

# Innocence in an age of Infamy

## **Activity 4: Would You Stick Your Neck Out?**

**Grades 7-12**

### **Objectives:**

- Students will examine the personal qualities of individuals who have been able to help others through selfless actions.
- Students will develop short skits about “heroes” who have “stuck their necks out” to help others.

### **Materials:**

- **“Innocence in an Age of Infamy”** video: “Les and Eva Aigner” excerpt

### **Procedure for Classroom Activity:**

1. Begin the lesson by showing the “Les and Eva Aigner” excerpt about Eva Aigner and her account of how a German soldier saved her mother’s life when he “stuck his neck out” and allowed her to run to freedom.
2. Discuss this incident by considering the following questions:
  - a. Why was Eva’s mother on the train? Why did she want to escape?
  - b. Why did Eva make a point to say that the German soldier was not a Nazi?
  - c. Why do you think the German soldier was willing to disobey orders and allow her to escape?
  - d. What would most likely have happened to the German soldier if his superiors had seen him turn his back to allow Eva’s mother to escape?
  - e. How does this example compare to the stereotype many people have of German soldiers during World War II?
3. Divide students into groups of three to five people. Ask them to think of adjectives that describe the personal characteristics of this German soldier during this encounter and hypothesize why he might have been willing to “stick his neck out” to allow Eva’s mother to escape from the deportation train.
4. If desired, compare this example with other examples of individuals who have

performed similar selfless, and often dangerous, acts of humanity: i.e., those who hid/sheltered Anne Frank's family, those who helped the slaves escape from the South via the Underground Railroad, Albert Schweitzer, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., César Chávez, Mother Teresa, etc.

5. Ask each group of students to select one of these "heroes" and develop a short skit to:

- Introduce who this person is
- Explain the historical and cultural situation in which he or she lived
- Explain the dilemma and consequences he or she faced during an important decision point
- Explain why you think he or she chose to take the actions they did
- Explain why this person should be considered a hero for "sticking his neck out"

6. Share the skits with the entire class and discuss the similarities and differences in these people's choices and characteristics. Point out that people don't have to be famous to make a difference. Sometimes even a small action that is hardly noticed can have an important impact on making someone else's life better.

### **Assessment Suggestions:**

1. Ask each student to write a reflective paragraph of an example when he, she, or someone they know did "stick their neck out" to do something selfless that helped another person.

### **Extension Ideas:**

1. Ask the school librarian to suggest the names of books for students to read about people who have succeeded in "making a difference" by "sticking their necks out." After the students have read these books, have them design posters about these individuals to post in the school hallway. (See Forging Freedom, The Diary of Anne Frank, and The Yellow Star.)

2. Ask students to find and reflect on quotations from people who have “made a difference.” Use these quotations as prompts for writing assignments or visual arts projects. Some good quotes to use include:
- “History, although sometimes made up of the few acts of the great, is more often shaped by the many acts of the small.” — Mark Twain
  - “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” — John F. Kennedy
  - “Some people see things as they are and ask why. I dream things that never were and ask why not.” — Robert F. Kennedy
  - “Be sure you put your feet in the right place, then stand firm.” — Abraham Lincoln
  - “Everybody can be great ... because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.” — Martin Luther King, Jr.
  - “I keep my ideals, because in spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart.” — Anne Frank
  - “Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it.” — George Bernard Shaw