

Lesson 3 Nazi Germany

Important Information to Keep in Mind When Using This Lesson

- Studying the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany inherently requires students to reflect on the importance of preserving and protecting democratic values and institutions and to consider the role of a responsible citizen in that process. Too often, students have the impression that the Holocaust was inevitable. Whenever possible, help students recognize that the Holocaust took place because individuals, groups, and nations made decisions to act or not to act. Begin to set the stage for this understanding in this lesson. The Weimar Republic was a fragile democracy. This unstable democracy paved a path for the Nazi Party. However, it must be made absolutely clear to students that the German people did not have to vote for the Nazis in the 1932 election. This was a choice made by the German citizens.
- In this lesson, students learn about Nazi concentration camps. The Nazis built these camps to control and subdue any opposition from within. The Nazi camp system branched out to many kinds of camps and their story is the story of millions that Nazi Germany exploited. This is not, however, the story of the Holocaust and the Jewish fate under Nazi control, which will be approached in Lesson 5: *The "Final Solution."*
- When using the "Pyramid of Hate" to study the Holocaust, caution students not to think there was a methodical progression from one stage to the next, ultimately resulting in genocide. The atmosphere of the German state was chaotic and there was an experimental nature to the Nazis' actions. Not only is it important to keep that in mind when trying to understand Nazism, but also when trying to understand the Jewish and other victims' reactions to German policies.
- There have come to be two major historical approaches to the study of Nazi Germany. The first approach is known as the "intensionalistic approach." This approach perceives the history of the Jews as being pre-intended by Hitler and the Nazis from the beginning through the "Final Solution." The second approach, known as the "functionalist approach," views the Holocaust as a step-by-step process in which major turning points were made according to the situation at hand. This approach does not mean that antisemitism did not play a central role in the course of events. Today, many historians have made some kind of combination between these two approaches. Our obligation as educators is to allow these two approaches to be heard. Often the answers students will give will show an inclination toward one approach or the other, and the teachers' role is to regard those answers in the framework of that combined historiography framework.

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STUDENT HANDOUT - The Weimar Republic and the Rise of the Nazi Party

The Weimar Republic refers to the German government that was formed at Weimar, a town in the eastern part of the country, in February 1919, after Germany's defeat in World War I. The new republic emerged following a revolution, resulting in the abdication of Wilhelm II in November 1918. The Weimar Republic's constitution safeguarded basic democratic human rights, such as freedom of speech and religion and even equality for women, including their right to vote in public elections (which had not yet been given to French and English women).



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Munich, Germany
The Putsch: Nazi Party members arresting city councilmen

The Republic was often perceived by Germans as having been forced upon them by the victors of World War I. Many German citizens remained deeply sympathetic to the Kaiser who was forced to resign, and to the leadership of the Second Reich, who had not signed the Treaty of Versailles. The treaty offended many sectors of the German nation mainly because of the following conditions:

- A. Germany had to admit to being guilty for the war and for all the damage it had caused.
- B. Germany had to pay reparations to compensate the victorious powers.
- C. Germany was forced to give up 13 percent of its territory and six million of its inhabitants to France, Belgium, and Poland.
- D. Germany was severely restricted in rebuilding and establishing its military force.

As a result of these conditions and the need to cope with the resentment it created in Germany, the “stabbed in the back” myth arose. According to this myth, Germany had not been defeated on the battlefield but rather had been betrayed by the Communists, Socialists, and Jews.

The Weimar Republic had to contend with many economic, political, and social problems. The German soldiers who came back from the war faced high unemployment. Many Germans were simply starving. Germany's heavy debts made it very difficult for the economy to recover and for new jobs to be created.

Among other ways, the political crisis was expressed in frequent elections: 10 in 14 years. Three major revolution attempts also occurred in the first years of the Republic. In 1919, the Communists tried to overthrow the democratic republic, and in 1920 and 1923, there were attempts by right-wing nationalists, including Adolf Hitler, to seize power.

In 1922, Foreign Minister Walter Rathenau, who was a Jew and strongly identified with the Weimar Republic, was assassinated.

In 1930, the New York stock market crash deeply affected Germany — German banks collapsed and inflation rose. Six million Germans were unemployed in 1932, and the country, like most other nations, entered a serious and drawn-out economic depression.

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STUDENT HANDOUT - The Weimar Republic and the Rise of the Nazi Party

In light of this situation, many Germans believed that the Nazis were the only ones who could solve Germany's problems and stop the "Communist menace." German president Paul von Hindenburg, who had opposed offering Hitler the leadership of Germany, was persuaded in January 1933 to appoint Adolf Hitler, the leader of the largest party in the Reichstag (the German Parliament), as chancellor of Germany. Four weeks later, the German Parliament building, the Reichstag, was set on fire. Hitler blamed the fire on the Communists and used the fire as an excuse to pass new laws "for the protection of the German people." All newspapers, magazines, books, and radio stations came under control of the Nazis. This was the start of the Nazi dictatorship.

Selections from "The Program of the National-Socialist (Nazi) German Workers Party"

1. We demand the uniting of all Germans within one Greater Germany, on the basis of the right to self-determination of nations.
2. We demand equal rights for the German people (*Volk*) with respect to other nations, and the annulment of the peace treaty of Versailles and St. Germain.
3. We demand land and soil (Colonies) to feed our People and settle our excess population.
4. Only Nationals (*Volksgenossen*) can be Citizens of the State. Only persons of German blood can be Nationals, regardless of religious affiliation. No Jew can therefore be a German National.
5. Any person who is not a Citizen will be able to live in Germany only as a guest and must be subject to legislation for Aliens.
6. Only a Citizen is entitled to decide the leadership and laws of the State. We therefore demand that only Citizens may hold public office, regardless of whether it is a national, state or local office.
7. We demand that the State make it its duty to provide opportunities of employment first of all for its own Citizens. If it is not possible to maintain the entire population of the State, then foreign nationals (non-Citizens) are to be expelled from the Reich.
8. Any further immigration of non-Germans is to be prevented. We demand that all non-Germans who entered Germany after August 2, 1914, be forced to leave the Reich without delay.
9. We demand the nationalization of all enterprises (already) converted into corporations (trusts).
10. We demand profit-sharing in large enterprises.
11. We demand the large-scale development of old-age pension schemes.
12. We demand the creation and maintenance of a sound middle class; the immediate communalization of the large department stores, which are to be leased at low rates to small tradesmen. We demand the most careful consideration for the owners of small businesses in orders placed by national, state, or community authorities.

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STUDENT HANDOUT – The Weimar Republic and the Rise of the Nazi Party

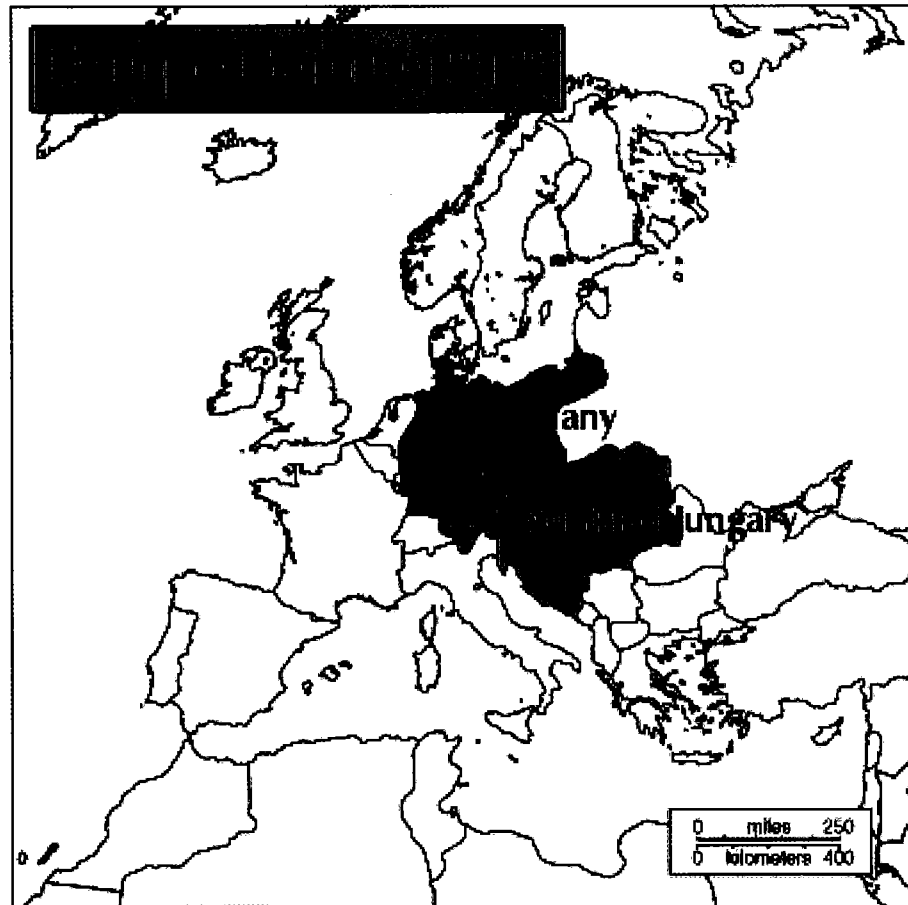
13. We demand ruthless battle against those who harm the common good by their activities. Persons committing base crimes against the People, usurers, profiteers, etc., are to be punished by death without regard to religion or race.
14. We demand the replacement of Roman Law, which serves a materialistic World Order, by German Law.
15. The State must raise the level of national health by means of mother-and-child care, the banning of juvenile labor, achievements of physical fitness through legislation for compulsory gymnastics and sports, and maximum support for all organizations providing physical training for young people.
16. We demand the abolition of hireling troops and the creation of a national army.
17. We demand laws to fight against *deliberate* political lies and their dissemination by the press. In order to make it possible to create a German press we demand:
 - a) All editors and editorial employees of newspapers appearing in the German language must be German by race;
 - b) Non-German newspapers require express permission from the State for their publication. They may not be printed in the German language;
 - c) Any financial participation in a German newspaper or influence on such a paper is to be forbidden by law to non-Germans and the penalty for any breach of this law will be the closing of the newspaper in question, as well as the immediate expulsion from the Reich of the non-Germans involved.
 - d) Newspapers which violate the public interest are to be banned.
18. We demand laws against trends in art and literature which have a destructive effect on our national life, and the suppression of performances that offend against the above requirements.
19. To carry out all the above we demand:
 - The creation of a strong central authority in the Reich.
 - Unquestioned authority by the political central Parliament over the entire Reich and over its organizations in general.
 - The establishment of trade and professional organizations to enforce the Reich's basic laws in the individual states.

The Party leadership promises to take an uncompromising stand, at the cost of their own lives if need be, on the enforcement of the above points.

Munich, February 24, 1920.

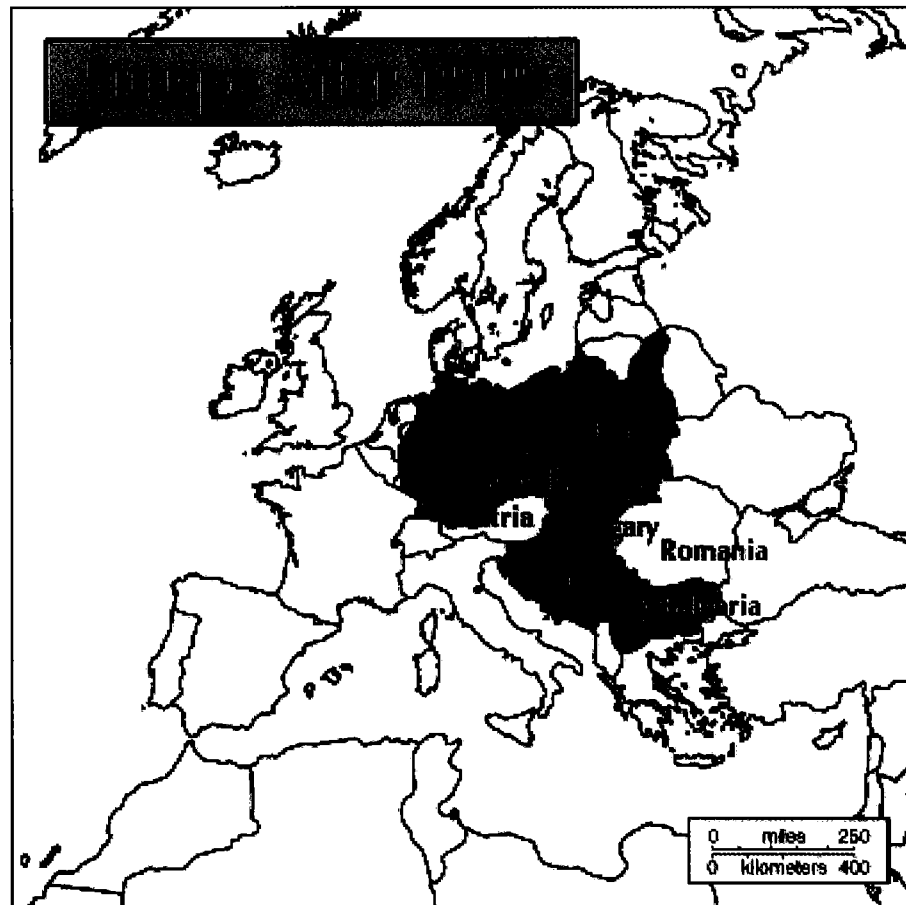
Source: *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland and the Soviet Union* by Yitzhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman, Abraham Margalio (Eds.). Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1981, pp. 15–18. All rights reserved.

EUROPE BEFORE 1919 AND THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES



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STUDENT HANDOUT – What Rights Are Most Important to Me?

Directions: Rank the following in order of importance to you, with #1 being most important and #9 being least important.

- _____ Date/Marry whomever you choose?
- _____ Go to a public school close to home?
- _____ Live in a neighborhood of your choice?
- _____ Swim and play in a public swimming pool or park?
- _____ Eat what you want, according to taste, culture, and religious custom?
- _____ Be able to own a pet?
- _____ Leave your house whenever you choose?
- _____ Shop at stores and businesses of your choosing?
- _____ Vote?

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STUDENT HANDOUT – Nazi Germany and Anti-Jewish Policy



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Germany, An SA soldier near a Jewish owned store on the day of the boycott

The Nazi Party rose to power with an antisemitic racial ideology. However, the anti-Jewish campaign was not conducted according to a blueprint, rather it evolved. Before the outbreak of the war, political and economic factors, as well as public opinion both inside and outside Germany influenced the evolution of Nazi anti-Jewish laws and measures.

The main purpose of the anti-Jewish policy between 1933 and 1939 according to the racial theory was to isolate German Jewry from German society. These laws sought to uproot and dispossess Jews economically from daily life in Germany and encourage them to leave their homeland. These laws limited and humiliated Jews on a daily basis.

Anti-Jewish Policy (1933–1939) Divided Into Three Periods

- The first period, 1933–1934, included boycotts against Jews and the Civil Service Law that dismissed Jews from government jobs.
- The second period began in the spring of 1935 and was marked by the establishment of the racially based Nuremberg Laws. Jews were no longer German citizens.
- The third period from 1937–1939 was a time of increasing anti-Jewish violence, confiscation of Jewish property, and the forbidding of Jewish ownership of business concerns. The turning point of this period was the *Kristallnacht Pogrom*.

Anti-Jewish Policy by Year

1933

- All non-“Aryans” were dismissed from holding government jobs. This regulation applied to public school teachers, university professors, doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc. — all Jews who held government positions of any kind. Non-“Aryans” were defined as Jews, the children of Jews, and the grandchildren of Jews.
- A general boycott of all Jewish-owned businesses was proclaimed. Officially it lasted for one day, but actually it continued for much longer in many localities.
- Membership in the Reich Chamber of Culture was prohibited. This meant that Jews could not hold jobs in radio, in the theaters, or sell paintings or sculptures.
- Mass bonfires were ignited throughout Germany. Books written by Jews and anti-Nazis were burned.

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STUDENT HANDOUT - Nazi Germany and Anti-Jewish Policy

- Jews were prohibited from owning land.
- Jewish lawyers and judges were barred from their professions.
- Jewish doctors were barred from treating “Aryan” patients.
- Jews were prohibited from producing kosher meat.

1935

- The Reichstag adopted the Nuremberg Laws, which declared that Jews could no longer be citizens of Germany.
- Marriage and intimate relations between Jews and those of “Aryan” blood were declared criminal acts.
- German females under the age of 45 were prohibited from being employed by Jews.
- Jews were forbidden to wave the Reich’s flag or to display the flag’s colors.

1936

- Hitler temporarily relaxed the antisemitic propaganda and other measures against Jews in order to avoid criticism by foreign visitors attending the summer Olympic Games in Berlin.

1937

- “Aryanization,” the confiscation of Jewish businesses and property, intensified greatly.

1938

- The Reich Supreme Court declared that being a Jew was cause for dismissal from a job.
- The Nuremberg Laws were extended to Austria after the *Anschluss*, the annexation of Austria.
- All Jews had to add the names “Israel” and “Sarah” to their identification papers, and passports were marked with the red letter J, for *Jude* (Jew).
- Jews could no longer attend plays and concerts, own phones, or have drivers’ licenses, car registrations, etc.
- *Kristallnacht Pogrom* (Night of Broken Glass): approximately 1,400 synagogues were burned and 7,000 stores owned by Jews and hundreds of homes were damaged and looted.
- 30,000 Jews, most of them leaders in the Jewish communities, were sent to concentration camps. Many were offered the opportunity to leave the camps provided they could prove they had arranged their emigration from Germany.
- Very few Jewish children remained in German schools.
- All Jewish shops were ordered to close by December 31, 1938.
- Jews had to abide by curfews.

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STUDENT HANDOUT - Nazi Germany and Anti-Jewish Policy

Between 1933 and 1938, nearly 150,000 Jews managed to leave Nazi Germany. This number represented approximately 30 percent of the total Jewish population. In order for Jews to legally emigrate from Germany, they were required to have both German passports and visas permitting them to enter another country. Most countries however, had quotas that limited the number of immigrants allowed to enter and required that those entering were able to support themselves. Very few countries admitted German-Jewish refugees, and after the *Kristallnacht Pogrom*, it became extremely difficult for Jews to leave Germany. Most of the Jews who fled Germany went to other European countries that were occupied by the Nazis months or a few years later.

PHOTOGRAPH FROM *KRISTALLNACHT* POGROM



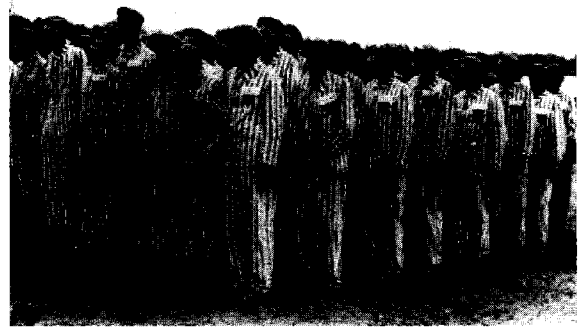
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A crowd watches as a synagogue burns during the *Kristallnacht* Pogrom, Graz, Austria, November 9/10, 1938.

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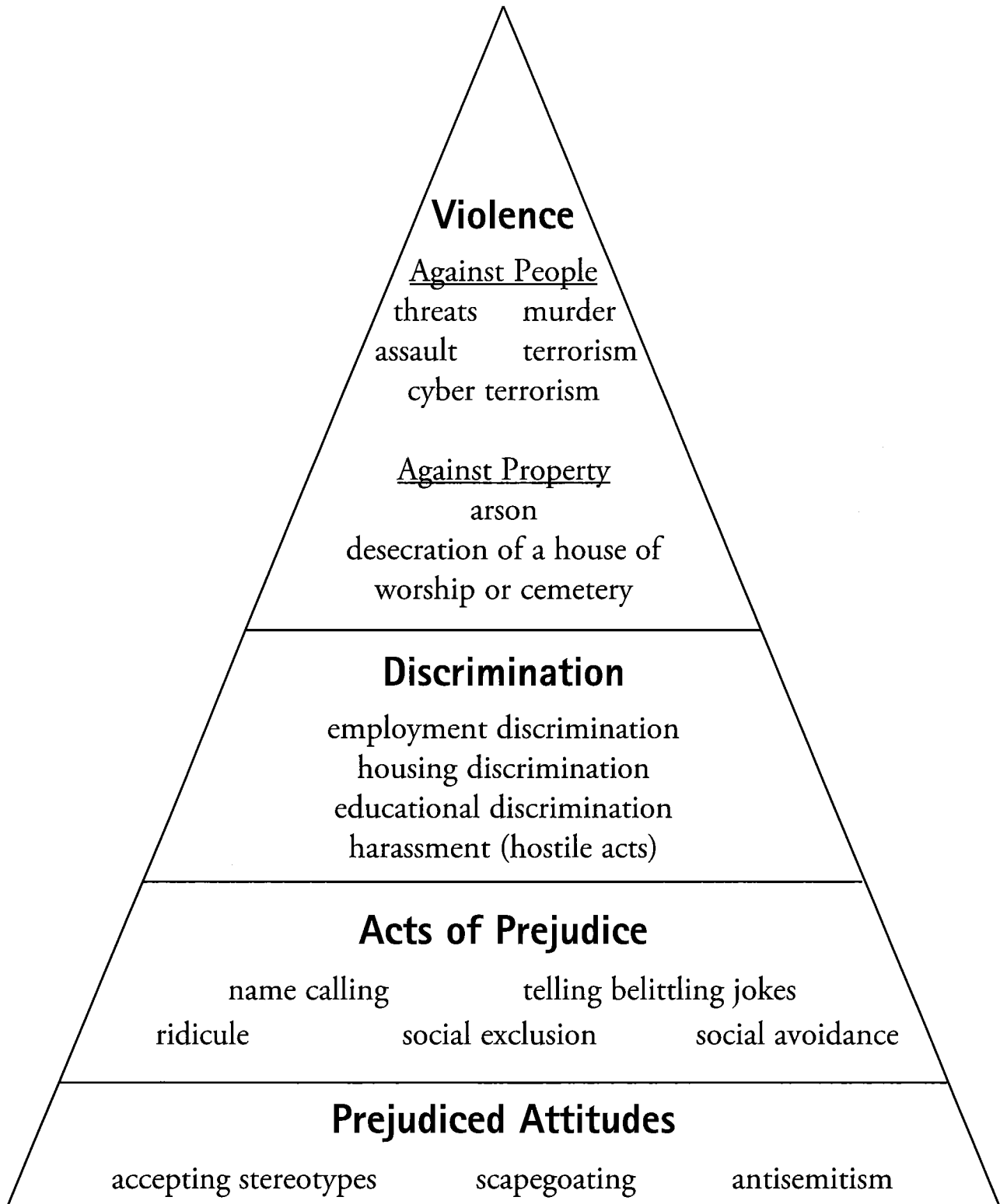
STUDENT HANDOUT – Concentration Camps

The first concentration camps were established in Nazi Germany after Hitler came to power in 1933. In the first few years of the regime, the concentration camps were instruments of terror, control, and punishment, used for the incarceration of political dissidents; later, people defined by the Nazis as “asocial elements” — including the homeless, beggars, Sinti-Roma, and hardened criminals — were also taken there. Beginning in the summer of 1938, many Jews were held in these camps. The number of incarcerated Jews in Germany reached its peak following the *Kristallnacht Pogrom*. After the war broke out, local resistance activists, civilians whom the Germans wanted to punish, and tens of thousands of Jews were sent to them. Hundreds of thousands of prisoners were killed in concentration camps throughout Europe as a result of inhumane living conditions, brutal punishment, and slave labor, which was a form of ongoing abuse.



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PYRAMID OF HATE



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Lesson 4 The Ghettos

Important Information to Keep in Mind When Using This Lesson

- The Nazis' goal when closing Jews in ghettos was not only to deprive them of their human rights, but to deprive them of their human dignity. The ghetto period is often referred to as the "bypass death," for more than 80,000 Jews died in the Warsaw ghetto alone. Many people often mistakenly assume that the Nazis issued directives to establish ghettos in the Polish occupation zone in September 1939 in an effort to confine Jews prior to deporting them to extermination camps. However, during this transitional phase, a detailed blueprint for carrying out mass murder did not yet exist, but rather there was a wish to solve the so-called "Jewish problem" in some rapid and radical way. Only in 1941, with the invasion of the Soviet Union, did the last phase of the Nazis' plan begin — a plan in which they sought to murder every single Jew within their reach.
- This lesson uses the Lodz ghetto as a way to tell a larger story. While each ghetto was unique, this lesson uses Lodz as a prism to try and understand the ghettos in general and something of the mentality of the people who would confine human beings in such an inhumane manner. What happened in Lodz and the decisions made by people who established the ghetto shed light on larger decisions that were being made elsewhere, even though the Lodz ghetto had its own uniqueness and special historical circumstances.
- Students often ask why Jews did not escape the ghettos. It is important for students to remember that the Holocaust created a world of choiceless choices. While we know the ultimate fate of Jews during the Holocaust, Jews did not know that they would be sent to extermination camps — especially when the Germans continuously employed many different means to camouflage their actions. In addition, due to conditions in the ghettos, Jews were malnourished and ill. They did not have the strength to carry themselves around — let alone rebel or design escape routes. They had lost their possessions, and many Jews felt a strong responsibility to take care of family members living with them, especially young children and elderly parents. And, even if there was a way to escape, there was no place to go. Non-Jews living outside the ghetto walls were not willing to help them, and many times hiding Jews was punishable by death. It is also important to keep in mind that even prior to the beginning of World War II, Jews who attempted to emigrate from Europe had almost nowhere to turn due to immigration quotas and strict policies toward refugees. Overall, most Jews in Europe were trapped at that time.
- Although empathetic activities such as simulations can be very effective techniques for interesting young people in history by highlighting human experience and responses to events in the past, great care needs to be taken in selecting such activities when approaching a subject as sensitive and complex as the Holocaust. Some young people might over-identify with the events of the Holocaust, be excited by the power and even the "glamour" of the Nazis, or demonstrate a morbid fascination for the suffering of the victims. Herein lies the danger of creative writing or role-play exercises that encourage students to imagine they were directly involved in the Holocaust. It may be useful, however, for students to take on the role of someone from a neutral country, responding to events: a journalist writing an article for a newspaper about the persecution of Jews; a concerned citizen writing to his or her political representative; or a campaigner trying to mobilize public opinion. Such activities can be good motivators and can also highlight possible courses of action that students can take about events that concern them in the world today.

Lesson 4 The Ghettos

STUDENT HANDOUT – The Ghettos



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Przemysl, Poland, October 1939
Jews Rounded Up for Forced Labor

In September 1939, the Germans invaded Poland. Poland lost its independence, and its citizens were subjected to severe oppression. Schools were closed, all political activity was banned, and many members of the Polish elite, intellectuals, political leaders, and clerics, were sent to concentration camps or murdered immediately. Jews were subjected to violence, humiliation, dispossession, and arbitrary kidnappings for forced labor by German soldiers who abused Jews in the streets, paying special attention to religious Jews. Many thousands of Poles and Jews were murdered in the first months of the occupation.

On September 21, 1939, just after the German conquest of Poland, Reinhard Heydrich, Nazi head of the SIPO (security police) and SD (security service) issued an order to the commanders in occupied Poland. The first, immediate stage called for several practical measures, including deporting Jews from western and central Poland and concentrating them in the vicinity of railroad junctions and forming *Judenrate* (councils of elders or Jewish councils) that would be responsible for these actions.

Guided by ideological principles and striving to establish a “New Order” in Europe based mainly on racial doctrine, Nazi Germany attempted to separate Jews from the rest of the population by establishing ghettos. A ghetto was a section of the city in which Jews were confined and restricted to live behind

walls, fences, or barbed wire. The Germans wanted to isolate, humiliate, and completely disconnect Jews from everyday life. In addition, the ghettos became places for concentrating people in preparation for a future deportation that was supposed to take place as part of a grandiose plan for a population transfer. But first and foremost, ghettoization was another step in escalating anti-Jewish policy. Clearly, ghettos were a means to an end and not an end in and of themselves. Except for a Jewish living area in Amsterdam, the Germans did not establish ghettos in Western Europe, but rather found other methods to isolate Jews. The primary reason for this was rooted in Nazi ideology, which considered a ghetto a contaminated area and therefore was not appropriate in Western European towns where the majority of the population was considered “higher” races.

Very little time was generally allotted for moving into the ghettos. Jewish families who in some cases had lived in their homes for decades had to gather their belongings and find shelter in a fenced-off area that was extremely crowded. Motor vehicles were

SECRET

Berlin: September 21, 1939

To: Chiefs of all Einsatzgruppen of the Security Police
Subject: Jewish question in the occupied territory

I refer to the conference held in Berlin today....

For the time being, the first step toward the final goal is the concentration of the Jews from the countryside into the larger cities. This is to be carried out with all speed....

In each Jewish community a council of Jewish Elders is to be set up.... The councils of Elders are to be informed of the dates and deadlines.... They are then to be made personally responsible for the departure of the Jews from the countryside.... For general reasons of security, the concentration of Jews in the cities will probably necessitate orders altogether barring Jews from certain sections of the cities, or, for example, forbidding them to leave the ghetto....

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STUDENT HANDOUT - The Ghettos

not available, and even horse-drawn carts were rare; therefore, many people moved their belongings in baby carriages or on their backs. Jews had to quickly decide what to take with them to the ghetto although they had no information about how long they would have to stay or what life would be like there.

In the ghettos, the *Judenrate* were held fully responsible for the Jews' compliance with German policy. Members of the *Judenrate* were always exposed to German abuse and some were murdered for not obeying German orders. The *Judenrate* were required to act as municipal authorities and to provide a full range of services that Jewish communities had not provided in the past. The *Judenrate* were not only responsible for re-establishing systems of education, culture, and religious services in the ghettos and maintaining health and welfare institutions; they also had to arrange for garbage removal and postal services. Of course, the German authorities did not allocate resources for these purposes, and this put the *Judenrate* in an extremely difficult situation. They had to provide community services to a needy population without any infrastructure or financial resources.

Conditions in the ghettos were influenced by many factors, among them whether the ghetto was hermetically sealed or was open to some extent; the size of the ghetto and its location, since ghettos in the countryside often had access to more food; and the personality of the Nazis who were in charge of the ghetto. In many ghettos, a large number of Jews died of starvation or various epidemics that raged due to the harsh conditions.

In the shadow of chaos and terror, Jews attempted to retain their humanity and operate relief organizations just as they had done before World War II broke out. Despite the deteriorating conditions and extreme deprivation, a refugee aid network was established. For example, children gathered in special kitchens, where, in addition to receiving food, they were kept busy with educational activities.

Frequently, relief center staff recruited unemployed but highly educated people to work with youth in the ghetto. In most cases, the relief centers had to figure out how best to distribute their limited resources, which raised many moral dilemmas.

The Jewish family unit underwent a major change during the ghetto period. The pre-war situation, in which the father of the family, in most cases, had been the main breadwinner, was altered unrecognizably. In some cases, the father had died at the beginning of the occupation or had been sent to a labor camp in the months that followed. As a result, the women and children had to share in the financial burden and they often did jobs that were beyond their strength and age.

Education was considered a luxury in the ghettos, as many young people had to help support the family and could not afford to sit in class. In addition to the underground educational system, the *Judenrate* set up vocational school systems in ghettos where this was permitted. The idea was to enlarge the ghetto labor force and to give youth a practical means of earning a living during the war.



Warsaw Ghetto, Poland, September 19, 1941
Two Starving Women on a Rickshaw

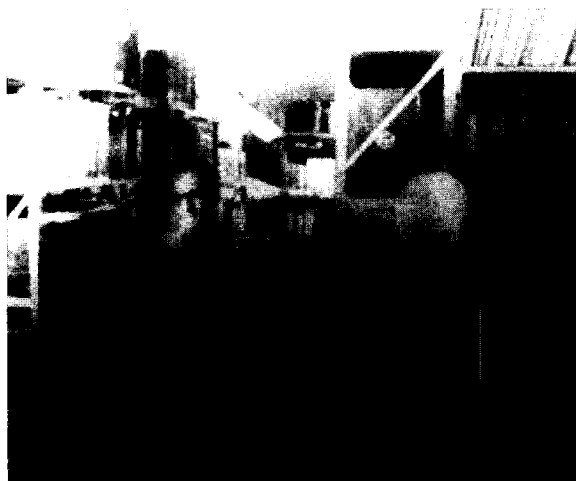
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STUDENT HANDOUT – The Ghettos

Cultural activity took place within the ghettos and the extent varied from ghetto to ghetto. Some of the activities were clandestine, held at the initiative of underground organizations; they included literary evenings, gatherings to mark the anniversary of a Jewish artist, and concerts. Jewish authors, directors, and poets produced works in the ghettos, and there were secret libraries. Some of the cultural activities were based on works written before the war; others drew on the situation in the ghetto. The cultural activities helped people temporarily forget the worries of ghetto life and were a source of encouragement. However, there was also criticism; some people argued that these events were inappropriate in a place where so many people were dying every day.

The vast majority of Jews deported from the ghettos were murdered in the extermination camps; only a small percentage were taken to concentration and

forced labor camps in the late stage of the war. By the end of the war when Europe was liberated, except in Budapest, not a single ghetto, neither in its entirety, nor in part, remained.



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Theresienstadt, Czechoslovakia
The Library

Lesson 4 The Ghettos

STUDENT HANDOUT - The Lodz Ghetto

Lodz is the second largest city in Poland, known for its textile industry. Before the war, Jews played an influential role in this industry. Lodz was occupied by the German army (Wehrmacht) in September 1939. As part of western Poland, Lodz was annexed to the Reich, and named Litzmannstadt for the German general who had conquered the city in World War I. The Nazis reserved this part of Poland for settlement by Germans, most of whom had lived for generations in the Baltic countries. By the end of 1939, tens of thousands of Jews and Poles had been deported from the area, and Germans were settled there. However, for administrative and logistical reasons, population transfers were halted at the beginning of 1940.

Earlier than most Jewish communities in Poland, the Jews of Lodz suffered from exceptionally brutal persecution, eviction from their homes, and deportation. As early as May 1940, the ghetto was established, and 164,000 Jews were incarcerated in it. The Lodz ghetto was one of the first ghettos to be established and it became the second largest ghetto in the occupied Polish territories. The Lodz ghetto was completely sealed off and detached from the outside world. Since many of the residents of Lodz were of German origin and identified with Germany and the Nazis, Jews there faced a hostile environment. The hostility of their neighbors and the strict closure of the ghetto made it almost impossible to smuggle food into the ghetto, which compelled the Jews to live on the meager ration of food allotted to them by the Germans.

The *Judenrat* in Lodz was led by Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski. Before the war, Rumkowski had been a junior member of the Jewish community administration in Lodz. Like many other Jewish leaders during the Holocaust, Rumkowski found himself in an impossible position between obeying German orders and trying to help Jews grapple with the hardships of ghetto existence. The German authorities created this tension on purpose, hoping the anger and the frustration of the local Jewish population would be spent on Jewish leaders and not

the German authorities.

It appears that Rumkowski often displayed delusions of grandeur and his behavior bordered on dictatorial since he perceived himself to be the only one who could successfully navigate the Lodz Jewish community through troubled times. Although he believed that he could be the savior of the ghetto, in the end, he too was murdered along with most of Lodz Jewry.

The large number of Jews in the ghetto, the total isolation in a hostile environment, the strict supervision imposed by the Germans, the acute hunger, and the difficulties in obtaining the most basic resources necessary to live made it very difficult to survive in the Lodz ghetto. The struggle for survival was a daily, up-hill battle.

Rumkowski thought that the only possible way to keep people alive in the ghetto was to open factories and workshops so that the German authorities would consider the Jews valuable and allow them to live.

**By the end of 1942, some
204,800 people had passed
through the Lodz ghetto.**

This policy came to be known as “salvation through labor.” Jews forced to work in these factories and workshops manufactured textile products for the Germans. Conditions in the labor workshops were harsh. The factory floors were small and congested, lighting and ventilation were poor, and most work was done by hand for lack of appropriate machinery. Production quotas were set beyond the workers’ abilities. Workers were “remunerated” for their efforts with a portion of soup each day and a slice of bread. Despite Rumkowski’s efforts to obtain increased food rations from the Germans, the daily portions did not suffice, and more than 43,000 Jews starved to death.

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In the first years of the ghetto's existence, the chairman of the *Judenrat* ran an education system with the enrollment of 15,000 children, from preschool to high school; even matriculation exams were given in the ghetto. Regular studies ceased in October 1941. Once children were enrolled in the workshops (to protect them from being deported to death), some managed to continue studying at their place of work. Over 7,000 young people continued to study in this way. In the ghetto, there were also some cultural and religious activities, which were often felt to be no more than a sad remainder of what life had been.

In 1942, the first *Aktion* against the Jews of Lodz took place. Most of the people who were deported from the ghetto were very young Jewish children, the elderly, and the sick. They were taken to the Chelmno extermination camp where they were murdered in gas vans.

The ghetto continued to exist for two more years, and work was the focal point of ghetto life. The populace was desperately hungry and food could be obtained only through work. The Lodz ghetto was the last remaining ghetto in Poland, and it was only "liquidated" in August 1944. During the four years of its existence, Jews in Lodz attempted, despite the severe hardships, to preserve some of their previous ways of life and imbue their daily lives in the arbitrary and hopeless ghetto reality with meaning.



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Children Celebrating Purim in the Ghetto,
Lodz, Poland

In the summer of 1944, an unknown Jew was sent from the Lodz ghetto to Auschwitz. Upon his arrival at the camp, he entrusted his diary, which he carried on his last journey, to a member of the Sonderkommando, Zalman Loewenthal. Loewenthal hid the diary, but also felt a historical obligation to add some of his own comments in the margins. The writer of the diary blamed Rumkowski for the catastrophe that had befallen the Jews of Lodz, and Loewenthal added in his own hand that the accusatory finger should be pointed at the Germans — they were the ones who were truly responsible for the murder of the Jews. The writer of the diary, Zalman Loewenthal, and Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski both perished in Auschwitz.

Lesson 4 **The Ghettos**

STUDENT HANDOUT - Photograph from the Lodz Ghetto



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Lesson 4 **The Ghettos**

STUDENT HANDOUT – Poems by Children in the Lodz Ghetto

This poem was written by an unknown girl who was left alone in the Lodz ghetto with her brother. Their fate is unknown, but it must be assumed that both brother and sister perished in the Holocaust.

Childhood, precious days,

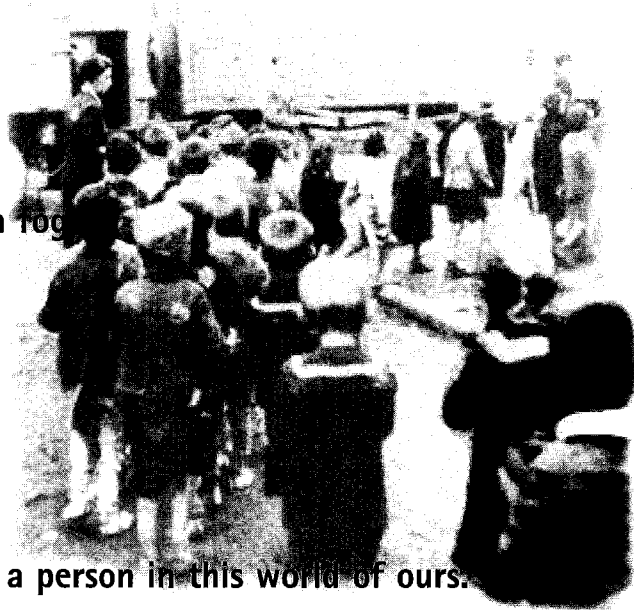
Alas, how few they were!

I will remember them as if in a fog

Only in dreams at night can I

Identify days long gone.

Brief, brief is the happiness of a person in this world of ours.



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Lesson 4 **The Ghettos**

STUDENT HANDOUT - Poems by Children in the Lodz Ghetto

This poem was written by Avraham Koplowicz, a child in the Lodz ghetto. Avraham was born in 1930. In the ghetto he worked in a shoemaker's workshop. He was taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau with his mother and father in 1944. Avraham was murdered in Auschwitz at the age of fourteen.

When I grow up and reach the age of 20

I'll set out to see the enchanting world.

I'll take a seat in a bird with a motor;

I'll rise and soar high into space.

I'll fly, sail, hover

Over the lonely faraway world.

I'll soar over rivers and oceans

Skyward shall I ascend and blossom,

A cloud my sister, the wind my brother.

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Lesson 4 The Ghettos

STUDENT HANDOUT - Excerpts from *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak*

BACKGROUND

In early 1940, in the city of Łódź, Poland, Gentiles were evicted by the German occupiers from the slum area of the Baluty district and forced to make way for the hundreds of thousands of Jews who were soon concentrated into the district from other parts of the city, elsewhere in Poland, and the rest of conquered Europe. The Germans sealed off the area's perimeter and renamed it "Getto Litzmannstadt" ("Łódź ghetto"). Among those forced to relocate there was the local lower middle class family of Majlech and Sara Sierakowiak and their two children, Dawid and Natalia. One by one, each of their lives was extinguished in the Holocaust.

Dawid began his diary while at a Zionist youth camp in southern Poland prior to the German invasion of Poland in 1939. He continued his daily entries until shortly before he died of hunger and exhaustion ("ghetto disease") on August 8, 1943, some two weeks after his eighteenth birthday. He was an inspiring young intellectual, brave, dark-humored, astonishingly aware politically, and an outstanding student at the top of his class. He had studied Latin, Hebrew, English, German, and French. His classmates elected him president of the ghetto *gymnasium* student council.

Dawid's notebooks were found after the war by a man returning to his apartment at 20 Wawelska Street, the Sierakowiaks' address in the ghetto. According to the man's words, "a whole pile of notebooks filled with notes was lying on a stove. Someone must have been using them for firewood because some of them were torn up. They contained stories, poems and other notes."

In the end, only five notebooks of at least seven Dawid wrote survived. Today, two of them are housed at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, and the other three reside in the archives of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. where they are to be featured in a special exhibit on the children of the Łódź ghetto. Dawid's diary has been published in six languages and is considered one of the richest accounts of daily Jewish life written from within the German-perpetrated war against the Jews.

EXCERPTS

[1939]

Sunday, September 3. Łódź. An alarm at half past twelve at night. I curse as much as I can. In the street it's cold, dark, nasty. In the shelter we want to amuse ourselves a little, but as usual the females raise an uproar, shrieking that it's no joke, this is war. We leave for the street. Bombs and cold are better than old women. This should always be kept in mind. Long live humor; down with hysteria!...

[The next day there is] the first big air raid on Łódź. Twelve planes in triangles of three break through the defense lines and start bombing the city. We stand in front of the entry to our buildings' yard and watch the sky in spite of the danger....

Suddenly the planes turn in our direction, forcing us to fight our curiosity and hide in terror in the stairwell...and just when it seems that we will be bombed at any moment, they leave us in peace to breathe a

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STUDENT HANDOUT – Excerpts from *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak*

sigh of relief. The planes finally disappear, which we announce in the shelter to the terrified, nerve-racked, crying women, some holding small babies in their arms. Truly a moving sight.

...

Wednesday, September 6. Łódź. God, what's going on! Panic, mass exodus, defeatism. The city, deserted by the police and all other state institutions, is waiting in terror for the anticipated arrival of the German troops. What happened? People run from one place to another finding no comfort: they move their worn bits of furniture around in terror and confusion, without any real purpose....

At home I meet our neighbor Mr. Grabiński, who has come back from downtown and tells about the great panic and anxiety that has taken hold of the people there. Crowds of residents are leaving their homes and setting off on a danger-filled trek into an unknown future. In the streets crying, sobbing, wailing.

I go to sleep, but a loud conversation wakes me at five in the morning. A neighbor, Grodzeński, is sitting there with his crying wife, telling us to leave. Where? Go where? Why? Nobody knows. To flee, flee farther and farther, trek, wade, cry, forget, run away...just run away as far as possible from the danger.... Father loses his head; he doesn't know what to do...finally the decision: stay put. Whatever will be will be.

...

Sunday, September 10. Łódź. ...Tomorrow is the first day of school. Who knows how our dear school has been? My friends are going there tomorrow to find out what's cooking, while I have to stay home. I have to! My parents say that they are not going to lose me yet. Oh, my dear school!...Damn the times when I complained about getting up in the morning and about tests. If only I could have them back!

...

Monday, September 18. Łódź. ...I am finally going to school tomorrow. Coeducational classes! There are great girls there, they say. Only let our education be normal. We are supposed to receive certificates of "immunity" so we won't be seized for work.

...

Tuesday, September 19. Łódź. I rode to school in a clean uniform (I came back on foot, however, and will go on foot every time now because there is no money to go by streetcar). At the gate I met two boys from our class....

...

Sunday, September 24. Łódź. The streets of Łódź feel eerie. Although richly decorated with Nazi flags, they are gray and sad. Dozens of [regulations], [public notices], and so on have been posted.... A person has to wait in line for bread for five or six hours, only to go away empty-handed 50 percent of the time. They are still seizing people for forced labor. Nothing seems to go well.

Lesson 4 The Ghettos

STUDENT HANDOUT – Excerpts from *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak*

Wednesday, October 4. Łódź. I didn't escape the sad fate of my countrymen who are being seized for work. As luck would have it, some older people talked me into going to school by way of Wólczajska Street, a slightly shorter route. As I walked along there yesterday I could see almost nothing but swastikas on all the buildings along the street, as well as a lot of German cars and a great number of soldiers and Łódź Germans with swastikas on their arms. I somehow made it through and today, thus emboldened, I went the same way. Then,...some student from the German [school] ran up to me with a big stick in his hand and shouted [in German]: "Come work! You can't go to school!" I did not resist because I knew that no papers could help me here. He took me to a square where over a dozen Jews were already at work picking up leaves! The sadistic youngster badly wanted to make me climb over a 2-meter-high fence, but seeing that I couldn't do it, he gave up and went away.

The work at the square was supervised by a single soldier, also with a big stick. Using rude words, he told me to fill puddles with sand. I have never been so humiliated in my life as when I looked through the gate to the square and saw the happy, smiling mugs of passersby laughing at our misfortune. Oh, you stupid, abysmally stupid, foolish blockheads! It's our oppressors who should be ashamed, not us.

Humiliation inflicted by force does not humiliate. But anger and helpless rage tear a man apart when he is forced to do such stupid, shameful, abusive work. Only one response remains: revenge!

[1941]

*Sunday, April 6. Łódź.** I'm beginning a new notebook of my diary, and thus dare to express the wish that it will become the start of a new, brighter and better period in my life than the one I covered in the preceding notebook. That seems just another pipe dream, though. In spite of a gorgeous (and expensive) holiday food ration, the situation remains as tragic as before. There's no hope for improvement.

**No notebooks covering 1940 or the first four months of 1941 have been recovered. During that time, the Sierakowiak family, along with all the Jews remaining in Łódź, were forced into the area designated by the Germans as the Litzmannstadt (Łódź) ghetto.*

Wednesday, April 9. Łódź. The weather is still nasty. It's cold, and raining almost incessantly; absolutely no sign of the sun. It looks like there won't be any spring this year. I just hope that such weather won't have a tragic effect on the harvests.

This week I wrote an article about the plight of school youths for a newspaper organized by the textile workers' association (Communists). I handed it in today, but it seems to me that before anything comes of it (there are enormous technical problems), the article will be out of date.

...

Sunday, April 27. Łódź. The first day of school. The trip to Marysin is quite long, but the worst thing about it is the awful mud from the incessant rain. I must cross all kinds of fields, and my shoes are in terrible shape. They are beginning to "go," but any repair is out of the question. I suppose I'll soon have to rush to school barefoot.

Lesson 4 The Ghettos

STUDENT HANDOUT – Excerpts from *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak*

Friday, May 2. Łódź. ...We continue to receive whole loaves of bread for our food rations, but now they check the weight carefully and, if needed, deduct or add the amount that the loaf's short. In any case, the loaf distribution system is no good. The portion of bread I receive won't feed me for more than two or three days; after that my stomach's empty, and all I can think of is the next loaf of bread.

...

Sunday, May 11. Łódź. It's raining constantly, and it absolutely won't get warm this year. I feel awful and look worse and worse. I hear that it's hard to recognize me.

...

Friday, May 16. Łódź. I have been examined by a doctor at school. She was terrified at how thin I am. She immediately gave me a referral for X rays. Perhaps I will now be able to get a double portion of soup in school. In fact, five such soups would be even better, but the two will do me some good, too. In any case, one soup is nothing.

The checkup has left me frightened and worried. Lung disease is the latest hit in ghetto fashion; it sweeps people away as much as dysentery or typhus. As for the food, it's worse and worse everywhere. It's been a week since there were any potatoes.

...

Saturday, July 19. Łódź. All day long I had nothing to eat but water (soup) in the kitchen. It's more and more difficult for me to go on starving. In the past I was able to not eat all day and still hold on somehow, but now I'm an empty pot. I was so weakened by the lack of soup at school that I thought I would collapse.

[1942]

Monday, May 25. Łódź. There are no vegetables in the June ration, not even potatoes. Now Rumkowski won't have to bother himself that people have eaten their potatoes too early; we won't even have a chance to see them this time. The situation is worsening, and there is no hope for the end.

They keep relocating Jews from small neighboring towns...into the ghetto, while the deportations from the ghetto have been stopped. Even that chance for getting out of the ghetto has been taken away. Death is striking left and right. A person becomes thin (an "hourglass") and pale in the face, then comes the swelling, a few days in bed or in the hospital, and that's it. The person was living the person is dead; we live and die like cattle.

...

Saturday, September 5. Łódź. My most Sacred, beloved, worn-out, blessed, cherished Mother has fallen victim to the bloodthirsty German Nazi beast!!! And totally innocently, solely because of the evil hearts of two Czech Jews, the doctors who came to examine us....

Lesson 4 The Ghettos

STUDENT HANDOUT – Excerpts from *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak*

...[T]wo doctors, two nurses, several firemen, and policemen entered our building completely unexpectedly. They had lists with the names of the tenants in every apartment. A frantic, unexpected examination began. The doctors...started an extremely thorough examination of every tenant, and fished out a great many of the "sick and unable to work," and the ones whom they described as [in German] "questionable reserve." My unfortunate dearest mother was among the latter.... The shabby old doctor who examined her...kept shaking his head, saying to his comrade in Czech, "Very weak, very weak."...

...My mother has been caught, and I doubt very much that anything will save her.

...My poor mother, who always feared everything, yet invariably continued to believe in God, showed them, in spite of extreme nervousness, complete presence of mind. With fatalism and with heartbreaking, maddening logic, she spoke to us about her fate. She kind of admitted that I was right when I told her that she had given her life by lending and giving away provisions, but she admitted it with such a bitter smile that I could see she didn't regret her conduct at all, and, although she loved her life so greatly, for her there are values even more important than life, like God, family, etc. She kissed each one of us good-bye, took a bag with her bread and a few potatoes that I forced on her, and left quickly to her horrible fate. I couldn't muster the willpower to look through the window after her or to cry. I walked around, talked, and finally sat as though I had turned to stone. Every other moment, nervous spasms took hold of my heart, hands, mouth, and throat, so that I thought my heart was breaking. It didn't break, though, and it let me eat, think, speak, and go to sleep.

...Meanwhile, if Mom had only left home, nothing would have happened to her. And so, someone else's baby has been saved in our home, while my mother has been taken. [My sister] Nadzia screamed, cried, suffered spasms, but these days it doesn't move anyone. I am speechless and close to madness.

[1943]

Sunday, April 4. Łódź. My state of mind is worsening every day. The fever persists, and I look like a complete "death notice." I can't bring my irritated skin back to normal, either.

In politics there's still nothing new. The war is extending infinitely, and here I am with no more strength. Everyone in the ghetto is sick. TB is spreading unbelievably, and there is a great number of other infectious and noninfectious diseases. Nadzia has noticed symptoms of scabies on her body again. If things continue like this, I will go crazy. Oh, this horrible, endless hopelessness. No chance or hope for life.

...

Thursday, April 15. Łódź. ...I am completely sick, and I have a high fever. I bought a Bayer medication for the flu, fever, and cold, for Nadzia and me. Nadzia stays in bed, and I think she will remain there for another day or two.

Mrs. Deutsch came to see me today.... I think she is the most devoted friend I have in the ghetto, or anywhere else for that matter.

In the evening I had to prepare food and cook supper, which exhausted me totally. In politics there's

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STUDENT HANDOUT - Excerpts from *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak*

absolutely nothing new. Again, out of impatience I feel myself beginning to fall into melancholy. There is really no way out of this for us.

Here the last of Dawid Sierakowiak's surviving notebooks breaks off. He died four months later of tuberculosis, starvation, and exhaustion, the syndrome known as "ghetto disease."

Selections reprinted from *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak: Five Notebooks from the Lodz Ghetto*, edited by Alan Adelson, translated by Kamil Turowski, copyright © 1996 by the Jewish Heritage Project and Kamil Turowski. Used by permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.

STUDENT HANDOUT – Diary Entry from the Lodz Ghetto

“...Do you have any children at all in the ghetto? This species is steadily approaching extinction even before it develops in order to produce at the machine. A child, if fortunate enough to avoid death, immediately becomes a full-fledged grown-up. There are no children in the ghetto; there are only small Jews up to the age of ten, who do not work but queue at the soup kitchens [and] the bread lines, and...small Jews aged ten and over who already work — still beardless and unmarried, but already working.

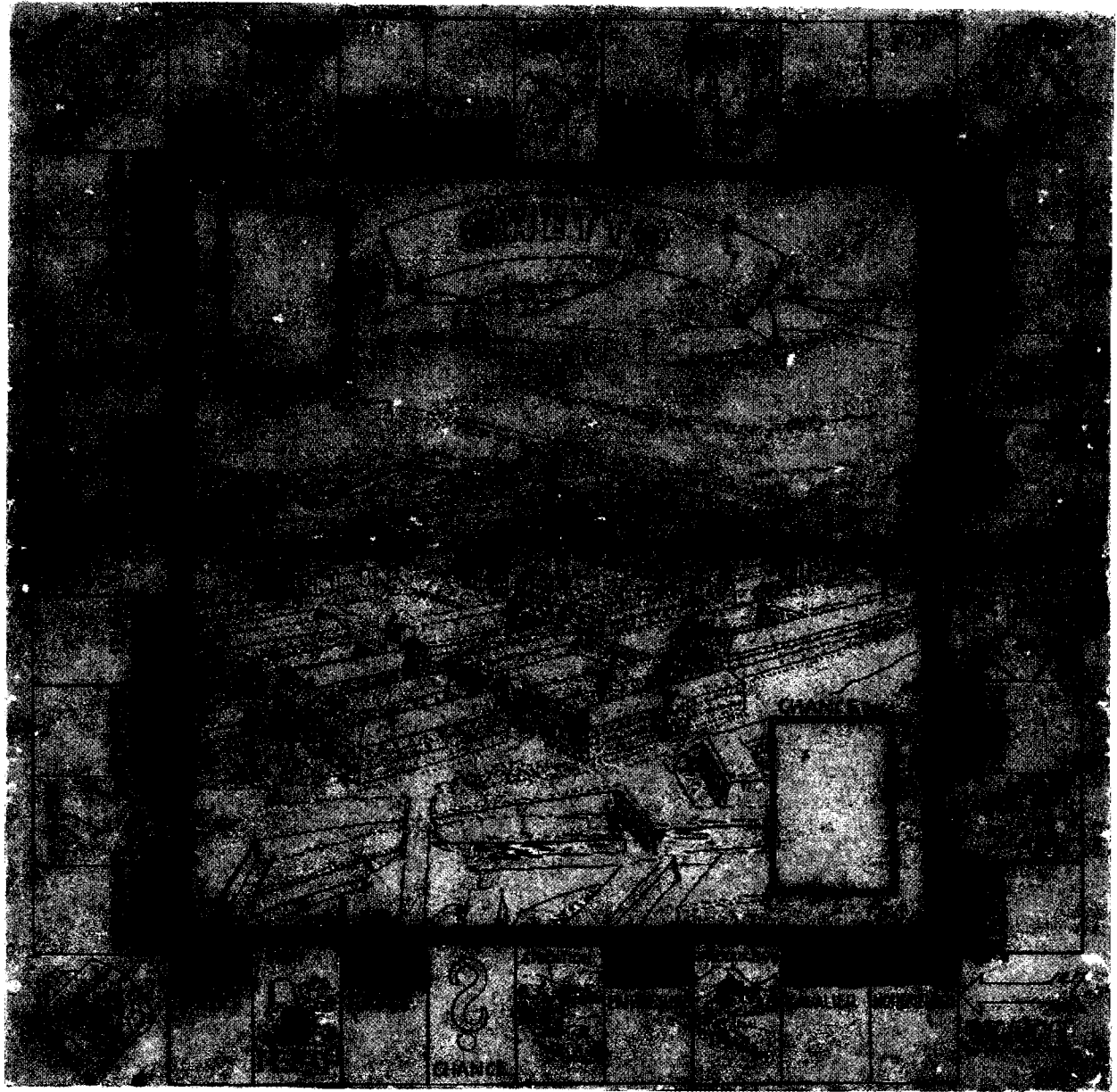
It is difficult, if only because it's the burden of this small Jew has to report to work by seven o'clock, he has to wake up at six o'clock, and for this small Jew every extra hour of wakefulness means another hour of hunger pangs all day long.

And if hunger has not yet caused their legs to swell, because they do not have to carry a large body as do their parents' legs, they nevertheless have twisted, bent spines; sunken chests; lifeless and turgid eyes, their gazes turned somewhere far away, alien and cold, like today's sky...”

Excerpted from *In Those Terrible Days* by Josef Zelkowicz. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2002, pp. 186–188.

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STUDENT HANDOUT – Monopoly Game from Theresienstadt



© Yad Vashem Museum Collections

This monopoly game was made by the graphics workshop in the Theresienstadt ghetto to inform children about ghetto life.

STUDENT HANDOUT – Poem from Theresienstadt

The Butterfly

The last, the very last,
So richly, brightly, dazzlingly yellow.
Perhaps if the sun's tears would sing
against a white stone...

Such, such a yellow
Is carried lightly 'way up high,
It went away I'm sure because it wished to
kiss the world good-bye.

For seven weeks I've lived in here,
Penned up inside this ghetto.
But I have found what I love here.
The dandelions call to me
And the white chestnut branches in the
court.

Only I never saw another butterfly.
That butterfly was the last one.
Butterflies don't live in here,
In the ghetto.

Pavel Friedman
June 4, 1942

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