Student Activity Howard Cwick: Eyewitness to History

Name

Howard Cwick was born August 25, 1923, in the Bronx, New York, the son of Polish Jewish immigrants. As a child, Howard received his first camera, sparking a lifelong interest in photography. In 1942, Howard enlisted in the U.S. Armed Forces and was sent to Europe in 1944. Separated from his unit, Howard arrived at the gates of Buchenwald in April 1945, and with camera in hand, became an eyewitness to history. However, as Howard's testimony exemplifies, a person can assume a variety of roles depending on the circumstances.

Directions: After viewing Howard's testimony as a class, define the word *eyewitness*. Now define the word *activist*. (Optional: Brainstorm one or two possible roles that might lie between eyewitness and activist on the role continuum. This might help you to place each of the quotes below more precisely along the continuum.) In small groups consider the following quotes from Howard's testimony. Draw a line from each quoted experience to the place your group thinks it belongs along the role continuum. The first quote is done for you as a sample. Be prepared to justify your answers.

Eyewitness Activist

- 1. "When we walked in the gates, every so often, there were one or two or three dead bodies on the ground. The buildings were within twenty yards, twenty-five yards from us. Alongside some of the buildings were large wooden wagons, with bodies, naked bodies, stacked like cordwood where they were thrown..."
- 2. "People started to walk towards us. Some were wearing civilian clothes, some were wearing these long black-and-white robes. Some had gray and black robes, it seemed like multiple kinds of uniforms ...Uh, I hugged one of the men later, when I, when we, when I said, 'Ich bin ein Jude' 'I am a Jew.' And he said that he was too, and I grabbed him and hugged him."
- 3. "One man screamed at me, 'Wasser, wasser [Water, Water].' So I gave him my canteen, and in one drink, he drained it dry."
- 4. "I was in back of the building and I photographed the pile of human ash that came out of the ovens."
- 5. "I was so befuddled and fogged. I just literally wandered around in a daze, in a daze."

- 6.. "...if I ever see you treat another Jew like this again, I'll kill you.' And I brought the hammer back, it sounded like a steel door being slammed. It was so quiet the crowd around us didn't make a sound ... And I swear to this day, I don't know, had he stood up to me, what could've happened."
- 7. "It wasn't until many years after, after the war, I was teaching in Uniondale, Long Island. I was teaching photography, and the kids came into the lab that day. There had been a program about the Holocaust the night before on TV, and the general consensus was that it couldn't have been that bad, that's Hollywood. I became so incensed that I took my photographs the next day into school with me and instead of teaching my five classes, I showed the photographs and I spoke."
- 8. "Since living here in Florida ... I've now spoken to one hundred and eighteen [groups], quite a few of them, schools where I would give seven assembly programs every day, in a day."

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Name Discussion Questions		
2.	Of Howard's experiences, which seems the hardest to quantify or label? Why?	
3.	Can a person simultaneously be an eyewitness and an activist? Explain your answer.	
4.	Are we currently more eyewitness or activist in responding to genocide in the world? Why? What types of actions could we each take to move us along the continuum from eyewitness to activist?	