***Heading: The Notebook “Without Language” by Hannah Szenes, 1940***

**Resource Information**

Hannah Szenes’s notebook of poems is one of the most fascinating items in the Hannah Szenes Collection at the National Library of Israel. Just before embarking on a parachuting mission in Europe, a mission from which she did not return, Szenes copied her poems into one neat, organized notebook with numbered pages. The title of the notebook, which is filled mostly with poems in Hebrew, is *Without Language*. Szenes signed it with her underground name, Hagar. She gave this notebook to her close friend Miriam Yitzhak, who studied with her at the Nahalal Agricultural School for Girls. On the first page, Szenes added a dedication: “To Miriam Yitzchak, to my first and dearest reader and critic, in true friendship, Hannah.”

Some pages that had been torn from the notebook were given to the National Library by Hannah’s mother, Katrina Szenes, but the notebook itself stayed with Miriam Yitzhak. It was only after Miriam Yitzhak’s death that the notebook reached the Szenes family. They decided to donate the notebook and other items from the Szenes family estate to the National Library of Israel.

Hannah Szenes was born in 1921 in Budapest, Hungary to an educated family who were actively involved in Hungarian society. In 1939 she immigrated to Eretz Israel, where she studied at the agricultural school in Nahalal and then joined Kibbutz Sdot Yam. In 1943 she volunteered for the British Army and joined a group of fighters training for a paratroop mission in Nazi-occupied Europe. In March 1944, Hannah and her comrades parachuted into Yugoslavia, close to the Hungarian border. In June, Hannah crossed the border and was immediately apprehended and imprisoned. In a prison in Budapest, she was brutally tortured but refused to give any details about the mission or her friends. On November 7, 1944, Hannah Szenes was executed for treason in her native Hungary.

**Teaching Suggestions**

In history classes, the notebook can be used to teach about Hannah Szenes as an historical figure.

In literature classes, it can be used to open a discussion of Hannah Szenes’s poems.

**Discussion Points**

**Observation**

* What type of item is this?
* What is its title?
* In what language is it written?

**Reading Between the Lines**

* What is the author’s story?
* When was the notebook written?
* How did it get to us?
* How many poems are in the notebook?
* Which poems from the notebook did Katrina Szenes give to Abraham Schwadron of the National Library?
* In your opinion, what is the meaning of the title “Without Language”?

**Connections**

* Why do you think Miriam Yitzhak wouldn’t give the notebook to Hannah Szenes’s mother?
* Which poem in the notebook particularly moved you?

**Creative Ideas**

* Choose one of the poems in the notebook and read it aloud to the class.
* Talk to the class about various ways to commemorate Hannah Szenes.

***Heading: The Szenes’ Little Newspaper***

**Resource Information**

Hannah Szenes displayed writing talent when she was still a child. She “composed” before she could read and write. She would make up poems in her mind and tell them to her grandmother, who wrote them in a special notebook.

This item is one of Hannah Szenes’s early projects. At the age of seven or eight, she decided to print a family newspaper, for which she served as editor-in-chief. The name of the paper was *Kis Szenesek Lapja (The Szenes’ Little Newspaper).* She typed it herself on the family’s home typewriter. At the top of each issue was a date, as befits a real newspaper, and it featured articles, poems, and stories that she chose, along with illustrations she drew.

Hannah Szenes was born in 1921 in Budapest, Hungary to an educated family who were actively involved in Hungarian society. In 1939, she immigrated to Eretz Israel, where she studied at the agricultural school in Nahalal and then joined Kibbutz Sdot Yam. In 1943 she volunteered for the British Army and joined a group of fighters training for a paratroop mission in Nazi-occupied Europe. In March 1944, Hannah and her comrades parachuted into Yugoslavia, close to the Hungarian border. In June Hannah crossed the border and was immediately apprehended and imprisoned. In a prison in Budapest, she was brutally tortured but refused to give any details about the mission or her friends. On November 7, 1944, Hannah Szenes was executed for treason in her native Hungary.

**Teaching Suggestions**

The family newspaper edited by Hannah Szenes as a child.

In Israeli culture and heritage classes, the figure of Hannah Szenes can be used to open a discussion on the subject of heroism.

In literature classes, the newspaper can serve as an opening for a discussion of Hannah Szenes’s poems.

**Discussion Points**

**Observation**

* What type of item is this?
* In what language is it written?
* Who wrote it?

**Reading Between the Lines**

* What can we learn about Hannah Szenes from this item?
* What can we learn about her family?
* In what languages did Hannah Szenes write?
* What happened to Hannah Szenes?

**Connections**

* What poem by Hannah Szenes do you know?
* Do you know any other writers and poets who started writing as children?

**Creative Ideas**

* Plan to publish a family newspaper. Think about its name, the themes that will appear in it, the design, and how it will be distributed.

***Heading: Letter from Hannah Szenes to the Nahalal Agricultural School, 1939***

**Resource Information**

* This is Hannah Szenes’s letter of application, addressed to the principal of the agricultural school in Nahalal. It tells us much about her character.
* At the beginning of the letter, Hannah describes her family: her mother Catalina (Katrina), who is the widow of her late father, the author Bella Szenes. She writes that she has been an outstanding student in all the institutions where she has studied. She mentions that she speaks German, French, and English, and the letter shows that she is proficient in Hebrew as well.
* Hannah explains in the letter that her desire to immigrate to Israel is not a result of the events in Europe: “Even before the tide of fate turned against us, my people in my homeland, my soul already longed for life in Eretz Israel.” She says she wants to learn a profession that will allow her to take part in building the country, which is why she wants to be accepted to study at the agricultural school. She ends the letter with the hope that her request will be granted, which will bring her “great joy and great happiness.” She signs her name as “Anna Szenes.”
* Her application was accepted, and Hannah arrived in Israel in September 1939, at the age of 18. She studied for two years at the Hannah Meisel Agricultural School in Nahalal and then joined Kibbutz Sdot Yam. In 1943, she volunteered for the British Army and was one of the paratroopers who left for a mission in Nazi-occupied Europe.
* In March 1944, Hannah and her comrades parachuted into Yugoslavia, close to the Hungarian border. In June, Hannah crossed the border and was immediately apprehended and imprisoned. In a prison in Budapest, she was brutally tortured but refused to give any details about the mission or her friends. On November 7, Hannah Szenes was executed for treason in her native Hungary.

**Teaching Suggestions**

Hannah Szenes’s letter of application to the Nahalal Agricultural School:

In history classes, this item can be used to teach about Hannah Szenes and her motives for going on the mission.

In literature classes, this letter can serve as an opening for a discussion of Hannah Szenes’s poems.

**Discussion Points**

**Observation**

* What type of item is this?
* In what language is it written?
* To whom did Hannah write the letter?

**Reading Between the Lines**

* What can we learn about Hannah Szenes from the letter?
* What can we learn about her family?
* Why do you think Hannah emphasizes that her desire to immigrate to Israel is not affected by the war?
* According to the letter, what reason did Hannah give for her request to be admitted to the agricultural school?
* What do you know about the agricultural school in Nahalal?
* What other famous characters studied there?

**Connections**

* What is your impression of Hannah Szenes’s level of Hebrew?
* What important details do you know about Hannah Szenes that are not mentioned in the letter?

**Creative Ideas**

* Write a letter of reply to Hannah Szenes’s request.

***Heading: The Funeral Procession for Hannah Szenes***

* This photo shows the coffin of Hannah Szenes on a military vehicle, with people standing on the side of the road to pay their respects.
* The coffin was received in Israel by an honor guard of six paratroopers – veterans of World War II – and members of Kibbutz Sdot Yam. A unit of IDF paratroopers served as an honor guard when the coffin was taken ashore.
* The convoy along the roads in Israel was official and ceremonial: the coffin at the head of the procession was followed by a military vehicle with foreign officials, family members’ cars, representatives of the army, the kibbutz, the government, the Ministry of Defense, the Israeli Chief of Staff, World War II paratroopers, and finally the accompanying crowd of mourners. Motorcycles of the military and civilian police led and accompanied the convoy. A military tombstone with a symbol of a parachute was placed on Hannah Szenes’s grave in Israel.
* Hannah Szenes was a paratrooper who went on a mission to Europe during World War II. She was captured immediately after crossing the border into Hungary and imprisoned. After severe torture, she was executed in November 1944. Hannah was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Budapest before her remains were exhumed and brought over to Israel. In 2007, the monument from the Budapest cemetery was transported to Israel and placed next to her home in Kibbutz Sdot Yam.
* Efforts to bring Hannah Szenes’s remains to Israel for burial began immediately after the war, but were unsuccessful until 1950. Large crowds accompanied the convoy on its way from Haifa Port through Caesarea and Tel Aviv to the Mount Herzl Military Cemetery in Jerusalem. Memorial services were held at each location. The press coverage of the funeral procession and the eulogies given at the event strengthened the image of Hannah Szenes as a national symbol.

**Teaching Suggestions**

Photograph of Hannah Szenes’s funeral procession.

In history classes, this item can be used to teach about the paratroopers’ mission, the design of the Holocaust memorial, and the character of Hannah Szenes.

In literature classes, this item can be used as an opening to teach the works of Hannah Szenes.

In Israeli culture and heritage classes, this item can be used to teach about the subject of heroism and the fact that Hannah Szenes became a national symbol.

**Discussion Points**

**Observation**

* What event is taking place in the photo?
* What feelings does the photograph evoke in you?

**Reading Between the Lines**

* Who was Hannah Szenes? Read about her mission and her death.
* When were Szenes’s remains brought to Israel? Where was she buried?
* Who were the participants in Hannah Szenes’s funeral procession?
* In what places did the funeral procession and memorial ceremonies take place?
* Why was Hannah Szenes named a national heroine?
* What was the purpose of the paratroopers’ mission? Was it successfully achieved?

**Connections**

* Hannah Szenes was one of seven paratroopers who parachuted into Europe during this mission. Why, in your opinion, are some more famous than others?
* Can you think of any man or woman today who deserves the title of “national hero”?

**Creative Ideas**

* Write an obituary for Hannah Szenes or a newspaper article describing the funeral procession.

***Heading: “In the Fires of War,” poem by Hannah Szenes, 1940***

**Resource Information**

* The poem “In the Fires of War” is the first poem Hannah Szenes wrote in Hebrew. She wrote it on October 11, 1940. The poem appears in the notebook into which Szenes copied her poems shortly before she left Eretz Israel for her parachuting mission and which she gave to her close friend Miriam Yitzhak.
* Szenes wrote this poem a year after her arrival in Israel, about one year after the outbreak of World War II. Against the backdrop of the war in Europe “among stormy days of the blood,” she tries to “search for a human being.”
* Hannah Szenes was born in 1921 in Budapest, Hungary to an educated family who were actively involved in Hungarian society. In 1939, she immigrated to Eretz Israel, where she studied at the agricultural school in Nahalal and then joined Kibbutz Sdot Yam. In 1943, she volunteered for the British Army and joined a group of fighters training for a parachuting mission in Nazi-occupied Europe. In March 1944, Hannah and her comrades parachuted into Yugoslavia, close to the Hungarian border. In June, Hannah crossed the border and was immediately apprehended and imprisoned. In a prison in Budapest, she was brutally tortured but refused to give any details about the mission or her friends. On November 7, 1944, Hannah Szenes was executed for treason in her native Hungary.

**Teaching Suggestions**

This is the first poem written by Hannah Szenes in Hebrew.

In history lessons, this poem can be used to learn about the character of Hannah Szenes and her talents.

In Israeli culture and heritage classes, the poem is suitable for Holocaust Remembrance Day as well as discussions on the theme of heroism and devotion.

In literature lessons, one can analyze the poem and its message.

**Discussion Points**

**Observation**

* Who wrote the poem?
* When was this poem written?
* Where was this poem written?
* What is the theme of this poem?

**Reading Between the Lines**

* What is Hannah Szenes looking for, and how?
* What do you think her search means?
* How are the events of the war reflected in the poem?
* Szenes wrote the poem only a year after immigrating to Israel. What can we learn from the poem about her knowledge of Hebrew?
* What can we learn about her character?

**Connections**

* If you were looking for a “human being,” how would you identify him or her?
* Where would you look?

**Creative Ideas**

* Illustrate the poem.

***Heading: The poem “To Die?” handwritten by Hannah Szenes***

**Resource Information**

This poem was written in 1941 in Israel.

“To Die?” is one of the lesser-known poems written by Hannah Szenes. She wrote it in 1941, during her studies at the Nahalal Agricultural School. She was not yet twenty years old.

The poem consists of two short stanzas. In the first stanza, Szenes writes about her love of life and says that she does not want to die young. In the second stanza she comes to terms with her expected death in the war, and is comforted by the fact that she has had the opportunity to live in Israel, her homeland. Szenes noted on the page the date and place of the poem’s composition: Nahalal, May 5, 1941. The poem had originally been written on page 8 of her poetry notebook. It was torn out of the notebook and given to the National Library by her mother Katrina Szenes.

Hannah Szenes immigrated to Israel in 1939 and attended the Nahalal Agricultural School for Girls. In 1943, Szenes volunteered for the British Army and joined a group of paratroopers who landed on European soil. The prophetic and heartbreaking poem was written about three years before Szenes was executed in her native Hungary for espionage and treason. Her remains were brought to Israel in 1950 and buried on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

Hannah Szenes is known as a talented poet and writer. After her death, additional poems she had written were discovered. Two of these became valued assets to the heritage of Hebrew poetry and Israeli culture: “Blessed is the Match” and “A Walk to Caesarea.”

Link to the Abraham Schwadron Collection for: Szenes, Hannah

<https://merhav.nli.org.il/primo-explore/search?query=any,contains,003559706&tab=default_tab&search_scope=Local&vid=NLI&lang=iw_IL>

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Link to the item in the Israel National Library catalog: [Http://primo.nli.org.il/primo\_library/libweb/action/dlDisplay.do?vid=NLI&docId=NNL\_ARCHIVE\_AL003559706](http://primo.nli.org.il/primo_library/libweb/action/dlDisplay.do?vid=NLI&docId=NNL_ARCHIVE_AL003559706)

**Suggestions for Teachers**

The poem “To Die?” handwritten by Hannah Szenes, 1941.

In history classes, the poem is appropriate for the theme of settlement in Israel during World War II, and especially to discuss the paratroopers who parachuted into occupied Europe. It is also possible to discuss Szenes’s fate and her heroic conduct following her capture.

In Israeli culture and heritage classes, the poem is suitable for Holocaust Remembrance Day as well as the theme of heroism and devotion.

In literature classes, the poem can be analyzed while focusing on the gap between the short structure and small number of words versus its dramatic message.

In homeroom classes, this poem can be used to open a discussion of Hannah Szenes’s character.

**Discussion Points**

**Observation**

* Who wrote the poem?
* When was the poem written?
* Where was it written?
* What is the subject of the poem?

**Reading Between the Lines**

* Read about Hannah Szenes. At what point in her life was the poem written?
* Why do you think the title of the poem ends with a question mark?
* According to the poem, what are the things Szenes likes?
* Why is she willing to give them up?
* Which events of the war are referred to in the poem?
* According to this poem, did Szenes foresee her own death? Explain your answer.

**Connections**

* Why do you think Hannah Szenes became more famous than the other paratroopers who volunteered to parachute into Nazi-occupied Europe?

**Creative Ideas**

* Think of a way to commemorate Hannah Szenes.

Translation of “To Die?”

To die… so young to die… no, no, not I.
I love the warm sunny skies,
Light, songs, shining eyes,
I want no war, no battle cry –
No, no…not I.

But if it must be that I live today
With blood and death on every hand,
Praised be He for the grace, I’ll say
To live, if I should die this day…
Upon your soil, my home, my land.