

The Representation of Children in Holocaust Work

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Abstract

The Holocaust was a devastating event in human history that resulted in the deaths of millions of people, including six million Jewish people, and forever changed the way we understand the world. The vulnerability of children during this time was especially profound, as they were often the most innocent victims of the horrors that took place. In film and scholarship, the depiction of children's vulnerability has been used to help audiences understand the lessons of the Holocaust and the importance of preventing such atrocities from occurring in the future. Analyzing works, such as *Life is Beautiful*, *Schindler's List*, and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, will demonstrate how perceived child innocence can cause a disruption when constructing a Holocaust narrative. The use of child innocence as a way to illustrate the horrors of the Holocaust leaves audiences able to resonate with the emotions being inflicted upon them as a way to convey this universal idea of the Holocaust. By telling one story of a child, countless other children had similar experiences; therefore, memorialization of these child experiences is vital in preserving Holocaust memory and perspectives. In this paper, I will argue that Holocaust diaries, scholarship, film, and museums use the common theme of innocence from child experiences to influence and construct a narrative, therefore providing an alternative outlook on the Holocaust through a child lens.

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Image via The Guardian

- The undeveloped narrative of the little girl in the red coat in *Schindler's List* conveyed the children who were silenced and the pure innocence of confusion.

- *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* is a controversial film and book that utilizes child innocence and ignorance to establish the denials of actions taken in concentration camps.



Image via The Guardian

The Diary of Anne Frank

The Diary of Anne Frank is the most famous of diaries exemplifying the life of a child in hiding during the Holocaust. Her diary laid the foundation for a universal understanding of the everyday life of a child. The perception of child innocence and purity emerged from Frank's diary, allowing readers to engage and explore her life. By reflecting on her hopes and dreams, Frank's nature lays the foreground for a universal understanding of humanity and the Holocaust. Her reflections prompted many filmmakers to develop Holocaust films with the child figure as the focal point of the narrative, demonstrating innocence, trauma, and resilience.

Holocaust Films

Research on the depiction of children in numerous films and works highlights different experiences for each child, yet the common theme is vulnerability and innocence. Films such as *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, *Life is Beautiful*, *Schindler's List*, and *Son of Saul* emphasize the child figure to leave a profound impact on the viewer. Within these films, the child becomes the storyteller, leaving the viewer with a new outlook on the Holocaust. Scholars such as Mark Anderson, David Bathrick, and Lydia Kokkola focus much of their work on the depiction of children in Holocaust films. Each scholar evaluates different films, yet all have a centralized argument that the use of a child figure shapes a new perception of the Holocaust while also raising questions of controversy.

Daniel's Story

The final section will focus on the depiction of children in museums, specifically the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Within the museum, there is an exhibit solely about a child, *Remember the Children: Daniel's Story*. The exhibition is derived from the book *Daniel's Story*, which tells the fictional story of a little boy and his family under Nazi Germany occupation. All of the events and experiences Daniel goes through are pulled from accounts of other children's stories from diaries, testimonies, and photographs. The exhibit is an interactive space allowing visitors to physically see and feel what Daniel experienced. Providing visitors with a cartoonish nature of the Holocaust is necessary to keep the discussion of such atrocities continuing when many struggle to comprehend this complicated topic.