

**HOLOCAUST/GENOCIDE  
EDUCATION**

**QUESTIONS, THOUGHTS AND LESSONS  
FOR SONGS**

**BY**

**HANK FELLOWS**

**6,000,000**

**The Tree of Life**

**The Spirit of America**

**Halfway to Heaven  
(A 9/11 Tribute)**

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## Questions for Thought and Discussion on Selected Songs of Hank Fellows

1. Listen carefully to the lyrics of the song *6,000,000*. Assume that you have never studied or heard about the Holocaust. Make a list of facts that can be learned from the lyrics of the song. What is the scene or setting for the song? What may the flowers in the field symbolize?
2. The lyrics talk about the words the songwriter can “almost hear.” However, he also speaks of the words he can “never hear.” What is that he can never hear? Why is it so important that these words or deeds were never spoken? In talking about the roles that people, groups, and nations played in the Holocaust and in genocides, several roles in particular frequently are identified. They are the roles of victim, perpetrator, bystander, and rescuer. Which of these roles is associated with “words or deeds never spoken”? Why is this role so critical when events such as pogroms, genocides, acts of prejudice and discrimination, etc. occur? How can the person, group, or nation in this role influence the events that occur?
3. What is the mood or emotional tone of the song? Write a brief description of the feelings conveyed by the lyrics. Are the lyrics optimistic or pessimistic about the future? What words convey this view? Make a list of some of the events – local, national, and/or international – that support this view. What does the lyricist say would make his sorrow “almost bearable”?
4. Compare and contrast the emotional tone or mood of the three songs - *6,000,000*, *The Tree of Life*, and *The Spirit of America*. Make a chart that lists a song title at the top of each column. Under the column of each song, list words and terms that reflect the mood or emotional tone of the song. (For example: hope, despair, sorrow, joy, light-hearted, dejected, etc.) Do any of the songs convey more than one emotional tone? Explain how this is done.
5. The mood of *The Tree of Life* is quite different from that of *6,000,000*. What actions and behaviors are noted that give it this positive outlook? Which role – perpetrator, bystander, or rescuer – is making the difference? Compare and contrast what the songwriter sees and concludes in the *6,000,000* to that which is seen and concluded in *The Tree of Life*. Which conclusion do you believe to be most accurate? Explain why you agree with that viewpoint. What do you believe can – and should – be done to make the optimistic view of the world achievable?
6. What do the lyrics “then I know the world still is working” mean? Why is this belief so important to *The Tree of Life*? What evidence does the songwriter offer to show that *The Tree of Life* is still growing?
7. Using magazines, newspapers, etc. as resources, search for photos and images that reflect the information and emotional tone of the songs *6,000,000* and *The Tree of Life*. Utilize the photos and images to create a collage for each song. Mount related lines and word strips from each of the two songs on the collages. Create a mural or bulletin board in the classroom using the collages made by members of your class. Work as a group to create an appropriate title for the mural or bulletin board.
8. According to the songwriter, what is the *Spirit of America* that he feels in his heart? What was the purpose of the service and lost lives of the generations over the years? What are some of the images of diversity the songwriter has created with his lyrics?

**Specific Lesson Plans (Grades 6 – 12)**  
**The Song “6,000,000”**

**Exercise #1:** After the CD is played the class is asked what are the different ideas (themes) that the songwriter wrote about in this song? (List the themes on the chalkboard).

**Note:** These themes include the following ideas:

1. In the first verse: Contrasting the peaceful present time (mountain valleys and flowers) with the horrors of the past (barricades and barbed wire).
2. In the chorus: The echoes and shadows of the past are just out of reach of the present-day observer. Also, there is the sadness of remembering that the world did nothing to stop the Holocaust.
3. In the second verse: The Allied (US, British, French) leaders were not heroes to the Jewish people, because they did nothing to stop the Holocaust.
4. In the bridge and last chorus: The victims of the Holocaust died in vain, because the world seems to have learned nothing from their suffering and death. Also, the Holocaust was not an isolated example of genocide; there are new examples of genocide in our own time.

**Exercise #2:** Class, let's look at the lyric sheet for this song. The first verse of the song starts with the line “In the peaceful mountain valleys...”, and the second verse (after the chorus) starts with the line “I have seen old newsreel photos...”.

Write a possible alternate first or second verse for this song, using your own ideas. We will read these alternate versus (which are actually short poems) at our next session.

**Note:** Possible ideas for alternate verses:

1. Life in a concentration camp from a child's point of view.
2. The lost dreams of those in a concentration camp.
3. Does the world know what is happening to us?
4. Why do people have to hurt other people?
5. In my dreams, I am far away from here.
6. If I close my eyes, I can see my family around me.

**Exercise #3:** Class, let's look carefully at the words of the song's chorus, which begins with the line “I can almost hear the words they might have spoken...”.

1. Try to imagine the words that might have been spoken by the prisoners in a concentration camp.

Note: Possible words that might have been spoken:

- a. Do you have any bread to share with me?
- b. What village are you from?
- c. Does anyone in your barracks have medicine to share with me?
- d. Have you seen my brother – I have not seen him in 2 days.
- e. What do you think will happen to us?
- f. Do you know anyone who has escaped from here?
- g. Do you think we will ever be freed?
- h. Watch out for the tall guard – he will hit you for no reason at all.
- i. I am feeling sick – what will happen to me if I can't work tomorrow?
- j. I hear the sound of cannons – do you think the American Army is coming closer?

2. Why might some prisoners be standing "bent" and some standing "tall"?

Note: Possible reasons to be standing bent:

Tired, sick, old, without hope, hungry, trying to avoid being seen by the guards.

Note: Possible reasons to be standing tall:

Brave, defiant, still proud, still hopeful, trying to look healthy and not sick.

3. What sort of "prayers of love" might the prisoners be thinking or saying?

Note: Prayers of love for God, for protection of their family and friends, for their defeated country.

4. Would any of the class's answers to the above questions 1, 2 and 3 be different for the victims of modern genocide (such as Cambodia, Rwanda and Darfur) than for the victims of the Holocaust?

Note: Perhaps no difference in the answers – all victims of genocide face the same horrors.

Exercise #4: Hank Fellows wrote the song "6,000,000" while thinking about the Holocaust. Class, what changes, if any, would you need to make to the words of the song so that it could specifically apply to one of the modern examples of genocide?

Note: Perhaps not many changes would be needed. In the first verse, the reference to World War II would be omitted, and "the peaceful mountain valleys" might be replaced with references to "the jungles of Cambodia", or cities of Bosnia", or "remote villages of Rwanda or Darfur". In the second verse, "old newsreel photos" could be replaced with references to television broadcasts or internet news items, or other modern media.

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