



# WHITE BIRD

## Dear Educator,

*"It takes courage to be kind... [Kindness] is a light in the darkness. It is the very essence of our humanity. It's hope."*

—Sara Blum in *White Bird*

Written by R. J. Palacio, author of the acclaimed *Wonder*, the graphic novel *White Bird* is told from the perspective of Sara Blum, now a grandmother, as she recounts her life story to her grandson. While her story focuses on her experience as Jewish girl forced to hide during the Nazi Occupation of France in 1940, *White Bird* also gives the message of hope to its readers. We watch as Sara befriends Julien, a classmate, whose family's kindness keeps Sara safe.

Inspired by *White Bird*, Random House Children's Books and the curriculum specialists at Young Minds Inspired have created this free program with activities that complement the book's themes of kindness and self-reflection. Designed to strengthen research and communication skills in English language arts and social studies classes, the activities can be used with or without reading the novel.

We encourage you to share this program with other grades 4-6 teachers and families in your school. And please let us know your thoughts on the program by visiting [ymiclassroom.com/feedback-whitebird](https://www.ymiclassroom.com/feedback-whitebird). We look forward to your feedback.

Sincerely,

Dr. Dominic Kinsley

Editor in Chief

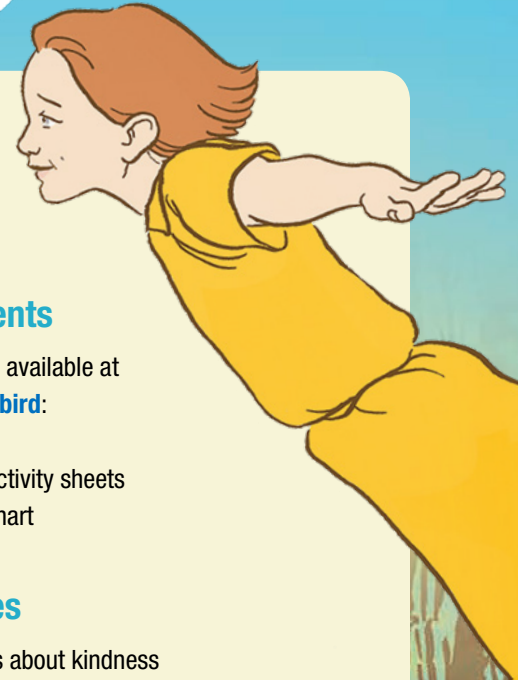
Young Minds Inspired



For questions, contact YMI toll-free at 1-800-859-8005 or by email at [feedback@ymiclassroom.com](mailto:feedback@ymiclassroom.com).

## About *White Bird*

Sara Blum lives a happy life with her family in Vichy, France, attending school and spending time with her friends. But this idyllic life shatters when the Nazi Occupation during World War II separates her family and forces Sara to go into hiding. Sara's classmate Julien and his family risk everything to ensure her survival, and, together, she and Julien find beauty in a secret world of their own creation. R. J. Palacio's graphic novel demonstrates the power of kindness to change hearts, build bridges, and even save lives in the darkest of times.



### Target Audience

Students in grades 4 to 6

### Program Components

The following materials are available at [ymiclassroom.com/whitebird](https://www.ymiclassroom.com/whitebird):

- This teacher's guide
- 2 reproducible student activity sheets
- A standards alignment chart
- An online feedback form

### Program Objectives

- Encourage conversations about kindness
- Prompt students to research examples of kindness or light during dark times
- Inspire students to interview older generations to learn about their experiences

### How to Use This Program

Photocopy and distribute the activity sheets. Students will need computer access for Activity 1. For Activity 2, we suggest sending a brief note to families to let them know that the students will be interviewing an older adult family member or friend and to encourage parents/caregivers to coordinate time for the children to speak to their interviewee. Students do not have to read *White Bird* to complete the activities, but reading the graphic novel will enhance their learning experience.





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## Activity 1: Lights of Kindness in Our History

Introduce the lesson by reading the synopsis of *White Bird* on the previous page, and provide students with a background on the Nazi Occupation of France and why Sara would have to go into hiding. Ask students: *How would you describe Julien's family knowing they risked their lives for Sara? Why do you think the author chose to tell Sara's story in a graphic novel?* Then bring the conversation back to the students. Ask: *When was a time that you witnessed someone showing kindness to others? How could that kindness have been a light for the recipient?*

Distribute the activity sheet and have students work in small groups to examine a dark event in history and research ways in which kindness was a light for those suffering. Alternatively, you might select a specific event or period for your students to research that coincides with your class curriculum. For example, if your class has been learning about American slavery, they might research the Underground Railroad as a light of hope. Other examples could include the Depression, 9/11, or the aftermath of a severe storm. Or you might choose something in the news as a current events project.

Review the activity sheet with the class to help guide students through their research. Use resources your students are familiar with or select a few from PBS ([pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/educators/lessonplan/an-hdsi-viewing-guide/index.html](https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/educators/lessonplan/an-hdsi-viewing-guide/index.html)) or the Library of Congress ([loc.gov/families](https://www.loc.gov/families)). Have students present their findings to the class as a final assessment.

## Activity 2: Learn from Living History

Grandmère Sara's story in *White Bird* helps her grandson Julien truly understand her experiences. Ask students: *What are your favorite memories from childhood?* If students feel comfortable, invite them to share in a short class discussion.

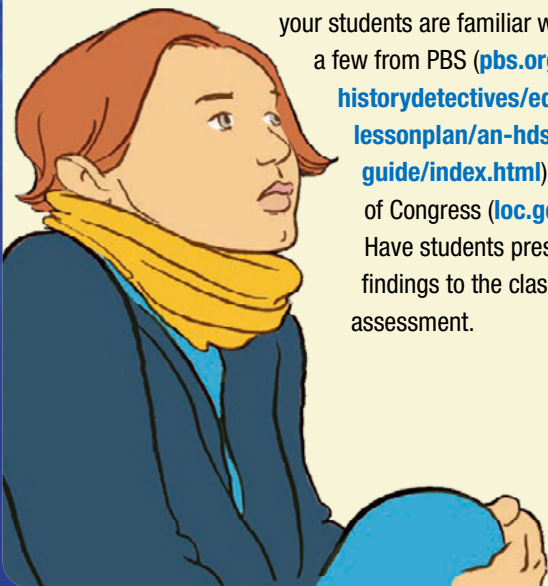
Next, explain that a good way to learn about a distant time period or historical event is through primary sources — through the words and stories of people who can give a first-person account of those times. Distribute the activity and explain that, with their parent or caregiver's guidance, students will interview an older relative, neighbor, or community member to learn about what life was like during their childhood.

Brainstorm people students could interview. Then use the activity sheet, to help students plan their interviews. Point out to students that asking open-ended questions will help their interviews. As the final assessment, students will create a graphic novel-inspired poster that includes information about their interview subject, interesting experiences they had as children, and how their experiences provide another perspective to the history of the time.

## Resources

Learn more about *White Bird* and get teacher resources:

- [wonderthebook.com/books/white-bird](https://wonderthebook.com/books/white-bird)
- [ymiclassroom.com/whitebird](https://ymiclassroom.com/whitebird)





# Lights of Kindness in Our History



**IN THE GRAPHIC NOVEL *WHITE BIRD***, by R. J. Palacio, Sara Blum tells her grandson about her experience as a child during World War II in France. We learn that her classmate Julien and his family risked their lives to protect her from the Nazi Holocaust. And we see how simple kindness can be revolutionary to those facing tragedy.

How has kindness lit the way through other dark times in history? Choose a desperate historical event or time period (or one your teacher assigns) and research acts of kindness that kept hope alive in those days. Use this planning sheet to take notes. Once done, create a brief slideshow to teach the class about what you learned.

1. The event or period in history I am researching: \_\_\_\_\_
2. When did it happen? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Where did it take place? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Who were the key figures in the period or event? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What caused it to occur? What's the background? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What types of experiences did those living during the period or event have? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. How was kindness shown during this time? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What, in your opinion, were the positive effects of this kindness? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



Need help finding information? The National Archives ([www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)) and The Library of Congress' Memory Collection ([memory.loc.gov](http://memory.loc.gov)) are good places to start.



# Learn from Living History



**SARA'S GRANDSON LEARNS A LOT FROM HER STORY** — who better to tell us what happened in the past than those who lived through it?

You can learn about the past by talking with an older member of your family or an older family friend who is willing to share their story. Use this sheet to plan questions for an oral history interview about their childhood or younger days. The more specific you can be here, the better your interview will go! Once done, create a slideshow about your interview or a graphic-novel inspired poster.

## About Your Interviewee

Full name: \_\_\_\_\_

Year born: \_\_\_\_\_ Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

A time or event in history that they experienced: \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions to Ask:** Brainstorm questions to get your conversation flowing. Here are a few examples, as well as room for you to add your own.

1. What is your favorite childhood memory? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What do you remember most about the time period you lived through?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What experience(s) did you have or witness as a child that gave you a new perspective on what was happening at the time?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What is a lesson that you learned during your childhood that you think would benefit kids today?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**An Inspiring Quote from your interview:**  
What is something your subject said that was so good, it should go on a poster?

