

Vita Activa: The Spirit of Hannah Arendt (2016)

Directed by Ada Ushpiz

Approved for English II

Summary of the Work:

Hannah Arendt is a German-American intellectual most famous for her *New Yorker* essays on the 1965 Israeli trial of Adolf Eichmann, a high-ranking S.S. official. These works were published as a book titled *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. This documentary follows Arendt's coverage of the trial, bringing in original footage from the trial, coverage of the holocaust, and interviews with and about the writer.

Rationale:

The term "banality of evil" (coined by Arendt) is a key concept in Holocaust and Genocide Studies. This documentary provides context for the term. It also addresses the reaction to Arendt's coverage of the trial, delving into problems with the concept of seeing evil, particularly on the scale of a genocide, as banal.

Professional Reviews:

- Scott, A. O. "An Anatomist of Evil with It's Well-Known Roots." *New York Times*. April 4, 2016. Section C, p. 1
- Rainer, Philip. "Vita Activa: The Spirit of Hannah Arendt Presents Naysayers and Supporters of the Philosopher." *The Christian Science Monitor*. 29 April 2016. <https://www.csmonitor.com/The-Culture/Movies/2016/0429/Vita-Activa-The-Spirit-of-Hannah-Arendt-presents-naysayers-and-supporters-of-the-philosopher>
- Turan, Kenneth. *Los Angeles Times*. 28 April 2016. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-vita-activa-review-20160429-column.html>

Awards/Distinctions:

- Master of Art Film Festival Best Documentary in Literature 2017
- Santa Barbara International Film Festival Best Documentary 2017

Readability:

Not Applicable (Film)

Common Core State Standards:

- SL 9-10.3
- SL 9-10.2

Notes on the Film

This is an excellent introduction to Arendt's philosophy for a high school audience. Additionally, it exposes students to primary source footage of a range of important historical events, including Eichmann's trial, World War II, and Nazi Concentration Camps.

Connection to the Curriculum

The film connects to Unit 4 of the Grade 10 Curriculum, which asks students to answer the essential question, "What motivates people to do bad things?" The film proposes several frameworks from which to evaluate this question and gives students some historical context for these approaches.

Additional Connections:

Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil by Hannah Arendt
The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness by Simon Wiesenthal
The Act of Killing dir. Joshua Oppenheimer