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Being in Hiding

For over two years Anne and seven other people were in hiding. There were many ways in which this was a dangerous thing to do but less dangerous than being caught would have been. Since the building housed a business which was operating during the week, and since strangers who knew nothing about them were apt to come into the business at anytime, the inhabitants of the Secret Annexe had to be very quiet during the day. There was a standing reward given for anyone who turned in people in hiding, and very few people, even other Jews, were privy to the fact that the Franks were still in Amsterdam or that they were hidden away in an attic apartment.

Being quiet meant no coughing, talking, laughing, playing a radio, moving about the attic, running water, or flushing the toilet. The inhabitants went to elaborate lengths to ensure that no one below would hear a single sound from above. Over the two years of hiding, there were several scary times: when burglars entered the business below when the property was sold without their knowledge and the new owner came wanting to see his newly acquired building and when neighbors shined a flashlight into the building because they heard a noise. During these times, Anne, her family, and the others cringed in fear, dreading the worst.

Activity: In this activity, you are to pretend that you are an inhabitant of the Secret Annexe, hiding from the Gestapo. SS officers have come into the business showroom below, and you must remain absolutely silent as long as they are in the building. At a signal from the teacher no one in the classroom may make a sound. Any urge to cough, laugh, talk, or make any noise whatsoever must be stifled. You are to maintain this silence until the teacher gives the signal that the silence has ended. Remember, everyone in the classroom is in this together.

When the silence is over, discuss with other students their reactions—how they felt, what went through their minds when they were unable to make a sound, how Anne must have yearned for conversation at the ages of thirteen and fourteen, only to have to remain silent every day for over two years.

To the teacher: This activity can be an extremely powerful experience for the students. Careful preparation is necessary, and the students must understand that this is an opportunity for them to develop their ability to control their behavior in a way which was imperative for many, many people who went into voluntary exile during the war. Some of the students who have the most trouble controlling their behavior in ordinary situations may get really caught up in this activity and may wish to try the activity again to determine whether they can improve their ability to “hide out” from the Gestapo.

Prepare an Escape Bag

Anne prepares an “escape bag,” because she is terrified that one day they will have to run for their lives from the Secret Annexe. Bombings and gunshots are heard almost daily. She sees people being led down the street by the Gestapo. They listen to the radio news, in itself a crime, and they know now that freedom is not going to come immediately, although they cling to the hope the Allies will defeat Germany.

Anne admits to Kitty that she clings to her escape bag more because she wants something to hold onto than thinking that they have any hope of escaping. As she says, there is nowhere for them to go. Still, it gives her a certain amount of comfort, so it would hold some of her most precious things.

In a tote bag or a large shopping bag, prepare the escape bag you think Anne would have prepared. Inside the bag, place the things, or pictures of things, you believe Anne would take with her if she was forced to flee the Secret Annexe. You know her well enough by this time to know what is dear to her and what is not.

Would she take clothing? _____ If so, what kind? _____

Would she take books? _____ If so, which ones? _____

What decorative items in her tiny room would she take? _____

Would she take any souvenirs of the Secret Annexe? _____

Would she take anything belonging to anyone else? _____ If so, what? _____

Would she take food? _____ If so, what kind? _____

Would she decorate her escape bag? _____ If so, how? _____

Bring your escape bag to share with your classmates. Tell them the reasons you have put into your bag each item you have put there and why each would have been important to Anne.

Extension: Pretend that you are in a dangerous situation similar to Anne Frank’s. Prepare an escape bag containing some of your own things that are most precious to you. Share your bag with the class if you would like to.