



**Centropa Lesson**  
**Survival in Sarajevo:**  
**Two lessons on community and civic values**  
For public, parochial and charter schools

The Bosnian-Serb siege of Sarajevo, from spring 1993 until winter 1996, was the longest in modern history. With electricity, water and food supplies cut off and only sporadically supplied, with 11,541 citizens shot by snipers or killed by mortars, Sarajevans had to depend on each other.

In a faded, turn-of-the-century synagogue, a group of Holocaust survivors and their offspring created La Benevolencija, the Jewish humanitarian aid agency. Who worked there? Jews and Muslims, Serbian Orthodox and Catholic Croats--all those who never believed one ethnic group was superior to another.

After all, Jews had lived alongside *all* their neighbors since they were welcomed in Sarajevo in the 16th century. This is the story of how they paid their neighbors back.

We offer two lessons that challenge your students to think about what it means to be a member of society, and what responsibilities come from being part of a community. The people in this story defined community as something that went beyond ethnic and religious identities. How do your students define community and what choices do they make as citizens in this country? As global citizens?

The lessons are designed to last 60 minutes, but you can adapt them to fit any class length, and select those discussion questions that best fit your curricular goals. A comprehensive understanding of the history and events of the Bosnian wars in the 1990s is not a pre-requisite for teaching this class, though we do provide you with a brief fact sheet so you understand key background information.

This project is based on Edward Serotta's book, *Survival in Sarajevo: Jews, Bosnia, and the Lessons of the Past*, published in 1994 and now out of print [but available through abebooks.com](#). The exhibition from this project has been created by [Centropa](#), and has been underwritten by [JDC](#) (the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) and The Milton and Roslyn Wolf Foundation.

## Survival in Sarajevo: Two lessons on community and civic values

### Goals:

- Study a historic model of a multiethnic society that worked, even in a time of crisis.
- Provide students with an opportunity to reflect on our ethical and civic responsibilities for our neighbors and fellow-citizens.

### Essential Questions:

- How do you define community?
- In a multiethnic society such as ours, are we one community or a society of many communities? How does the answer to this question effect how we treat each other?
- What ethics and values did the people of La Benevolencija exhibit and what can we learn from them?

### Overview of Lessons

Activity	Supplies Needed	Time
<b>Lesson 1: Survival in Sarajevo</b>		
Part I: Set Induction Discussion: What is community?	Board, chalk/markers	10 mins
Part II: Film Watch film, discuss	Optional: projector to show map of Balkans	20 mins
Part III: Civic Values Exporing civic values through the Survival in Sarajevo story	Copies of quotes Other supplies based on activity: Option1: paper, pens, tape Option 2: computer, Internet access for student discussions (FB, Collaborize Classroom) Option 3: nothing but the quotes	30 mins
<b>Lesson 2: "I'm nothing. I'm a human"</b>		
Part I: Reading book excerpts Remind students of story, read and discuss excerpts from the book, Survival in Sarajevo	Handout of excerpts from the book Survival in Sarajevo (attached)	20 mins
Part II: A wish for the world/collage	Supplies for making collages: paper, poster board, glue, markers, etc; also, the quotes, printouts of photos from the Survival in Sarajevo web site, students' personal photos (see assignment), images, etc.	40 mins

## **Class #1: Survival in Sarajevo**

### **I. Set Induction (10 mins)**

Think/Pair/Share: Basing this definition on your own life experiences, how do you define community? As you think of your answer, consider:

- How do you determine who is part of your community? People from the same background? Same religion? Same interests? People who live near you or go to school with you?
- Is there anyone you would exclude from your community? Explain.

Students discuss the above questions with the person next to them (2 mins), and the class discusses all answers. Here are follow-up questions for the teacher to pose to the entire class during the open discussion:

- What responsibility do you have towards your community? Explain.
- What responsibility do you have towards those you don't consider part of your community? Explain.

During the discussion, students make a list of the responsibilities they agree they have towards others in their community, and those they believe they have to people who may not be in their community.

### **II. Survival in Sarajevo (20 mins)**

- a. Before viewing the film, the teacher should provide some basic historical context for the students. Please turn to the teacher fact sheet for the information you need to know and links to maps.

Minimally, teachers should answer these three questions:

1. Where is Sarajevo?
2. Who are the Jews (Sephardim), Croats, Serbs and Muslims?
3. How did the Sephardim get to the Balkans?

- b. Watch the film, *Survival in Sarajevo*, which can be found at <http://centropastudent.org/?typ=sprache&fLang=ENG&movID=44&nID=78&q=m>. We recommend teachers download the film to a computer or disk to avoid technical problems in class. The film runs for 12 minutes.

### **III. Exploring Civic Values Through the Survival in Sarajevo Story (30 mins)**

After answering any questions students may have about the story, the teacher leads a class discussion with these questions:

- Describe the behavior of the people in this story towards each other.

- What values did the people in this story exhibit towards one another?

Teacher writes student answers on the board, then the teacher hands out the list of quotes (attached).

Then, the teacher writes the following questions on the board so students can refer to them as they do one of the below activities (the entire class must do one option).

- i. What does this quote mean? Put it in your own words.
- ii. Why does this quote most reflect the values in the story?

Option 1: Post all of the quotes around the classroom, with paper just below the quote. Students walk around the room and choose two quotes they think most reflect the values in the story. Below each quote, on paper taped underneath the quote, they write their answers to the questions the teacher has written on the board.

Option 2: Students choose two quotes from the list and post them on Collaborize Classroom ([www.collaborizeclassroom.com](http://www.collaborizeclassroom.com)) or Facebook (closed group), answering the questions on the board and responding to at least one other student's post.

Option 3: Teacher hands out the sheet with the quotes. In pairs, students choose the two quotes that they think best represent the story's values and answer the above questions. Go around the class and each pair presents to the group their choices and answers to the questions.

Once students have done one of the above activities, discuss student answers as a class and then ask these questions:

- Describe an example from your life of someone living out the values you chose in the quotes. What did they do to live that value, to make it a reality?
- How does the value you chose help make a community? How does it help make a community stronger?

*Note:* Teachers may want to send an email with the link to the film to those students who were absent for this first class, asking them to watch it at home before the next class. Another option is for those who were absent to watch the film in the next class while the others begin their collages.

## **Class #2: “I’m nothing. I’m a human.”**

In this class, students will read two excerpts from Edward Serotta’s book, *Survival in Sarajevo*, about the boys they saw in the film, and explore the tension between being a member of a group (religious, ethnic, political) and being part of a global society.

### **Part I: Friendship in a time of war (20 minutes)**

Remind students about the story, perhaps asking them to recount what they remember and filling in the gaps. The most important point to highlight is that the Bosnian war was one of ethnic rivalries and conflict; students need this information in order to understand the first excerpt below. See the teacher fact sheet for background information.

### **Excerpt 1: “Only Deny doesn’t call me names.”**

Read this excerpt from the book, *Survival in Sarajevo*, and discuss the below questions as a group. This story challenges us to reflect on how we think about people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds. This excerpt is also included in a separate document so you can print it and copy for students.

“When war broke out, walks in the surrounding hills were impossible, and with no electricity the computer and television set stood idle. Haris Karalich found himself busier than ever with jobs from various aid agencies, and Denis [his 10 year old son], with his school now closed, often drifted through the ruined city alone. Radoslav [his friend] too felt the isolation and alienation war brings. ‘All my old friends left Sarajevo, and the other children started calling me names, dirty Serb, dirty Chetnik, all because my mother’s Serb and my dad half-Serb. Even a real good friend of mine, a Muslim boy, won’t speak to me anymore. Only Deny doesn’t call me names,’ he said.

‘Well, I don’t care who’s a Muslim, a Serb, a Croat,’ Denis muttered. ‘People who care about such things are sick.’ The boys grew closer together than ever.”

Questions to discuss:

- Why do people of different religions and ethnic groups hate and fight each other? Why would children call Radoslav those names?
- Do you think you would be able to remain friends with someone if your parents were telling you bad things about the religion or ethnic group they belonged to?
  - Why/why not?
  - How would your parents’ disapproval affect your life?
  - Would this be different if you lived where people were fighting over ethnic differences (versus living where you live now, in a peaceful society)? Explain.

## **Excerpt 2: “I’m nothing. I’m a human.”**

Also from the book *Survival in Sarajevo*, this poignant excerpt raises the question of whether we need to give up our religious and ethnic identities in order to be part of humanity. Read the excerpt out loud, as a group, then discuss the questions below.

Background to the excerpt: At the end of the *Survival in Sarajevo* film you met Denis, a 10-year-old boy who traveled first by bus from Sarajevo to Croatia and then to Israel. He was traveling with his friend Radoslav Bozovich (called Rasho) and Natalia Bosovich, Rasho’s mother, who intended to adopt Denis and raise him in Israel.

As a minor, Denis could not immigrate to Israel without a parent, and Natalia had not yet formally adopted him. Since Denis was a Muslim, Israel would not accept him under the law of return. The law of return states that any Jew [someone whose mother is Jewish] or person with a Jewish grandparent can immigrate to Israel to become a citizen. The following excerpt describes what happened as they traveled to Israel as a family. Read it and discuss the questions that follow.

“Just after 10:30 on Sunday morning the doors of the bus opened in front of the Biokovko Hotel in Makarska [Croatia].

Radoslav, Natalia, and Denis dragged their bags up to the Jewish Agency desk. An Israeli representative listened to their story, rolled his eyes and took them to Tuvya Raviv, the tireless traveler who was helping everyone he could come to Israel.

Raviv scanned the papers and said to [Edward Serotta], “Am I to understand that this boy has no adoption papers from Mrs. Bozovich? And she wants to bring him to Israel unattended by his parents?” He scratched his head and shook it from side to side. “And Denis, you’re Muslim, right?”

‘I’m nothing,’ Denis said. ‘I’m a human.’<sup>1</sup>

Questions for the group to answer in response to this excerpt:

- What did Denis mean by this statement?
- How do you identify yourself? As a part of a particular group (religious, ethnic, political), or (as Denis does) as a “citizen of the world” or “global citizen,” or a combination? Explain your answer.
- What are the challenges and benefits of each choice (i.e., identifying with a group, or seeing yourself as a generic “human”)?
- How do we create a world where people can maintain their religious and ethnic identities but they see each other as human first? Explain and support your answer.

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<sup>1</sup> Denis, who had been injured by a mortar shell explosion in Sarajevo, made it into Israel with Rasho’s family thanks to Tuvya Raviv. How? After the above took place, Serotta writes, “Next to a blank spot near Denis’s name, [Raviv] said to me quietly as he wrote, “It was, I believe, a Jewish grandmother the boy had, right?”

## Part II: A wish for the world.

As a final assignment, each student will create a collage that identifies what s/he thinks is the main lesson to be learned from this story, and a wish for the world based on that story. The collage can include:

- a. Quotes from the list used in the first class session, or other quotes that express the relevant themes.
- b. Photos from the film that visually depict the lessons learned. Print out photographs from the web site:  
[http://upload.centropa.org/upload/centropa-sarajevo/Centropa.org\\_Sarajevo/Sarajevo\\_home.html](http://upload.centropa.org/upload/centropa-sarajevo/Centropa.org_Sarajevo/Sarajevo_home.html) (click where it says “the photographs,” and when you click on the photo under each section title you will see a series of photographs taken by Edward Serotta, used in the making of the film; you may print them out)
- c. Personal photographs that reflect the values and lessons learned from the story, or photographs from the synagogue or community. This could show students doing volunteer work, or a mitzvah day activity, for example.
- d. In their own words, wishes for the future – for their own community, for another specific community, or for humanity in general – based on what they learned.
- e. Action words or phrases that illustrate what it means to be a member of a community, or take responsibility within a community. Some might include: voting, helping neighbors, stay informed about your community, know your neighbors, etc. These should be action-oriented verbs/phrases.
- f. Name one thing *you* can do to reach out to someone of a different ethnic or religious background – like Denis did to Rasha – to make a difference.

Students can present their collages to the class and discuss what the story meant to them, the lesson they’d like everyone to learn from it and the wish they have for the world.

Follow-up options:

- Compile the wishes into a small booklet and give one to each student.
- Line your classroom or school hallway with these posters. They are sure to generate lots of discussion!
- If your school commemorates Holocaust memorial day, you can hang these collages around the school.