

***Dear Cara: Letters From Otto Frank
Anne's Father Shares His Wisdom***

Discussion Questions

As a frame work for teaching this book, please be sure to visit www.ushmm.org for resources on topics to teach and guidelines for teaching the Holocaust.

Much of what we know about Anne Frank and her family comes from the Diary, which Anne kept throughout her time of hiding. After the Franks and the others hiding in the annex were taken away to the concentration camps, Miep Gies went upstairs and recovered papers and the red-checked diary written by Anne. She placed all in her desk waiting for Anne to return and retrieve them. As we now know, Anne never returned from the concentration camp. Anne, her mother and sister, and the others in hiding with them were all murdered.

Otto was liberated at Auschwitz on January 27, 1945 by the Russian army and returned to Amsterdam on June 3, 1945, knowing his wife had died. Around the end of July, 1945, he received word about Anne and Margot. At his darkest moment, Miep then presented him with Anne's writings. Since much of what Anne revealed in her Diary was her private thoughts, hopes and dreams Otto would learn a tremendous amount of information about his daughter through her writings. It is through this knowledge that he hoped to spread Anne's most important message: A world when one day humankind would be unified and the world would be at peace.

Cara's book presents a variety of themes, below are a just a few themes to guide the discussion with students. For more historical background, please visit www.ushmm.org and <http://www.annefrank.org/>.

Opening Discussion:

Positivity and making positive choices

Otto Frank chose to not turn in the person who revealed their whereabouts because he knew it would not bring back his family and other innocent people's lives would be destroyed. When asked if he knew who betrayed family he simply said, "It doesn't matter." What does this reveal about his character? How can you apply this "It doesn't matter" concept to your own life?

Otto shares that he hoped to publish to help people to gain a positive outlook on life. From what you know about the Diary, do you think it accomplishes this goal? Why or why not?

In his letter from **November 5, 1975**, Otto shares a negative effect of the Diary. He tells Cara that he had to stop in Frankfurt to talk to his lawyer about a book written about Hitler in which the author states the Diary of Anne Frank was a falsification. Holocaust denial is an extreme form of anti-Semitism. What actions does Otto Frank take to preserve his daughter's memory and to combat anti-Semitism?

When Cara finally meets Otto, we learn that Otto corresponded with people from all over the world. One individual named John was a devout Catholic convert. When he heard Otto's advice he became a

Catholic priest: “If you really want to honor Anne’s memory and the people that died, you do what Anne wanted so very much to do—do good for other people.” How can John honor Anne’s memory in his role as a priest?

Teenage vs. Adult Dilemmas

Cara describes listening to love songs on the radio and wanting to be in love. At what age does “puppy love” turn into true love? For Anne, is her love to Peter true love or “puppy love”? Do you think this feeling of love allowed her to manage being in hiding?

Re-read Cara’s description of her relationship with her sister. What is Otto’s response to the typical teenage dilemmas Cara faces with her sister? **Basel 6/19/59**

While in high school, Cara took the advice of Otto very seriously. Why do we tend to listen to people outside of our immediate family?

We learn about Cara’s dilemma of falling in love with someone of a different faith. What potential issues is Cara worried about in her relationship? Are these concerns reasonable? What issues could you predict in a relationship between two people of different faiths? Later in the chapter, Cara talks about conversion. What issues could arise if one of the people in the relationship is forced to convert to the other religion? Today the issues have become more encompassing involving same-sex marriages, marriages between people of different cultures and/or age ranges, etc. How do you feel about these?

Otto advises Cara regarding her relationship. She responds with a letter in which she expresses the concerns of the time. **May 15, 1966** “How do I maintain a constant degree of objectivity when all the world is groveling in cruelty, hypocrisy and selfishness?” Thinking about the time period in which the letter was written, what was the “cruelty, hypocrisy and selfishness”? Are any of these issues reflected in our times? How and why do you see this?

After discussing her concern with the direction society is heading, Cara shares the flyer she wrote for the Anne Frank Foundation in May of 1970. In the flyer, she writes: “What can we, young people, do to prevent such horrors and to create a livable world? These words were repeated over and over again in the diary of a now very famous young woman, Anne Frank. Today, the words are echoed by the young in loud and impassioned voices.” What is Cara hoping the youth of the 1970s will choose to do with their intelligence and talents? What can you do today to help alleviate the horrors—big or small—that you see or experience in your world?

Cara writes about the many racial issues taking place in the United States during the 1960s. Knowing what you know about the Civil Rights movement in the United States, how are Cara’s feelings similar to how you would feel about this time period. How do you feel about these issues today? Have attitudes changed or not? Why do you feel this way?

While visiting with Otto Frank, Cara is shown a photograph. Otto tells Cara that the photo is of playmates from when Otto was a small boy. He tells Cara, “And they all became—except that one right there—they all became Nazis.” Cara reflects that the reality is “Nazis were once babies, too.” What do you think of when you think about the perpetrators of the Holocaust? Do you imagine that they were once babies, teenagers, young adults? How about today’s criminals seen in this same light?

After showing Cara a replica of Anne's Diary, Cara reads passages and reflects on Anne's writing. She asks Otto if he knew that Anne was so creative and so sensitive. Otto responds, "I did not know that side of her. I would have expected her sister Margot, to have such depth of emotion, but Anne...she was temperamental, so private, so very funny. I did not know my child." Were you surprised when you read this passage? Do you think your parents or other close family members or friends know your true personality? Is there a side of you that others don't see or know about? What is different about this side of you and what would you like others to know if you decided to discover all that you really are inside?

Cara shares how her relationship with Otto shaped much of her life's decisions. She also relates her own dilemmas to those Anne shares in her diary. The biggest dilemma of which was the longing for a true father-daughter relationship. Cara writes that Otto was the grandfather she never had. Is there someone in your life who fills a specific role for you? Is there a person you consider one you've never had in your life or wished you had?

Cara quotes some of Anne's most famous words: "People really are good at heart" and "If I look up to the heavens, I think that it will all come right, and that peace and tranquility will return again." What do these two quotes tell us about Anne's personality and world view? Do you believe that people are really good at heart? Why or why not?

In addressing the hardship he has faced, Otto writes, "In this attitude it is a great support to have still family, especially my wife's daughter, her husband and their three little girls (living in England) and devoted friends." Do you find comfort during difficult times with family and friends? Describe how family and friends have comforted you.

Otto in his letter **June 16, 1968** writes "I remember to have once read a sentence, 'If the end of the world would be imminent, I still would plant a tree today.' When we lived in the secret annex we had the advice 'Fac et spera' which means 'work and hope'." What does this quote tell you about the focus of life in the annex? What does it tell you about Otto's view of the future and of the true meaning of hope? What does this quote mean to you?

After spending the day with Miep and visiting the secret annex, she states "Life was happier for Otto because of her (Fritzi) and they took great pleasure in our baby, Paul. They loved him very much. You will love Otto. He is a wonderful man." What do we learn about Otto and his wife, Fritzi?

Once Cara meets Otto and Fritzi, she is at peace. Upon meeting Cara, Fritzi opened up a cabinet and picked out two objects: a paperweight and a sculpture. Immediately, she tells Cara "You've forgotten? These are what you sent us many years ago. We keep them here." What is the significance of these two items? What does it tell us about the relationship between Cara, Otto and Fritzi?

Cara shares that her book would never have been written without the love and support that Otto gave to her over the course of their correspondence and relationship. How was Otto's love a reflection of what Anne wrote about people in her Diary?

The Value of Mentorship

Cara and Otto begin and develop a relationship through writing letters back and forth to one another. Re-read **April 21, 1959: Letter from Otto Frank**. How has letter writing and communication in general changed today?

In Otto's letter **Basel 7/1960**, it is clear that he has seriously taken on the role of being a mentor to Cara. What role do mentors play in shaping our direction professional, personally, and spiritually? Do you have a mentor? Are you a mentor to someone else?

Cara shares that she sent Otto a copy of the book *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. After reading the book, Otto writes "The bird's strife for perfection and self-fulfillment is described beautifully. It shows that it affords a strong character to live as an individual following one's own ideas. It is fascinating to read how Jonathan after having reached the climax of his capacities, learns that he has the duty to spread his message to his brethren." How does this exchange between Cara and Otto show us that the role of their relationship has changed from mentor to mentee?

After arriving in Amsterdam, Cara meets Miep Gies and is taken to the Anne Frank House (the museum which preserved the secret annex where Anne and her family hid throughout the war.) Miep takes Cara throughout the annex and cites examples from the Diary. How has Miep become a mentor to Cara during this experience?

While Cara is visiting with Otto and Fritz, she learns that they have been corresponding with people from all over the world. How does this information tie into our definition of a mentor? Why do you think Otto chose to be a mentor to so many?

Spiritual and Intellectual Growth

In her letter to Otto **February 2, 1965**, Cara writes, "The point that you brought up about Anne expressing the fact that although she said that she believed that there was good in all people, she was still young and full of youthful naiveté about life and people. She certainly must have realized that there existed some persons without any true, deep goodness from within. It is only now, at the age of 20, do I now put people off their pedestals and accept the world without rose colored glasses." What does it mean to "put people off their pedestals"? How does this quote show growth? Have you ever put someone on a pedestal only to have them fall down when you realized they were simply being human? How does that feel? How would you feel if someone put you on a pedestal?

In this chapter, Cara describes her experiences as a mother. She writes to Otto **August 25, 1973** "You have been so much a part of our lives—my distant, dear adopted grandparents...we find that we have to look for happiness, search for good reasons to be on this choking festering planet. We have to find hope for our children to build on in spite of the rising inflation, morbid violence, ecological wastelands, Watergate mentality...I just keep buying more plants to fill the house, take walks in the sunshine and groove in the smiles and laughter of my family." How does this passage from Cara's letter show she has grown spiritually as a mother and as an individual? What does she find most positive to help her find happiness in a world that isn't always a happy place to live?

Cara writes she "...is never as happy as when she is around animals, or reading or writing or talking or learning about them." It is clear in this letter that this experience is a truly positive one in her life. What is something that you enjoy doing? What activity or subject do you want to read and learn about continuously?

When Cara describes leaving home to begin her tremendous journey to meet Otto for the first time she says, "I had never felt so alone. What in the world had I done? What if Otto isn't anything I pictured him to be? What if he just shook my hand and we had a very reserved discussion over some more tea in some strange Swiss restaurant and then I was expected to leave? But where would I go? My family was thousands of miles away...and just when I was about to call the whole thing off, my Boston connection was announced in the nick of time." What fears does Cara express? Have you ever felt this way? When?

Closing Discussion:

Validation and Choices

The final concepts Cara leaves the reader to explore are the ideas of validation and that of the choices we have in our lives. What does it mean to be validated? Who validated Cara's life? How can we validate others? When did you remember first being validated for something that you did and how did that impact your life? Who validates your life today? How can you validate your own life after an accomplishment you're proud of without needing other's approval?

What is the choice that Otto made to change his perspective after the war and when he heard about his daughters' deaths? How did the choices he made impact the world? What kinds of choices do you have in your daily life to change your own perspective?

Miep chose never to read one word of Anne's Diary and all her other papers found strewn on the floor in the annex after the Nazis left. How did that not only validate Anne's privacy but save the Diary for the world?

When Cara talks about the power of one pebble being dropped into a pool of water and sending out ripples of positivity or negativity, what does she mean? How are you like that pebble?

Other thoughts to explore:

If you had to go into hiding immediately and could only take certain things with you in one small backpack what would they be? Why? What does that tell you about what is most valuable in your life?

What would you miss the most if you were in hiding without any outside form of communication available to you?

If you could have a discussion with any of the people hiding with or helping to hide Anne Frank who do you think you'd want to talk to the most and why? What would you talk about? What would you ask them?

How is the story of Anne Frank (persecution because of religion, political belief, race, sexual-orientation, etc.) being continued worldwide in other places all over the world right now? What progress/hope do you see in changing such cruelty, brutality, bullying etc.? What have you done in your daily life to possibly stop some form of persecution occurring? How has that changed your life?

Is there someone you would most want to communicate with right now if you could? Who is that person and why is this connection so important to you?