

## **Passage to Freedom: The Sugihara Story, by Ken Mochizuki. New York: Lee and Low Books, 1997.**

**Story Summary:** This simple but heroic story tells the true-life events that shaped the lives of one Japanese family and thousands of Polish Jews. The book is told through the eyes of a five-year-old, Hiroki Sugihara. In 1940 Hiroki's father, Chiune Sugihara was the Japanese consul to Lithuania. With the spread of German control throughout Europe, Jews began to flee Poland in search of safety from the Nazis. One such opportunity was to seek refuge through a foreign government. When thousands of fleeing Jews came to Sugihara to request safe-transit visas, Sugihara had to make a decision; only issue a few visas, as was permitted by Japanese law, or go against direct orders and issue as many visas as possible. Hiroki recalls how difficult a choice it was for his father and how he consulted with the family to make the final decision. Sugihara's family understood the importance of their choice and despite the risks decided to support the issuing of the visas. The days of endless writing by the Japanese consul resulted in the saving of more than 10,000 Jewish refugees, the eventual imprisonment of the Sugihara family in a Soviet internment camp, and removal of Chiune from diplomatic service. Though written as a children's book, readers will find the illustrations touching and the historically accurate story moving. By reading this book, students can approach the concepts of the impact of political decisions on society, the ramifications of being a moral and ethical human being, and the cultural, political, and socioeconomic conflicts created from choosing to remain silent or not.

**Objectives:** Students should be able to:

- analyze the sacrifices made by Sugihara and his family;
- explain the effects of Sugihara's actions;
- understand the implications of choosing to remain silent or speak out against deplorable actions;
- identify the reasons Jews fled Poland;
- Identify the actions of others to recognize Sugihara.

### **Suggested Topics for Discussion:**

#### Introductory

- Did you ever have to do something you knew was right even though you knew it would result in bad consequences for you?
- Why were Jews fleeing from Poland?

#### Content Specific

- Why do you think Sugihara asked his family for their opinion?
- Why do you think the Sugihara family agreed to issue the visas?
- What was the result of Chiune Sugihara's actions? For the Polish Jews and for his own family?

#### General

- Discuss the possible reasons for Japan turning down Sugihara's request for the visas.
- Why would this be a good book to share with others?
- If small children know little about the events of the Holocaust, why would Hiroki choose to tell his father's story in this form? How might the story be different if it was told in another form of literature?
- Why is Sugihara considered "a Righteous Among Nations" at Yad Vashem?

**Suggested Activities:**

- Evaluate the process by which the “Righteous Among the Nations” is selected and research its recipients.
- Research Japan’s position regarding immigration prior to 1940.
- Create a diorama from a scene in the book.
- Research Yad Vashem in Israel.
- Create a compare and contrast diagram to illustrate the choices made by countries to aid victims of the Holocaust.
- Character talk – Learn as much about Chiune Sugihara as you can and then “become” him in a class discussion. Students can ask questions of him and learn more details about his story.
- Debate the actions of Sugihara. One side supports his choice to illegally issue visas while the other represents Japan actions. Prepare by researching the time period, the story of Sugihara and similar actions by other rescuers.

