the stories of other Germans who tried to help the Jewish people under the Nazis.
  - What punishments were administered to those who were caught?
96. *One night I was lying on the ground and thinking to myself, 'I am God's creation. I am a human, so I can't dig and burrow into the earth. I am above the animal world, but what is this going on all around me. Is this humanity?'* (p. 202) What do you think the narrator means by this?
97. *The Americans entered Eisfeld in April 1945. We saw the tanks coming. The best day of my life. I had such a feeling of gratitude. These days America is often depicted as the 'big Satan', but I know how wrong that judgement is. The American liberating army was so civilised. There was no retribution and a lot of understanding and tolerance ... by July 1945 the Americans were replaced by the Russian army.*

*How very different the Russians were ... There seemed to be no discipline and they embarked on an orgy of rape and reprisals. It was so bad that we had to go into hiding for a week. (pp. 202–203)*

- a. Do you agree that America is often portrayed as the 'big Satan' nowadays? If so, why do you think this is?
- b. Research living conditions during the Soviet occupation of Germany.
- c. Sexual violence in war conflict is recognised by the United Nations as a crime against humanity, yet it has been widespread in many armed conflicts in modern history. More information is available here: <http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/about/bgsexualviolence.shtml>. This is a particularly confronting topic – the teacher will need to assess whether it is suitable for discussion in their classroom.

### *Chaim Majteles*

98. Chaim grew up in a town in south-west Poland. Locate this region on a map of Europe.
99. *We were marched under guard to the cattle wagons. There I witnessed dreadful scenes, as guards picked up small babies by their feet and swung them against the edge of the rail wagons, splitting their heads open while their parents watched helplessly. (p. 209)* Why were ordinary Nazi soldiers able to carry out such violent crimes?
100. *I lived in perpetual fear of being selected or of being taken away for the medical experiments being conducted in nearby laboratories. (p. 212)* Research the medical experiments conducted by the Nazis on prisoners during the Holocaust, especially under the SS physician Josef Mengele. What do you think would be some of the short- and long-term effects of living in perpetual fear as Chaim was?
101. *Cans of Zyklon-B crystals were often required for dispatch and were constantly replenished with new shipments. (p. 212)* What was Zyklon-B and what was it used for?
102. *I went back to Poland in search of my family, but could find no one. I was just twenty years old and the only member of my family to survive the Holocaust. Nothing can ever compensate for the terrible loss I suffered or the agony I experienced and it gives me no pleasure to recall these painful memories. But at a time when survivors like me are dwindling in number, it is important to speak out and be heard, for there are people who are trying to rewrite history, to distort the facts or to pretend they never happened. (p. 214)* Why do you think some people might seek to 'distort the facts' or pretend that the Holocaust 'never happened'?
103. *To talk about Nazi Germany is to revisit a demented period. As terrible as the stories are, they are necessary to remind us of the horrors. We must never forget or we risk having the torch of peace extinguished once more. It flickered and went out during the war. Never forget. Never again. (p. 214)*
  - a. Are there regions of the world where you currently believe 'the torch of peace is extinguished'?
  - b. Why do you think humankind continues to engage in war?
  - c. Do you think we have learned any lessons from the suffering of WWII and the Holocaust?
104. *From Israel, Chaim returned to Germany, and was amazed by the changes in the country. He was filled with hope that the next generation of Germans were not growing up in an atmosphere of hatred. (p. 218)*
  - a. What steps has Germany taken to educate younger generations about the nation's past, the rise of the Nazis and the Holocaust?
  - b. What steps has Germany taken to remember and pay tribute to the victims of the Holocaust?

### *Richard Farago*

105. Richard grew up in Budapest. Locate this city on a map of Europe and view some images of the city during the 1930s and 40s. Compare and contrast these with images of Budapest today – how has it changed?
106. *On 15 October 1944, the real Nazis – called the Fascist Arrow Cross Hungarian Nazis – took over. They had a sign which was two arrows crossed – the Hungarian swastika ... Then virtual extermination started in Budapest. It was indiscriminate. Whenever they found a Jew they killed him. The place was full of bodies. (p. 226)* Research the history of the Fascist Arrow Cross Hungarian Nazis and their reign of terror.
107. *During that terrible winter of 1944–45 the Danube River was known as 'the Jewish Cemetery'. In 2005 the Hungarian government commissioned a memorial to the Hungarian Jews who were murdered by the Arrow Cross Party on the banks of the Danube. It is called the Shoes on the Danube Bank and it consists of sixty pairs of shoes made of iron and scattered on the edge of the water, as if their owners had just stepped out of them. (p. 228)* View the photograph of Richard at this memorial on page 229.

108. What steps does Richard take, following his arrival in Australia, to rebuild his life (pp. 237–245)? Consider such aspects as family, work and social activities. What challenges does he face?
109. *I wanted to contribute to the Australian community* (p. 245). Reread pp. 246–247 – what ways has Richard found to contribute back to his local community?

## *Hanoch (Heiny) Ellert*

110. Heiny was born in Neustadt in Lithuania. Locate this town on a map of Europe.
111. *In 1938 Germany had already started annexing parts of Europe. The borders changed and Germany took back control of the Memelgebiet, which was the district that included Heydekrug.* (p. 251) Define the term ‘annexation’.
112. Heiny’s family moved to a town called Heydekrug. Today this town is known by the name Šilutė. Similarly, the Memel region is today known as Klaipėda region.
- Why are the names of the town and region different today?
  - What are some other examples of placenames that have changed under different rule? Consider examples from chapters of *After This* as well as examples from your own knowledge.
  - View a map of the national borders (known as a ‘political map’) of Europe in 1920, 1939, 1941, 1945. List the changes in each period as Nazi Germany extended the reach of its occupation.
  - To gain a deeper understating of Europe’s history in context, watch an online video demonstrating the shifting borders of Europe over the course of several centuries.
  - What does this tell us about the nature of regional and national borders in the world?
113. *I did not realise it at the time, but what I learned there would ultimately save my life. My skills as an electrician were valuable during the war. They made me useful to the Germans and in the end they were what made the difference between being sent to the gas chambers or being allowed to live.* (p. 252)
- How did his electrician skills save Heiny’s life?
  - What other skills and professions are mentioned throughout the book as helping a number of the narrators survive the war (e.g. tailor, bootmaker, baker)?
114. Reread Heiny’s description on p. 257 of the journey on the cattle truck taking him to Auschwitz-Birkenau. What are your thoughts and feelings when confronted with this description?
115. *I remember seeing the sign ‘Arbeit macht frei’ (‘Work makes you free’) above the entrance and thinking perhaps that things would be better for us. Then we saw the smoke from the chimneys and smelt the burning flesh.* (p. 257) Upon losing their freedom to a life of forced labour, prisoners of Auschwitz-Birkenau arrived to a German sign stating ‘Work makes you free’. What would be the psychological impact of this sign as prisoners realised what awaited them at Auschwitz? Why do you think the Nazis placed it there (and at the entrance to other concentration camps such as Dachau)?
116. View the contemporary images of Heiny’s bunk in Block 16a of Auschwitz-Birkenau (p. 258) and the number tattooed on Heiny’s forearm (p. 259). What is the impact of including these images in the book?
117. *I don’t know where I got my will to live despite everything. Part of it was because I wanted revenge. I wanted revenge on Dr Shoy, the officer who had ordered the mass murder of all the Jews of Neustadt. After the war people helped me to see that this was futile, I should give up my desire for revenge. It would not help anything.* (pp. 259–260)
- In what ways do you think the desire for revenge may have helped Heiny sustain his will to live?
  - Why do you think Heiny eventually came to believe that revenge was futile and gave up this desire?
  - Do you agree that revenge ‘would not help anything’? Discuss with a partner.
118. *I didn’t want to be Jewish anymore ... But outside the camp there was a large Magen David. I don’t know why it was there but something changed when I saw it and I decided that I must go back to being Jewish. That it was the wrong thing to do to turn away from that.* (p. 261) Why do you think Heiny wanted to turn away from Judaism?
119. View the images of Heiny shortly after the war (pp. 262–265).
- What roles did displaced persons camps (DP camps) play in helping Holocaust survivors immediately after their liberation?
  - Research the history of Feldafing DP camp, where Heiny stayed.
120. *I don’t ever want to go back to Europe. The only reason I would want to return to Neustadt is to say Kaddish at the mass graves of my family, but I will never do that now. I can’t forget anything that happened. Still, today, I do not understand it.* (p. 268) Do you think that it is possible to ever ‘understand’ large-scale atrocities such as the Holocaust? Why/why not? Discuss as a class.
121. *The Holocaust is still happening every day, all over the world, in places like Syria and Lebanon. There are still wars, mass killings and discrimination between mankind. People don’t treat each other the way*

*they should and it's for this reason the Holocaust is still going on.* (p. 268) Do you agree? Discuss as a class.

## *Pola Potaznik*

122. Pola was born in Radom in Poland. Locate this city on a map of Europe.
123. What is meant by the term *Volksdeutsche*? (p. 270: *people of German origin who had settled in Poland but retained their German identity*).
124. *Despite the fresh disaster that had befallen her, Pola carried on with her son and made the journey to Israel, settling in Tel Aviv. She had escaped the open anti-Semitism and traumatic daily reminders of Poland, but life in Israel as a single mother with no family or friends and a young baby to care for was very difficult. Conditions in the fledgling nation were challenging, with strict rations and housing shortages as the flood of refugees from Europe descended upon the country.* (p. 279)
- How many Jews fled to Israel following the Holocaust?
  - What challenges awaited them in this new nation?
125. *Pola rarely spoke of her experiences during the war. There was not a day when the horror of what she had been through did not press on her, as well as her guilt over being the only one in her family to survive, but she wanted to shield her children from the terrors of her past. She also felt that Australians did not want to hear the awful details of the Holocaust. It was too foreign and too awful a subject to speak of.* (pp. 280–281)
- In your personal experience, do you agree that Australians do not want to hear ‘the awful details of the Holocaust’? Has this changed over the years?
  - Do you think it was possible for Pola to shield her children from ‘the terrors of her past’?
  - Create a definition for the term ‘survivors’ guilt’. Why do you think many individuals experienced this?
126. Reread p. 281. What finally motivated Pola to share her story?

## **After reading: class discussion**

127. When is International Holocaust Remembrance Day held annually?
128. What other Holocaust remembrance days are observed in different parts of the world?
129. Why is it important to have Holocaust remembrance days? What are some other ways in which people could honour the victims of the Holocaust?
130. Jewish survivors have chosen the phrases ‘Never forget’ and ‘Never again’ for remembering the Holocaust. Why do you think these were selected?

## **LITERACY: COMPOSING TEXTS THROUGH SPEAKING, WRITING AND CREATING**

### **Written comprehension activities**

Comprehension questions can be adapted from the discussion points above – have students write paragraph answers supporting their claims with quotes from the text.

### **Suggested essay questions**

131. The following questions can be adapted for in-class assessment or used for a take-home research essay.
132. Evaluate the validity of the following claim: ‘It can be argued that those who didn’t experience the Holocaust cannot begin to understand what it was like. Meanwhile, those who survived it cannot begin to describe it.’
133. *These accounts, when read in total, contain within them collective wisdom. They have much to say about love, hatred, trauma, betrayal, endurance, the randomness of fate, the pain of separation, the extremes of human brutality and perversion.* (Arnold Zable, p. 9) Critically analyse the representation of one or more of these themes in *After This*.
134. How is the theme of ‘man’s inhumanity toward man’ depicted within each of the testimonies in *After This*? What similarities/differences exist?
135. Critically analyse the failure of language in the face of trauma throughout the testimonies in *After This*.
136. ‘It has been said that history is a race between education and catastrophe.’ (p. 16) Discuss.
137. Consider the following question with reference to *After This*: ‘Is trauma always an experience of the individual or can collective trauma exist?’

138. *People talk about six million who died. I can't comprehend the death of six million people.* (Erica Moen, p. 161) How did the exploration of individual stories help you to better comprehend the Holocaust?
139. *I think that humanity works in strange ways. The people who rise to power are not necessarily the ones who are best qualified to lead the people to a better place. Quite often it's the lunatics who rise to power. This is why there have been so many evil empires throughout history. The Nazi regime was one but there have been others since and there may be more in the future.* (Kurt Ehrenfeld, p. 187) Do you agree?
140. *One night I was lying on the ground and thinking to myself, 'I am God's creation. I am a human, so I can't dig and burrow into the earth. I am above the animal world, but what is this going on all around me. Is this humanity?'* (Anonymous, p. 202) How is 'humanity' constructed collectively in the testimonies presented in *After This*? What similarities and differences exist within the representations of each narrative?
141. Why do some individuals and groups deny the reality of the Nazis' attempt to annihilate the Jews of Europe? On what evidence do their arguments hang?

### Oral Presentation

142. Create a three-minute presentation discussing the representation of one of the following themes in the text: love, hatred, trauma, betrayal, endurance, the randomness of fate, the pain of separation, the extremes of human brutality, perversion.

### Debate

143. In teams of four, critically debate the validity of the following claim: 'There were three kinds of people in the Holocaust: persecutors, victims and bystanders.'

### Teaching the Holocaust through poetry

144. Access poems such as 'The Butterfly' written by Pavel Friedmann at Theresienstadt concentration camp on 4 June 1942 (via the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust website: <http://hmd.org.uk/resources/poetry>). The following questions can guide a critical analysis of each poem:

| GUIDE TO THE CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF A POEM     |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Point of view</b>                         | 1. Who is the speaker (persona) in the poem? How would you describe this persona?<br>2. What is the speaker's tone? Which words reveal this tone?  |
| <b>Figurative language</b>                   | 1. What images does the poet use and how do they relate to one another?<br>2. Do these images form a unified pattern throughout (a motif)?<br>3. What is the most powerful image for you and what senses does it appeal to?<br>4. How has symbolism been used in the poem? What do you think different images might symbolise?<br>5. Can you find examples of figurative language used to evoke imagery e.g. simile, metaphor and personification?<br>6. Can you find examples of metonymy, allegory or literary allusion in the poem?   |
| <b>Structure</b>                             | 1. How has the poem been structured?<br>2. Why do you think the poet chose to structure the poem in this way? Does the structure complement the thematic concerns?<br>3. Are there any examples of repetition? What is the effect of this?<br>4. Can you identify distinct stanzas? A rhyme scheme, syllable count or rhythm?<br>5. Is the 'shape' of the poem significant? (i.e. has it been written so as to visually represent something?)<br>6. Can you find evidence of onomatopoeia, assonance or alliteration? How do they give momentum to the poetry when read aloud? |
| <b>Thematic concerns and reader response</b> | 1. What themes can you identify?<br>2. What emotions are evoked by the poem? How is this achieved?   |

### Webpage book reviews

145. Write a critical review of *After This* for your school website.
- In your opinion, what were the strengths and the weaknesses of the text?
  - To whom will you recommend the book and why?

## Role-play

146. What role do you think peer pressure played in Nazi Germany?
147. How are prejudice and peer pressure present in society today?
148. Devise and perform role-plays in groups of four depicting scenarios involving peer pressure.

## Skills to revise in creating texts (through study of *After This*)

- Model appropriate planning and drafting strategies, including underlining and highlighting key words in an essay question, and analysing the 'directive words' that instruct you how to answer the question (e.g. evaluate, compare and contrast, critically discuss etc.).
- Provide an essay-planning template. Revise how to structure an effective proposition.
- Use the text as stimulus for teaching a number of points of spelling and grammar to improve students' ability to effectively proofread their own work.

## Skills to revise in interpreting, analysing, evaluating texts (through study of *After This*)

- Set small reading activities to encourage students to practise a variety of reading strategies. For example: skimming through a page to find a relevant quote.
- Set comprehension tasks requiring the students to justify their response with appropriate evidence from the text or their wider reading and viewing.
- Set compare-and-contrast activities to encourage students to make connections between the text and their wider reading and viewing.

## CROSS-CURRICULAR LINKS

### Art

149. Can art be useful in responding to the Holocaust? In what ways?
150. Research the biography of Chava Wolf, an artist and Jewish child during the Holocaust (Useful website: [http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/lesson\\_plans/chava\\_wolf.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/lesson_plans/chava_wolf.asp))
  - a. As a class, view images of some of Wolf's brightly coloured, childlike paintings.
  - b. Invite students to identify examples of symbolism in her paintings.
  - c. As a class, consider her use of bright colours. Is this unexpected, given the subject matter?
  - d. How does Wolf deviate from students' preconceived ideas about representing horror, hopelessness, loss and death?
  - e. How do artists such as Wolf connect with their viewers through their artwork?
  - f. Which of Wolf's paintings is the most moving for you personally? Why?

### History

151. See the research questions under the earlier section 'Texts in Context'.
152. Visit the Holocaust institute in your state or territory.
153. Invite a Holocaust survivor to come and share their experience with your class.

### Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

154. Create a book trailer using iMovie/Windows Movie Maker. Students can create a storyboard and advertisement for *After This*.
  - a. Source copyright free-images at: <http://www.imagebase.net>
  - b. Source creative commons licensed music at: <https://creativecommons.org/legalmusicforvideos>



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