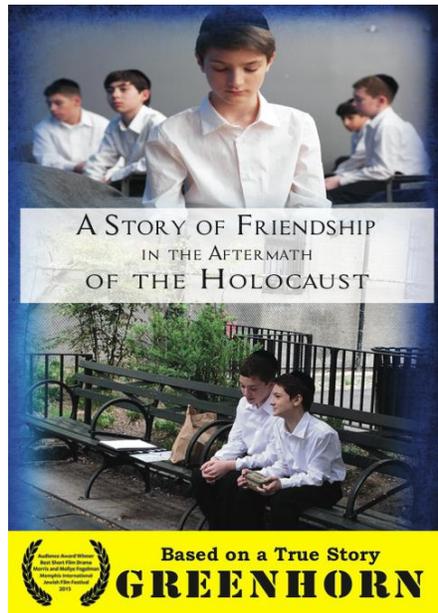


## Resource Guide

# Greenhorn

by Anna Olswanger  
A Story of Friendship  
in the Aftermath of the Holocaust  
**L4812DVD**



### Synopsis

Daniel, a young Holocaust survivor, arrives at a New York yeshiva in 1946. He is carrying a small box, his only possession. Daniel rarely talks, but the story's narrator, a stutterer taunted by the other boys, comes to consider Daniel his friend. What's in the box is a mystery. Daniel never lets it out of his sight, but he won't talk about it, either. The boys at the yeshiva are impatient with his secret. Only Aaron, the stutterer, reaches out to Daniel, and through their friendship, Daniel begins to let go of his box. Together, each boy finds his "voice." Based on a true story, *Greenhorn* gives human dimension to the Holocaust. It poignantly underscores our flawed humanity and speaks to the healing value of friendship.

## Themes

Belonging, Bullying, Disabilities, Family, Friendship, Self-Discovery, War.

## Curriculum tie-ins

Community, Family, Friendship, Genocide, Heroes and Heroines, Historical Fiction, Judaism, The Holocaust, U.S. and New York History, World History, World War II.

## Background Questions

### Teaching tip

To prepare students for *Greenhorn*, you may want to develop background and context for the story by asking them to consider these questions.

1. What does it mean to be a Holocaust survivor? Why is it important for others to understand what survivors experienced? Do you think it's possible to understand what they endured?
2. Why is it still important to tell stories of the Holocaust?
3. Look at a map of Europe during World War II. How much do you know about the events of the war and the Holocaust? What do you know about Nazi Germany and the concentration camps?
4. What is a refugee? Did you know that many Jewish refugees from Europe came to the United States after the war? What challenges do you think they faced in their new lives?
5. What was it like for boys to live and study at a New York yeshiva in the 1940s?
6. What is a person's "voice?" What happens when you don't have a "voice?"

## Before Watching

1. Discuss the meaning of the phrase "A friend loves at all times" (Proverbs 17:17).
2. *Greenhorn* takes place in New York City at the end of World War II. Not everyone in the story knows about the Holocaust. Why wouldn't they? How might their lack of knowledge affect their behavior when they meet a survivor?
3. What is the meaning of the word "Greenhorn?" What is the history of the word and how is it commonly used?
4. When you read a story about the Holocaust, do you feel angry, sad, determined, or full of despair? Can a story about the Holocaust ever make you feel hopeful, as well as sad or angry? Why?
5. Have you ever been the "new boy" or "new girl" in a school? What did that feel like? What did you do to try to fit in? Did someone help you?
6. Have you ever been bullied? How did it make you feel? Have you ever been a bully? Why did you behave that way? Why does bullying behavior occur?
7. If a person has a secret, should you try to find out the secret, or allow the person to keep it? Why is a secret so intriguing to others? Can another person's secret make you angry? Why? Why do people keep secrets?

## Setting a Purpose for Viewing

Ask students to think about how Daniel's secret may change the lives of the other characters in the film.

## After Viewing

1. *Greenhorn* is based on a true story. Were the events in the program believable to you? Why or why not?
2. Did the story shock or disturb you? What other emotions did you feel?
3. No one knows that Daniel can speak English. Do you think that he just learned it? Why does he resist talking in English? And why does he finally use English?
4. The power of language and communication is an important theme in *Greenhorn*. Aaron struggles to speak and express himself. Daniel, the newcomer, is silent at first. How does language help to bridge their different worlds and experiences?
5. At first, most of the boys are friendly to Daniel, but when Hershel holds him down and takes away his box, the other boys don't help Daniel. Why not? What would you have done?
6. Why is Aaron kinder to Daniel than are the other boys? Is he being unselfish or does he need something in return? List some reasons why a person might be kind to another person.
7. When Aaron hears the box fall on the floor, why does he slip it back under Daniel's pillow?
8. What does Aaron whisper to Daniel? Why does Aaron confess his own dream to the sleeping Daniel? And why, if Daniel heard Aaron, does he not answer or acknowledge him?
9. Why is Aaron afraid to share his dream with the other boys? What does he think they would do or say if he did?
10. Why does the Rebbe want to bury what was inside Daniel's box? Do you agree with him or disagree? What would you do with the contents of the box if it were your decision to make?
11. Can we be certain that the box actually contains what Daniel and the Rebbe believe it does? If they were mistaken, why would the box and its contents still be important to Daniel? Why does he want to keep the box with him at all times?
12. How does the stuttering Aaron finally find his voice? How does Daniel find his?
13. What does Daniel say to Aaron at the end of the program? Why does he wait to say it?
14. How would you define the word "friend?" Were Aaron and Daniel friends?

## Research Questions

1. How much did people in America know about the Holocaust in 1946 when this story takes place? Why didn't they know more?
2. What was the game of stickball? How was it played? Why do you think the boys at the yeshiva played stickball, rather than baseball?
3. Where did the Yiddish language come from? Why did so many Jews in America speak it? Why would Aaron have spoken it? Why did he presume that Daniel knew Yiddish?
4. What was the Quiz Kids Show? What role did the radio play in the lives of Americans in the early and middle twentieth century? What other radio shows might the boys in the yeshiva have listened to?
5. What did sixth-grade boys learn in a yeshiva in the 1940s? What is the Gemara? How did the boys "learn" Gemara?
6. Moishe Oysher was a famous Yiddish movie star. Do you know of other Yiddish movie stars? Why would Yiddish movies and movie stars have been popular with the boys in the yeshiva and their parents?

The film *Greenhorn* is based on the book by the same name, written by Anna Olswanger. The following questions will be useful in discussing both the film and book.

### Language Arts

1. Re-tell the first chapter of *Greenhorn* from the point of view of Daniel. Try writing it in the first person.
2. To the other boys at the yeshiva, Daniel's box and its contents are a mystery. Do you know of another story that has a secret at the center of the plot? Write your own mystery with a secret at the center of the plot.
3. Write a letter to the author of *Greenhorn* and tell her what you liked best about the story. What was most disturbing to you? Why?
4. Write a book or film review of *Greenhorn* for your local newspaper or community blog. Or compare the book and film and show how they are the same and different.
5. Rewrite one chapter or scene in the form of a play. Who is the main character: Aaron or Daniel?
6. Write a story about two friends and how they help each other during a crisis.
7. Pretend you're being teased or bullied at school. Write a diary entry about how you feel, and what you plan to do about it.
8. *Greenhorn* is historical fiction based on a true story. What makes the story different from a work of nonfiction or contemporary fiction? Using the characters of Daniel and Aaron, write a story that takes place five years later. What has happened to them? What issues are they facing?
9. Aaron struggles with stuttering. Try to put yourself in his shoes. Pretend you have to give a speech in front of a crowd. How would you find help? Write a list of things you would do to help prepare yourself.
10. Write a poem about the box and its contents.

### Social Studies

1. *Greenhorn* takes place in 1946. List the major events of the year in Europe and the United States. How much did the boys at the yeshiva know about the restrictions on Jews, Kristallnacht, slave labor camps, death camps? Why do you think they didn't know everything that had happened to the European Jews?
2. Where did the Yiddish language come from? Why did so many Jews in America speak it in the 1940s? Why would Aaron have spoken it? Why did he presume Daniel knew Yiddish? Is there someone you know who speaks Yiddish? Interview the person and ask how he or she learned the language. Learn a few Yiddish words. Write an essay about why it's important for the Yiddish language to survive.
3. Research the true story of a Holocaust survivor. What does Daniel have in common with this person and other survivors? Write a nonfiction story about the survivor. What makes Daniel's story unique?
4. The author uses many details to reveal the time period of *Greenhorn*. Watch the program again. List the historic details. Make a list of similar details in your own life. How are they the same, or different?

### Fine Arts

1. Compare the illustrations in the book to the look of the film and discuss how they are the same or different. Using your own imagination, draw an illustration of Daniel and his box.
2. Paint or sketch a picture of your most valued possession. Is your possession a secret? Why or why not?
3. Make a collage of New York in 1946, using the historic details given in the book and film.
4. Listen to Yiddish music on *YouTube*. Describe the music in an essay or poem.

## Food and Cooking

1. The author frequently mentions food in *Greenhorn*. Why is food a way to understand a historic time period? Write a short story set in the present time. Use details about food in the setting, characters, and/or plot of the story.
2. Chocolate is a popular food in many cultures. Find references to chocolate in *Greenhorn*. Does chocolate represent good or bad moments in the story? Bake a chocolate dessert. Share with the class, and talk about how chocolate makes you feel.
3. Food can also be a metaphor for negative emotions. Find food references in the story that reflect difficulty or hardship. Compose a dinner menu with foods that are metaphors for feelings and emotions.
4. The story contains many references to candies that were popular in the 1940s. Look up the candies on the Web to find out more information. Design an advertisement for a 1940s-era candy.

## Sports and Games

1. Research the game of stickball. Learn the rules. Organize a stickball game with your class or friends.
2. The boys at the yeshiva know a lot about baseball. Why are baseball and other sports important during a time of war or hardship? Look up the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants. Compare the two teams' performances in 1946.
3. The boys at the yeshiva like to arm wrestle and play Chinese checkers. Why have the two games survived so many generations? Play one of these games with your friends.
4. The boys walk a lot in the city. Take a walk in your neighborhood, and take photographs or make sketches of what you see.
5. Make a mural of your neighborhood. How does where you live shape your life? Why is it important to walk in your neighborhood?

## Thematic Connections Questions for Group Discussion

### Belonging

1. Daniel is slow to belong to the yeshiva community. For a long time, he is an outsider. What are the reasons for this? Is it his fault, or the other boys'?
2. Does Aaron do enough to reach out to Daniel? Why or why not?
3. Does Aaron belong to the group, or is he also an outsider? How does his speech problem affect the way he is accepted or not accepted by his peers?
4. Why is it important to feel like you belong to a group or community?
5. Are there times when it is the right choice to remain an outsider?

### Bullying

1. What is the definition of bullying? Is there a difference between teasing and bullying?
2. Why do kids often make fun of others who are different?
3. Do the boys tease or bully Aaron about his stuttering? Should the rabbi have intervened?
4. Why do the boys badger Daniel about his box? Was there something he could have done differently to stop them?
5. What can you do to stop bullying behavior if you are the victim?

## Disabilities

1. Aaron stutters and is unable to speak clearly. How would you feel if you couldn't express your thoughts and feelings?
2. Many people, like Aaron, have special challenges or disabilities. They might have a hard time moving around, seeing, or keeping up in school. Why do we sometimes ignore or exclude people with disabilities? Have you ever done this?
3. People with disabilities often face fear, intolerance, and prejudice. How do you think people feel when they are treated differently or unfairly because of a disability?
4. If you had a disability, how would you like others to treat you?
5. One message in *Greenhorn* is that people with disabilities deserve the same respect and opportunities as everyone else. How do we make sure that people with disabilities are not pushed to the edge of society?
6. What can you do in your own life to change the world for people with disabilities?

## Friendship

1. How would you define the word “friend?” What qualities make a good friend?
2. Are Aaron and Daniel friends? How do the boys in the yeshiva show their friendship with each other?
3. Do you think Daniel wants a friend? Does he need one? Why does Daniel finally agree to go live with Aaron and his family?
4. Has a friend ever helped you in a crisis? Have you helped a friend in trouble?

## Self-Discovery

1. Before arriving at the yeshiva, Daniel took a long journey, both physical and emotional. Now he’s beginning a new journey—to adapt to his new country and to learn to live with his past. What does Daniel learn about himself in *Greenhorn*?
2. What discoveries do the other boys make about themselves?
3. What does Aaron learn through his relationship with Daniel?
4. Why is self-discovery so difficult sometimes? What have you discovered about yourself?
5. Which character grows the most in this story?

## Vocabulary

The story contains words and phrases that refer to life in the 1940s and to Judaism, including some that may be unfamiliar. Talk about the vocabulary and ask students to define and find a synonym for each word or phrase below.

dry goods store  
prophecy  
commentary  
mimic  
bending his ear  
pennant  
flinch  
in cahoots  
shul  
loose marbles

## Vocabulary (cont)

taunt  
pry  
quarantine  
sneer  
“end of days”  
monument

Have students use the above words in sentences.

## Web Resources

### Children of the Holocaust

[www.adl.org/children\\_holocaust/children\\_main1.asp](http://www.adl.org/children_holocaust/children_main1.asp)

### Daring to Resist

[www.pbs.org/daringtoresist/synopsis.htm](http://www.pbs.org/daringtoresist/synopsis.htm)

### Museum of Tolerance Online

[www.museumoftolerance.com/](http://www.museumoftolerance.com/)

### The Holocaust Explained

[www.theholocaustexplained.org/](http://www.theholocaustexplained.org/)

### United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

[www.ushmm.org/](http://www.ushmm.org/)

## About the Author

Anna Olswanger is also the author of *Shlemiel Crooks* (NewSouth Books), a Sydney Taylor Honor Book and PJ Library Book. In 2011 the Kaufman Center premiered a musical adaptation of *Shlemiel Crooks* at Merkin Concert Hall in New York City. Anna lives in the metropolitan New York area and is a literary agent.

## Acknowledgments

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