

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

LIFE IN THE LODZ GHETTO

The Neuberger's **In Their Own Words** website offers a variety of Holocaust survivor testimonies that discuss the experiences of individuals forced to live in ghettos.

The Nazi's system of ghettos was an important step in the destruction of the Jews of Europe. They established ghettos across much of Central and Eastern that they controlled. Jews were isolated not only from their friends and family members, but the rest of the world too. Historians estimate that over 500,000 Jews died in these ghettos from starvation or disease resulting from squalid living conditions. Many others were deported on to death camps such as Chelmno, Treblinka, Belzec or Auschwitz-Birkenau, where they were killed. In many areas, the ghettos were an important tool in the Nazi genocide.

The Lodz ghetto the focus of this lesson, was established in February 1940. More than 165,000 Jews were forced to live in an area of Lodz that was less than 4 sq km.

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify and discuss the conditions that affected daily life in the Lodz Ghetto
- Assess the decision-making process of individuals and the factors that guide these decisions
- Identify and discuss the historical context of the ghetto as one step in the Holocaust as well as the specifics of the Lodz Ghetto
- Analyze and critique primary source documents and photographs
- Evaluate historical sources for perspective, limitations and historical context

This lesson focuses on life in the Lodz Ghetto through the experiences of Holocaust survivor Hanna Mishna. Additional personal perspectives are provided by Sally Rosen and Manny Langer in the Neuberger curated film "Voices from the Lodz Ghetto". It contains four activities which can be alone or together depending on the curricular needs.

ACTIVITY I

Learning about the Lodz Ghetto through First Person Testimony

APPROACH:

Watch the Hannah Mishna's testimony excerpt which can be found online at: <http://in-theirownwords.net/hanna-anne-mishna> It is about 3 ½ minutes long, and you may want to watch it more than once so that you can hear all the details of Hannah's story.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

"Hannah Mishna's testimony" was recorded in 1989, in Edmonton, Alberta. This was several years before "Schindler's List" (1993) introduced the Holocaust to millions of people. As an example of an earlier testimony the viewer can sense that Hannah may not be accustomed to speaking about her experiences and sometimes searches for the correct word in English. Her reflections provide us with important insights about the conditions in the ghetto, how she survived, and how she could find rare moments of beauty and hope even when subjected to the dire conditions of the ghetto.

Questions:

- 1 What do you notice about the way in which Hannah tells her experiences? Why do you think she has to search for some of the words when discussing these events? Hint: Hannah, like many Holocaust survivors, could speak several languages before they learnt English. In fact, English was often their 3rd, 4th or even 5th language. Searching for the correct word is not an unusual trait in listening to Holocaust survivor testimony and as a result Hannah describes the function of items when she does not know the English word.
- 2 What were some of the conditions that made life in the ghetto so difficult for Hannah?
- 3 What type of work did Hannah do in the ghetto? Why does she say that having a work assignment was so important in the ghetto?
- 4 In the midst of the hardship of the ghetto, Hannah describes one example of beauty. What was it and why do you think she remembers this so vividly?
- 5 **Reflection:** Write a short reflection piece on how Hannah's experiences made you feel and what she went through.

After viewing the testimony excerpt what questions do you have about her experiences? About the Lodz Ghetto? About how she survived?

You may find the answers to some of your questions about life in the ghetto in the second activity; watching the short film "**Voices from the Lodz Ghetto**"

ACTIVITY II

Voices from the Lodz Ghetto

APPROACH:

Show the Neuberger curated film “Voices from the Lodz Ghetto”. It is approximately 23-minutes long, and can be found on the Neuberger’s Vimeo site <https://vimeo.com/142838617/68985aa4c5>

After viewing the film, consider some of the following questions.

Questions:

You have heard the testimonies of Manny Langer and Sally Rosen who survived the ghetto:

- 1** What were some of the hardships they endured?
- 2** Why do you think they survived?
- 3** What was the importance of work in the ghetto?
- 4** Both Manny and Sally were children in the ghetto – a particularly vulnerable age group. What factors contributed to their survival?
- 5** What jobs did Manny and Sally carry out in the ghetto?

ACTIVITY III

Analyze a Primary Source Document: Chaim Rumkowski's Speech

Recommended for High School students in History, Religion, Civics and Social Responsibility and Philosophy courses.

APPROACH:

Read the Primary Source Document (Appendix I): 'Give me your children', delivered by Chaim Rumkowski, 4 September 1942, Lodz ghetto, Poland

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

Chaim Rumkowski was appointed by the Germans to be head of the Judenrat (Jewish Council) in the Lodz ghetto. He was 60 years old at the time of his appointment and a widower. He is considered by many to have been a controversial leader; a man who is sometimes described as having had delusions of grandeur, who could be arrogant and callous. At the same time, he was placed in an extremely difficult position as the go-between with the murderous Nazi regime and the Jews who were forced to live in the ghetto. The speech you are about to read can be very upsetting. Ordered by the Nazis to deport 20,000 Jews, Rumkowski made the decision to deport the elderly and the very young. In August 1944 Rumkowski was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau along with his brother Jozef. Accounts vary on how Rumkowski died. One account states that Rumkowski was beaten to death on train journey to Auschwitz, another account states that he was beaten to death by the Sonderkommando's in Birkenau who themselves had been interned in Lodz ghetto. What is confirmed is that Rumkowski did not survive Auschwitz.

Read the speech carefully. It may help to read the speech out loud as it was written to be delivered orally before an audience of listeners. Underline or note any phrases or words that are significant to you when reviewing the speech.

Questions:

- 1 What is the tone and purpose of the speech?
- 2 What choice or decision is Rumkowski addressing? What factors guided Rumkowski's decision?
- 3 What other decisions could Rumkowski have made?
- 4 Rumkowski is considered a controversial figure to many – why do you think some people admired him yet other people did not?
- 5 Reflection: Write a short reflection piece on how this speech made you feel and the effects of the decision to deport children and elderly from the Lodz Ghetto.

What questions do you have after reading Rumkowski's speech? How can you find out the answers to your questions?

ACTIVITY IV

Analyze a Primary Source Document: Archival photograph of Chaim Rumkowski speaking to a crowd of people in the Lodz Ghetto. Circa 1942-1944.

Recommended for High School students in History, Religion, Civics and Social Responsibility and Philosophy courses.

APPROACH:

Look carefully at the Primary Source photograph (Appendix II) of Chaim Rumkowski addressing a crowd in the Lodz Ghetto, likely taken by a ghetto photographer. Look for details as to its composition: what is in the forefront? The background? What stands out to you?

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

Chaim Rumkowski's approach to running the Lodz Ghetto was to make the its Jewish inhabitants useful to the German Reich through work. As a result, the ghetto had many workshops and small factories that produced goods such as gloves, straw overshoes, and uniforms, all needed by the German military. He also thought he could save the adults, himself included, as they would be needed to manufacture these goods in the workshops and small factories. However, his strategy of making the ghetto inhabitants useful to the Reich meant that he had to send children and the elderly to their deaths in death camps such as Chelmo in order to meet the quotas given to him by the Nazi regime.

Questions:

- 1 What is happening in this photograph? What do you notice that stands out to you?
- 2 What was going on in the rest of Europe at this time?
- 3 Who do you think might have taken this photograph? Why?

The following resources will provide you additional information about the Lodz Ghetto:

<https://vimeo.com/142838617/68985aa4c5>

"Voices from the Lodz Ghetto" a Neuberger curated film featuring the personal recollections of Manny Langer and Sally Rosen, two survivors of the Lodz Ghetto.

<http://agolodzghetto.com/>

Students can explore the Lodz Ghetto photographs of Henryk Ross; primary source documents that visually capture the conditions in the ghetto.

<https://memoirs.azrielifoundation.org/survivor/henia-reinhartz>

Henia Reinhartz's poignant memoir "Bits and Pieces" tells her experiences enduring the Lodz ghetto as well as surviving Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen.

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/lodz>

The website of the USHMM provides a detailed overview of the Lodz Ghetto including primary source materials



APPENDIX I

The Speech

Sourced from The Holocaust Research Project - <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/ghettos/rumkowski.html>

"A grievous blow has struck the ghetto. They are asking us to give up the best we possess - the children and the elderly. I was unworthy of having a child of my own, so I gave the best years of my life to children. I've lived and breathed with children, I never imagined I would be forced to deliver this sacrifice to the altar with my own hands. In my old age, I must stretch out my hands and beg: Brothers and sisters! Hand them over to me! Fathers and mothers: Give me your children!

I had a suspicion something was going to befall us. I anticipated "something" and was always like a watchman: on guard to prevent it. But I was unsuccessful because I did not know what was threatening us. The taking of the sick from the hospitals caught me completely by surprise. And I give you the best proof there is of this: I had my own nearest and dearest among them and I could do nothing for them!

I thought that would be the end of it, that after that, they'd leave us in peace, the peace for which I long so much, for which I've always worked, which has been my goal. But something else, it turned out, was destined for us. Such is the fate of the Jews: always more suffering and always worse suffering, especially in times of war.

Yesterday afternoon, they gave me the order to send more than 20,000 Jews out of the ghetto, and if not - "We will do it!" So the question became, 'Should we take it upon ourselves, do it ourselves, or leave it to others to do?'. Well, we - that is, I and my closest associates - thought first not about "How many will perish?" but "How many is it possible to save?" And we reached the conclusion that, however hard it would be for us, we should take the implementation of this order into our own hands.

I must perform this difficult and bloody operation - I must cut off limbs in order to save the body itself. I must take children because, if not, others may be taken as well - God forbid. I have no thought of consoling you today. Nor do I wish to calm you. I must lay bare your full anguish and pain. I come to you like a bandit, to take from you what you treasure most in your hearts! I have tried, using every possible means, to get the order revoked. I tried - when that proved to be impossible - to soften the order. Just yesterday, I ordered a list of children aged 9 - I wanted at least to save this one aged-group: the nine to 10 year olds. But I was not granted this concession. On only one point did I succeed: in saving the 10 year olds and up. Let this be a consolation to our profound grief.

There are, in the ghetto, many patients who can expect to live only a few days more, maybe a few weeks. I don't know if the idea is diabolical or not, but I must say it: "Give me the sick. In their place we can save the healthy."

I know how dear the sick are to any family, and particularly to Jews. However, when cruel demands are made, one has to weigh and measure: who shall, can and may be saved? And common sense dictates that the saved must be those who can be saved and those who have a chance of being rescued, not those who cannot be saved in any case...

We live in the ghetto, mind you. We live with so much restriction that we do not have enough even for the healthy, let alone for the sick. Each of us feeds the sick at the expense of our own health: we give our bread to the sick. We give them our meager ration of sugar, our little piece of meat. And what's the result? Not enough to cure the sick, and we ourselves become ill. Of course, such sacrifices are the most beautiful and noble. But there are times when one has to choose: sacrifice the sick, who haven't the slightest chance of recovery and who also may make others ill or rescue the healthy.

I could not deliberate over this problem for long; I had to resolve it in favor of the healthy. In this spirit, I gave the appropriate instructions to the doctors, and they will be expected to deliver all incurable patients, so that the healthy, who want and are able to live, will be saved in their place.

I understand you, mothers; I see your tears, alright. I also feel what you feel in your hearts, you fathers who will have to go to work in the morning after your children have been taken from you, when just yesterday you were playing with your dear little ones. All this I know and feel. Since 4 o'clock yesterday, when I first found out about the order, I have been utterly broken. I share your pain. I suffer because of your anguish, and I don't know how I'll survive this - where I'll find the strength to do so.

I must tell you a secret: they requested 24,000 victims, 3000 a day for eight days. I succeeded in reducing the number to 20,000, but only on the condition that these be children under the age of 10. Children 10 and older are safe! Since the children and the aged together equal only some 13,000 souls, the gap will have to be filled with the sick.

I can barely speak. I am exhausted; I only want to tell you what I am asking of you: Help me carry out this action! I am trembling. I am afraid that others, God forbid, will do it themselves.

A broken Jew stands before you. Do not envy me. This is the most difficult of all orders I have ever had to carry out at any time. I reach out to you with my broken, trembling hands and beg: Give into my hands the victims! So that we can avoid having further victims, and a population of 100,000 Jews can be preserved! So, they promised me: If we deliver our victims by ourselves, there will be peace!!!

(At this point in the speech the crowd begins shouting. Many cry out: "We will not let the children go alone! We will all go!") Rumkowski continues:

These are empty phrases!!! I don't have the strength to argue with you! If the authorities were to arrive, none of you would be shouting! I understand what it means to tear off a part of the body. Yesterday, I begged on my knees, but it did not work. From small villages with Jewish populations of 7000 to 8000, barely 1000 arrived here. So, which is better? What do you want? That 80,000 to 90,000 Jews remain, or God forbid, that the whole population be annihilated?

You may judge as you please; my duty is to preserve the Jews who remain. I do not speak to hot-heads! I speak to your reason and conscience. I have done and will continue doing everything possible to keep arms from appearing in the streets and blood from being shed. The order could not be undone; it could only be reduced. One needs the heart of a bandit to ask from you what I am asking. But put yourself in my place, think logically, and you'll reach the conclusion that I cannot proceed any other way. The part that can be saved is much larger than the part that must be given away!"

APPENDIX II

Photograph of Chaim Rumkowski giving a speech

