

THEIR OWN WORDS



UJA FEDERATION | SARAH AND CHAIM NEUBERGER
of Greater Toronto | HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE

IN THEIR OWN WORDS USING THE COLLECTION

In Their Own Words is a collection of oral history excerpts collected from Holocaust survivors who immigrated to Canada after the Second World War. These recordings are often referred to as ‘testimonies’ because they focus on the experiences of the person during the Holocaust.

The excerpts featured in this online collection has been curated from over 1200 testimonies in the Canadian Collection which can be accessed at the Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre. On average complete recordings may range from 90-120 minutes in length. The excerpts shown here average less than 10 minutes in length. Some of these testimonies were recorded in the mid-1980s while others are more recent additions. They provide us with important personal accounts of what it was like to live through the Holocaust.

As you will discover, experiences varied tremendously and there is a lot to learn about how the Holocaust affected individuals, families and entire communities. We hope that you will find this collection to be a valuable tool for learning about the Holocaust.

What is Oral History?

Oral history, or testimonies, are recordings of personal describing some of their life experiences. **In Their Own Words** focuses specifically on one or a few significant experiences as recalled by the individual. In the complete recording they usually describe what their life was like before the Holocaust, then what happened to them and their family during the Holocaust, and in the final segment they discuss their liberation experience and immigration to Canada.

Experiences Described in the Collection

Oral history is perhaps one of the richest and most engaging ways to learn about people, places, and events. Each excerpt profiled as part of **In Their Own Words** will have the name of the speaker at the bottom of the square displaying their photograph. Along the top is the category or type of experience they are addressing. Some of these experiences include: Camp, Escape, Gender, Ghetto, Hiding, Immigration, Physical Resistance, Pre-War Life, as well as others. The collection is a rich source of information about the diverse range of experiences in the Holocaust. No two experiences are ever the same so even though there may be multiple examples of one category, each excerpt is unique.

Working with Testimony – for educators

Listening to the oral history recordings will introduce your students to new words, new experiences, and new concepts. A glossary of terms is provided as a general resource when working with **In Their Own Words**, and each lesson plan has its own custom glossary. These terms and definitions will help scaffold the information for your students helping to create a deeper learning experience.

When introducing the collection to your students discuss how the excerpts are categorized by theme. Have your students consider why these specific themes were chosen to highlight. Are there categories or themes not present? What might be some of the reasons or factors taken into consideration when choosing excerpts to highlight?

You may want to have your students consider that curating a collection of oral history excerpts can be a bit like building any new structure: the foundational pieces are laid first, and over time more and more pieces are added to complete the structure. The Neuberger adds news testimony excerpts to In Their Own Words each year, choosing excerpts from more than 1200 oral history recordings collected across Canada.

Working with Testimony – for learners

As you explore these excerpts of recorded oral history, you'll likely encounter new words that you may not be familiar with. We've included vocabulary sheets to give you concise definitions for some of the words that you may not know.

Listening to recorded testimony excerpts also helps to develop your listening skills. Most the speakers recorded in this collection learnt English as their second, third, fourth or even fifth language! Sometimes they not pronounce the words as you know them. Or they may search for the correct word to use in English as it is not their native language. Be patient and listen carefully, but we have also included captions to help with the listening process.

As you watch and listen to these recordings, look for the nuances of how the speaker describes and relays their experiences. This will give you additional insight into the oral history account, the speaker, and the impact that the Holocaust has had upon them.

Think Like an Historian – for educators and learners

Keep in mind that in some cases, Holocaust survivors recorded these testimonies many years after the events they discuss. Still, for many, the Holocaust was an extremely traumatic and significant event in their lives that the memories of what they experienced can be recalled in detail.

Remember however, that few Holocaust survivors are trained historians. They may not have known what was taking place in other parts of Europe at the same as they were struggling to survive. Similarly, they would not have had access to media reports while the Holocaust was happening. In their accounts, the speakers may not recall all the details of an experience, or they may give an incorrect name or date when discussing some aspect of their experience. These are part of the human nature but nevertheless, these accounts are critical in helping us understand, at least to some degree, how human beings were affected by the Holocaust.

If you have questions after listening to an oral history excerpt or you simply want to learn more about the experiences described, below are some resources to consult. Part of the historical thinking process is to seek out other sources of information to help provide a fuller understanding of the account.

A few recommended resources include:

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM)

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/>

The Holocaust Explained

<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/>

The Wannsee Conference House

<https://www.ghwk.de/en/>

Anne Frank House

<https://www.annefrank.org/en/>

Listening to, and Learning from, Difficult Subjects – for educators

The recorded testimonies of Holocaust survivors capture some of the most difficult and traumatic experiences of a person's life. Although there may be moments that describe acts of kindness, most testimonies deal with difficult topics such as the loss of family members, persecution, antisemitism and racism, as well as descriptions of the horrendous conditions they endured in hiding, in a ghetto or concentration camp, or in an encounter with Nazi personnel. These are all difficult topics to listen to and it is important to provide learners of all ages and backgrounds with the opportunity to process this experience.

When using all forms of recorded survivor testimony (full recordings or excerpts), providing historical context is an essential step. This can help learners understand the larger issues and conditions that led to specific events in the history of the Holocaust. One source of historical context is the online encyclopedia of the United States Holocaust History Museum (USHMM). <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/> Another valuable resource you may wish to consult is a publication from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance called "Recommendations for Teaching and Learning About the Holocaust" <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/inline-files/IHRA-Recommendations-Teaching-and-Learning-about-Holocaust.pdf> It offers many useful guidelines and recommendations for teaching the Holocaust and its complexities in a thoughtful and comprehensive manner.

Discussing or writing about these events allows learners to contextualize them as well as to process their feelings. This section provides details on three activities that encourage students to work through the difficult experiences they may have encountered in listening to the Holocaust survivor testimony. You may decide to offer your students a choice between the three listed below, or you might decide to have your students complete the same activity. Alternately, you may have students who would prefer to record a video response or another type of activity. Whichever approach you choose, remember that it is the act of reflecting upon these difficult topics and then actively responding that is central to processing the difficult material covered. Whether the response is written or spoken, on paper or in a digital format, the important factor is that learners are reflecting and learning to process their responses.

- 1 FOUND POETRY**
- 2 SIX-WORD MEMOIR**
- 3 DOUBLE or TRIPLE ENTRY JOURNAL**

As an introduction to working with the oral history excerpts that make up the **In Their Own Words** collection, you may wish to have your students select two or three testimony excerpts by theme and have them watch the recording. They may even want to listen to each recording more than once to pick out important details, to notice how the speaker narratives their experiences, as well as the body language of the speaker. Ask if how the speaker appeared and was it easy for them to discuss their experiences in the Holocaust? What do they notice about the words the speaker used – did they come naturally, or did they have to search for the correct English word or expression to use? Did the narrator speak softly or were they animated, sad or angry when they described what had happened to them? These are all important points to consider when viewing oral history recordings and it often takes more than one viewing to notice these all these details.

After learners have listened to one or more of the testimony excerpts, have students complete one of the activities described below. This will provide them with an important opportunity to process some of the difficult themes and topics they engaged with during the testimony excerpt.

If you have questions or would like additional information about the teaching the Holocaust in today's contemporary context, please feel free to contact the Neuberger at neuberger@ujafed.org

ACTIVITY I

FOUND POETRY

Found Poetry is sometimes referred to as ‘collage writing’ or as a ‘poetry collage’. The writing challenge here is to listen carefully to the story or narrative being told and writing down key words that you find powerful or convey a feeling or impression that you found significant. There is no limit on the number of words you can record; remember to look for words that convey key themes and seem important to your understanding of the testimony excerpt. You should choose individual words (or at most two or three words as a phrase) rather than complete sentences.

When you have finished recording the words that you have highlighted, review them carefully and eliminate any seem boring or that don’t seem to convey a powerful moment or experience. This is part of the editing process and is important in helping to refine and focus your work.

Once this editing process has been done you are ready to create your ‘Found Poem’. Mix up the order of the words and moving them around until you have created new sentences that express your ideas and impressions from the testimony that you listened to. You may find that the editing process continues and that you’ll want to remove more words until you have a crisply written poem.

For more ideas on ‘Found Poems” visit the following websites:

<https://medium.com/1-one-infinity/how-to-write-found-poetry-18a03374e53>

<http://unlostjournal.com/about-found-poetry/>

<https://writescape.ca/site/tag/found-poetry/>

ACTIVITY II

SIX-WORD MEMOIR

Compose a short reflection piece, called a Six-Word Memoir, using one of the testimonies that you listened to.

What is a six-word memoir? It is a writing challenge to condense a narrative or story into 6 compelling words that captures the essence of the story and intrigues the reader to want to know more. A contemporary urban legend says that the famous American author Ernest Hemmingway was once challenged to write a compelling six-word memoir. He came up with the following: "For Sale: Baby shoes, Never Worn." That's it – six words, carefully chosen that capture the essence of a story or an experience, leaving the reader curious, and wanting to learn more.

An example specific to a Holocaust experience could be: "Stolen Childhood, Family Lost, Hope Reborn". The idea is to work with aspects of the narrative that resonate with you.

For more information on six-word memoirs visit:

<https://www.sixwordmemoirs.com/>

<http://writing.upenn.edu/wh/archival/documents/sixwords/>

<https://pen.org/six-word-memoirs/>

Consider carefully the testimony excerpt that you listened to, and then choose words that you feel capture the essence of the narrative. Remember, you are limited to choosing six words which you can then use to create an engaging six-word memoir. The goal is to re-lay an important element or theme from the testimony excerpt that will leave your reader wanting to know more about the survivor's individual experiences.

ACTIVITY III

DOUBLE or TRIPLE ENTRY JOURNAL

Journaling can be a valuable tool for students to process the difficult material that they may have encountered in listening to Holocaust survivor testimony excerpts. The process of writing (whether digital or by hand) will help to improve comprehension of the events as well as vocabulary. Journaling also helps learners to retain more of what they have heard and watched. Journaling also build a connection between the subject matter or themes that the learner has heard in the testimony excerpt and learner as their journal entries respond to what they have heard. In this way, the journal entries can serve as a “reply” to the speaker they have listened too. Journal entries can be shared by students in a classroom setting, kept private by the student, or shared between the teacher and student.

After listening to the testimony excerpt, ask students to pick out sentences or sections that they found powerful or particularly interested. These can be recorded in the column on the left hand side of the page (see template). Student can also give the timecode for where the passage appears in the testimony excerpt.

In a **double entry journal**, the right-hand column is the response column. Students respond to the passage by recording their impressions, analysis or reactions to what was said by the speaker in the recorded testimony. The entry might also include a comment, or a question that the passage triggered for the learner.

In a **triple entry journal**, the centre column is the response column that is completed as part of the immediate activity. The right-hand column (the third column) is then used a week or even two weeks later to respond to the initial impression, analysis or reaction recorded in the centre column. Has the learner’s feelings or reaction changed from their initial response during the interim period? How might the passage of time have affected or not affected their original opinion? What other factors might contribute to a change in perception or analysis? Or conversely, why might an opinion remain the same over time?

Listening to, and Learning from, Difficult Subjects – for learners

Watching and listening to the recorded testimonies of Holocaust survivors can be a difficult experience. Often, the speakers are describing events and actions that illustrate indifferent or cruel aspects of humanity. Themes of loss and sadness, or anger and frustration, are common elements of Holocaust survivor recorded testimonies. At other times, they may speak about an act of kindness or courage that helped them to survive in some way. Sometimes reading about or listening to these experiences can trigger an emotional response or it may prompt you to imagine or think about what took place during the Holocaust. These are normal responses and the process of writing or journaling can help to process these feelings.

However, talking about your reactions and feelings is an effective tool when dealing with difficult subjects such as the Holocaust. Teachers, your family, or another adult you trust may help you to describe what you are feeling and try to make sense of these emotions. Just as the symptoms of an emotional response are physical, there are also physical means of coping with it (deep breathing exercises to lessen tension, for example, the hunching-up and dropping of the shoulders, or another activity to aid in processing your feelings).

There are also a number of organizations in Ontario where you can seek support to discuss your experiences

These include:

Distress Centres of Toronto

Provides 24-hour telephone support to those experiencing emotional distress or in need of crisis intervention and suicide prevention

416-408-HELP (4357)

Gerstein Centre

24-hour crisis services in Toronto and York

416-929-5200

Integrated Community Health Crisis Response Program

24-hour crisis services in Etobicoke and North York

416-498-0043

Kids Help Phone

24-hour, national telephone and online counselling, referral and information services for children, youth and young adults

1-800-668-6868

LGBT Youth Line

Peer support phone line for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, 2-spirited, queer and questioning youth

1-800-268-9688

Scarborough Mobile Crisis Centre

24-hour crisis services in East York and Scarborough

416-495-2891

**Remember, your emotional responses and are important to express
to maintain your well-being.**

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

ESCAPE AND RESCUE

The Neuberger's **In Their Own Words** utilizes a diverse range of testimony excerpts from Holocaust survivors and witnesses, providing an important opportunity to discover how the Holocaust affected individuals and families. It demonstrates the human dimension of history and how decisions, big and small, affect people. Notable among the testimonies are examples of the efforts made by and for Jews to get out of Nazi Europe and find safe haven. Even if a Jewish person could get the necessary paperwork to leave a Nazi controlled state, they still needed to find a country to allow them entry. That became increasingly difficult after the Nazis took to power.

The testimony excerpts included in **In Their Own Words** are curated from longer, full length testimonies that average between 90 minutes and two hours. We've chosen to highlight some specific moments that are rich in detail and describe important moments in the survival of the narrator.

It is also important to remember that most Holocaust survivors are not trained historians. They may not remember all the dates or details perfectly. Similarly, they may not know what was happening in other parts of Europe or about other events taking place. However, their recollections of the events they experienced personally provide us with a unique window into how human beings experienced the Holocaust.

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

- Identify and discuss the various ways in which Jews tried to escape the Nazi regime
- Assess the decision-making process of individuals and the factors that guide these decisions
- Identify and discuss the historical context of the complexities associated with rescue efforts
- Analyze primary source material through the recorded accounts of Holocaust survivors

This lesson focuses on the complexities associated with escape and rescue, as told through the experiences of four Holocaust survivors and one rescuer:

- Esther Bem describes and encounter with a Nazi official when she posed under a false identity
- Suzanne Klag discusses the difficulty that resulted from being officially declared "stateless"
- Arie van Mansum tells about his work in the Dutch resistance movement giving aid and finding hiding places for Jews
- Rose Ruschin relays how worked to get to England on a student nurse visa
- Lolly Samosh describes the Danish rescue efforts which managed to get most Danish Jews to safety in neutral Sweden

ACTIVITY I

Learning about Escape and Rescue through First Person Testimony

APPROACH:

Choose and watch two or more of the testimony excerpts from **IN THEIR OWN WORDS** that deal specifically with the topic of escape and rescue.

These include:

- Esther Bem <http://intheirownwords.net/suzanne-klag>
- Suzanne Klag <http://intheirownwords.net/suzanne-klag>
- Arie van Mansum <http://intheirownwords.net/arie-van-mansum>
- Rose Ruschin <http://intheirownwords.net/rose-ruschin>
- Lolly Samosh <http://intheirownwords.net/lolli-samosh>

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

Choose three of the five questions to respond to.

Questions:

- 1 What were some of the challenges the Jews faced in attempting to escape Nazi Europe?
- 2 What are some of the ways in which Jews were able to get out of Nazi Europe?
- 3 Often rescue efforts required the combined efforts of multiple people. What are some of the characteristics of the Danish rescue effort as discussed by Lolly Samosh or of the testimonies that you listened to?
- 4 What are some ways in which rescue or escape efforts impacted children?
- 5 Write a short reflection piece about one of the testimonies that you listened to. You might choose to summarize the account by creating a six-word memoir.

What is a six-word memoir? It is a writing challenge to condense a narrative or story into 6 compelling words that captures the essence of the story and intrigues the reader to want to know more. Legend has it that the famous author Ernest Hemmingway was once challenged to write a compelling six-word memoir and came up with: **“For Sale: Baby shoes, Never Worn”**. An example specific to a Holocaust experience could be: **“Stolen Childhood, Family Lost, Hope Reborn”**. The idea is to work with aspects of the narrative that resonate with you.

For more information on six-word memoirs visit:

- <https://www.sixwordmemoirs.com/>
- <http://writing.upenn.edu/wh/archival/documents/sixwords/>
- <https://pen.org/six-word-memoirs/>

VOCABULARY LIST

ESCAPE AND RESCUE

ANTISEMITISM

Antisemitism is prejudice against or hatred of Jews. The Holocaust is history's most extreme example of antisemitism.

AUSCHWITZ

Auschwitz was a network of concentration and death camps located in Nazi-occupied Poland. Initially a site to house political prisoners, by mid-war Auschwitz was murdering people in gas chambers. Of the estimated 1.3 million individuals sent to Auschwitz, 1.1 million died.

CONCENTRATION CAMP

Prison camps where Jews, political prisoners, and other victims of the Nazis were confined for various reasons. Inmates were forced to work very long hours for the Nazis and did not receive much food or medical care. Camp conditions were overcrowded, unsanitary, and brutally violent.

DEATH CAMP

A type of prison camp established with the intent of systematically killing the people who were sent there.

DEPORTATION

The forced removal of Jews from their homes in the countries occupied by Nazi Germany. These Jewish people were told that they were going to be 're-settled' in new homes and communities in 'the East'. In reality they were transported to killing centres, death camp, concentration and labour camps.

FINAL SOLUTION

Term used by the Nazis to describe their plan to murder the Jews of Europe.

GESTAPO

The Gestapo were the official secret police of Nazi Germany and German-occupied Europe. They played a central role in the Nazi plan to destroy European Jews.

GHETTO

A place where Jews were forced to live by the Nazis and the people who helped them. These places were often dirty, and without much food or medicine. Jews were prevented from leaving these places by the Nazis.

ESCAPE AND RESCUE

THE HOLOCAUST

The Holocaust was the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its allies and collaborators. The Nazis also persecuted the Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, Jehovah Witnesses, the disabled, and other groups it deemed to be “inferior” according to its racist policies.

KINDERTRANSPORT

The name given to a special humanitarian mission that attempted to take children (under the age of 17) from parts of Europe controlled by the Nazis before the start of the Second World War. The first transport left Europe in December and continued for nine months. The outbreak of the war made such rescue efforts impossible. The Kindertransport program helped approximately 10,000 children escape Nazi-controlled Europe to safety, primarily in England and the USA. The word Kinder in German means ‘children’.

RAVENSBRÜCK CONCENTRATION CAMP

A concentration camp established by the Nazi German regime, and located about 90km north of Berlin. It was built primarily as a women’s camp and many prisoners were forced to work as slave labourers for German industry. It was in operation from 1939-1945.

SS (IN GERMAN- SCHUTZSTAFFEL)

The elite, paramilitary unit that was responsible for security and surveillance during the Nazi regime in Germany. It operated in parallel to the regular German army (Wehrmacht) and used terror tactics to enforce its rules and regulations.

STATELESS

According to international law, a “stateless person” is someone who is not considered a national by any state or country under the operation of its law. A stateless person would not have a passport or travel documents issued by a specific country or state.

ESCAPE AND RESCUE

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

KRISTALLNACHT POGROM

The Neuberger's [In Their Own Words](#) website provides a diverse range of testimony excerpts from Holocaust survivors and witnesses. This activity focuses on the experiences of Jews who experienced or witnessed the Kristallnacht pogrom. This wave of violence swept across the German Reich on November 9 and 10, 1938. It was an unprecedented episode of a modern nation turning on a segment of its own citizenry. The Neuberger's testimony collection contains valuable first-person accounts of this turning point in the history of the Holocaust.

Listening to the recorded testimony of Holocaust survivors provides an important opportunity to discover how the Holocaust affected individuals and families. It demonstrates the human dimension of history and how decisions, big and small, affect people.

The testimony excerpts included in [In Their Own Words](#) are curated from longer, full length testimonies that average between 90 minutes and two hours. We've chosen to highlight some specific moments that are rich in detail and describe important moments in the survival of the narrator.

Remember that most Holocaust survivors are not trained historians. They may not recall all the dates or details perfectly. Similarly, they may not know what was happening in other parts of Europe or other events taking place. However, their recollections of the events they experienced personally provide us with a unique window into the history of the Holocaust.

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

Identify and discuss the various ways in which Jews experienced the Kristallnacht pogrom and why it was a turning point in civil society

Assess the decision-making process of individuals and the factors that guide these decisions

Analyze primary source material (the recorded accounts of Holocaust survivors)

This lesson focuses on how the Kristallnacht pogrom affected Jews across the German Reich which includes Austria (annexed to Germany in March 1938) and the Sudetenland (annexed to Germany in October 1938). Students will also have the option of completing a hands-on remembrance activity, detailed later in this lesson plan.

ACTIVITY I

Learning about the Kristallnacht pogrom through First Person Testimony

APPROACH:

View the testimony excerpts of Elfreda Fuchs from **IN THEIR OWN WORDS** who recalls witnessing the Kristallnacht pogrom in Austria. The testimony can be found at <http://intheirownwords.net/elfreda-elfriede-fuchs>

If time permits and you would like to include an additional account of experiencing the Kristallnacht program, you could show the Neuberger curated film, “A Stolen Childhood: Kristallnacht Remembered” which is approximately 8 minutes long. It can be accessed online at <https://vimeo.com/144948240>

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

The Kristallnacht pogrom got its name as a result of the shattered glass that covered German streets in the wake of the violence on November 9 and 10, 1938. The broken glass came from the windows of synagogues and Jewish-owned businesses that had been vandalized and destroyed during the violence.

The Kristallnacht pogrom was a turning point in the Nazi persecution of Jews. It marked the first time that the Nazi German regime arrested and imprisoned Jews on a national scale simply because they were Jews. Approximately 30,000 Jewish men from across the German Reich were deported to concentration camps during the pogrom. At least 100 Jews were killed during the violence while hundreds more were killed by the violence and brutal conditions they experienced in the concentration camps.

The Kristallnacht pogrom was evidence that Jews were no longer welcome in the German Reich, and as a result many attempted the difficult process of moving to another country. It was an important turning point in how Nazi Germany treated the Jews of Europe.

Questions:

- 1** What are some of the strongest memories that Elfreda has from witnessing the Kristallnacht pogrom?
- 2** Why do you think it was so difficult for Elfreda’s father to imagine that could be targeted during the Kristallnacht pogrom?
- 3** What does this account of the Kristallnacht pogrom tell us about human rights, citizenship or civil society?
- 4** Stones of Remembrance: The violence of the Kristallnacht pogrom claimed many Jewish lives between November 9 and 10, 1938. In the weeks that followed, many others died from wounds and injuries they incurred during the pogrom.

In Jewish tradition, it is not customary to place flowers on the graves of loved ones. Instead, small stones are placed on graves as a physical way to honour the deceased. Stones are permanent reminders of that the person is remembered.

In this activity students can create stones of remembrance to honour the memory of those killed in the Holocaust.

Materials needed:

- Stones of varying sizes that can be collected from nature or from craft stores.
- Paints and brushes, or markers suitable for painting and writing on stone.
- Modge-Podge or similar white-glue based product that can be used for decoupage technique on stones. Brushes or sponge to apply Modge-Podge.
- Holocaust themed images from magazines or downloaded and printed from reliable internet sources.

Method:

- After listening to the testimony and reflecting on the questions, create a visual response to the effects of the Kristallnacht pogrom on Jewish individuals and families.
- Pictures or symbols may be painted directly onto the stones, or text may be written using the appropriate markers.
- Images may be adhered onto the stones using the decoupage method, or in combination with text. See the examples below for inspiration. These examples were created by the students of Ms. Caroline Slifkin in the UK.

When the stones of remembrance are completed, create a classroom display so that students can share their work and reflections.



For more information on the Kristallnacht Pogrom visit:

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM)
at <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kristallnacht>

VOCABULARY LIST

KRISTALLNACHT POGROM

ANTISEMITISM

Antisemitism is prejudice against or hatred of Jews. The Holocaust is history's most extreme example of antisemitism.

CONCENTRATION CAMP

Prison camps where Jews, political prisoners, and other victims of the Nazis were confined for various reasons. Inmates were forced to work very long hours for the Nazis and did not receive much food or medical care. Camp conditions were over-crowded, unsanitary, and brutally violent.

DEPORTATION

The forced removal of Jews from their homes in the countries occupied by Nazi Germany. These Jewish people were told that they were going to be 're-settled' in new homes and communities in 'the East'. In reality they were transported to killing centres, death camp, concentration and labour camps.

GERMAN REICH

Literally translated as the German Empire or Realm, it often is used to refer to the German-speaking lands in Eastern Europe annexed by the Nazis in its quest to build a new (Third) German empire.

GESTAPO

The Gestapo were the official secret police of Nazi Germany and German-occupied Europe. They played a central role in the Nazi plan to destroy European Jews.

THE HOLOCAUST

The Holocaust was the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its allies and collaborators. The Nazis also persecuted the Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, Jehovah Witnesses, the disabled, and other groups it deemed to be "inferior" according to its racist policies.

KRISTALLNACHT

A pogrom (see definition below) organized by the Nazi government and carried out by Germans against Jews on November 9 and 10, 1938 across the country. Kristallnacht's name is derived from the mounds of broken glass that resulted from the violence and looting of synagogues and Jewish businesses. In some countries it is remembered as "the November Pogrom."

KRISTALLNACHT POGROM

POGROM

A pogrom is a violent act such as a riot that is carried out against a specific ethnic or religious group, particularly one aimed at Jews. Pogroms result in wide-spread destruction to property as well as inflicting injury upon people.

SYNAGOGUE

A Jewish house of worship.











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 Europe 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. Looks 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!!!

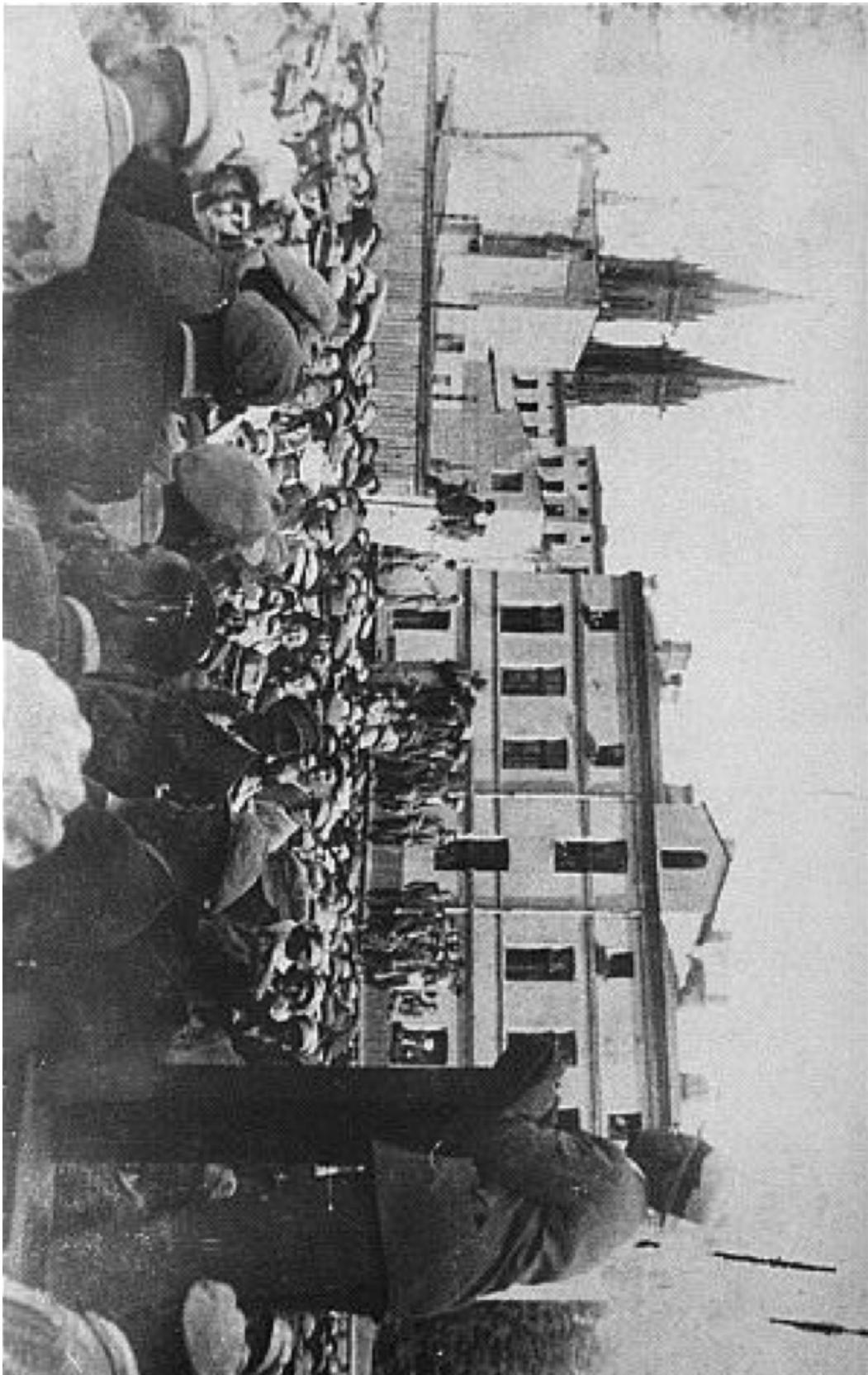
(At this point in the speech the crowd begins shouting. Many cry out: "We will not let the children go alone! We will all go!") Rumkowski continues:

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



VOCABULARY LIST

LIFE IN THE LODZ GHETTO

ANTISEMITISM

Antisemitism is prejudice against or hatred of Jews. The Holocaust is history's most extreme example of antisemitism.

AUSCHWITZ

Auschwitz was a network of concentration and death camps located in Nazi-occupied Poland. Initially a site to house political prisoners, by mid-war Auschwitz was murdering people in gas chambers. Of the estimated 1.3 million individuals sent to Auschwitz, 1.1 million died.

BLACK MARKET

An underground economy in which items are bought and sold, or bartered, outside the law and normal economic conditions.

CONCENTRATION CAMP

Prison camps where Jews, political prisoners, and other victims of the Nazis were confined for various reasons. Inmates were forced to work very long hours for the Nazis and did not receive much food or medical care. Camp conditions were overcrowded, unsanitary, and brutally violent.

DEATH CAMP

A type of prison camp established with the intent of systematically killing the people who were sent there.

DEATH MARCH

At the end of the war, as the Red Army approached the death and concentration camps in Nazi-occupied Europe, the Nazis forced the inmates of several camps to march to camps located within Germany. Conditions were brutal and many died on these forced marches.

DEPORTATION

The forced removal of Jews from their homes in the countries occupied by Nazi Germany. These Jewish people were told that they were going to be 're-settled' in new homes and communities in 'the East'. In reality they were transported to killing centres, death camp, concentration and labour camps.

DISPLACED PERSON (DP)

After the Holocaust, the survivors were classified as Displaced Persons, which means that they did not have a place or a home to go back to after the War.

LIFE IN THE LODZ GHETTO

FINAL SOLUTION

Term used by the Nazis to describe their plan to murder the Jews of Europe.

GESTAPO

The Gestapo were the official secret police of Nazi Germany and German-occupied Europe. They played a central role in the Nazi plan to destroy European Jews.

GHETTO

A place where Jews were forced to live by the Nazis and the people who helped them. These places were often dirty, and without much food or medicine. Jews were prevented from leaving these places by the Nazis.

THE HOLOCAUST

The Holocaust was the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its allies and collaborators. The Nazis also persecuted the Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, Jehovah Witnesses, the disabled, and other groups it deemed to be “inferior” according to its racist policies.

JEWISH POLICE

The Jewish police was officially part of the Judenrat (see definition below), but were often regarded with suspicion. Members of the Judenrat often feared that the Germans who appointed the Head of Jewish Police had direct control over them and could make them carry out their orders. The Jewish Police had no authority of their own. The mass deportations of Jews from the ghettos to the death camps had a deep effect on many of the Jewish police. Many quit the force, rather than assist the Nazis. As a result, these policemen were themselves deported.

JUDENRAT

A Council of Jewish leaders appointed by the Nazis, to carry out their orders in the ghettos. They oversaw daily life in the ghetto but could be replaced at any time by the Nazis if they did not carry out their orders.

LIBERATION

Liberation refers to the moment when Allied forces reached a concentration camp, death camp, or forced march.

LODZ GHETTO

When the Second World War began, the Jewish community of Łódź, Poland numbered approximately 200,000, about 1/3 of the city's total population. It was the second largest Jewish community in Poland. After the Nazi invasion, the Germans established a ghetto in Łódź and forced the city's Jewish community to live there. The residents were subject to harsh living conditions, a lack of food, and never knew when they might be deported to one of the killing centres.

LIFE IN THE LODZ GHETTO

YIDDISH

The language used by Jews in many parts of central and eastern Europe before the Holocaust. It is derived from German but also includes vocabulary from other European languages such as Russian and Polish. Although Yiddish has its origins in German, it is written with Hebrew letters.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

SURVIVAL AND THE EINSATZGRUPPEN

The Neuberger's **In Their Own Words** website offers the unique opportunity to hear testimony delivered by witnesses to the effects of the Einsatzgruppen, Jewish resistance and survival.

The Einsatzgruppen (often translated as mobile killing squads), and their role in carrying out the Holocaust is the focus of this lesson. Although we may be more familiar with the role of the network of concentration camps established by the Nazis, the Einsatzgruppen were ruthlessly efficient in carrying out their mission – the mass murder of Jews through primarily through mass shootings as well as the use of gas vans. They operated in the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), Russia, Ukraine and the Balkans. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) estimates that at least 1.5 million and possibly more than 2 million Holocaust victims died in mass shootings or gas vans in Soviet territory as a result ruthless actions of the Einsatzgruppen. Many of the victims were buried in unmarked grave sites often in fields and have been documented through the work of Father Patrick Desbois, a French Roman Catholic priest.

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

- Identify and discuss how and where the Einsatzgruppen functioned as well as their role in carrying out the Nazi genocide of Europe's Jews.
- Assess the decision-making process of individuals and the factors that guide these decisions
- Identify and discuss the historical context of the role of the Einsatzgruppen as one step in the Holocaust
- Analyze and critique primary source documents such as photographs as well as contemporary media sources.
- Evaluate historical sources for perspective, limitations and historical context.

This lesson focuses on the impact of the Einsatzgruppen through the experiences of Holocaust survivor Peter Silverman. An additional perspective is provided through the use of primary source material; an archival photograph. It contains 3 activities which can be alone or together depending on the curricular needs.

ACTIVITY I

Learning about the Einsatzgruppen and Survival through First Person Testimony

APPROACH:

Watch the Peter Silverman testimony excerpt which can be found online at <http://intheirownwords.net/peter-silverman> It is just under 5 minutes duration, and you may want to watch it more than once so that you can hear all the details of Peter's story.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

Jody, Peter Silverman's hometown was a small Polish town situated near three countries- Lithuania, Latvia, and the former Soviet Union (today Russia). The area was subjected to occupation by Soviet forces from 1939 - 1941 as per the Molotov- Ribbentrop Pact signed between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Later in 1941, Nazi Germany was at war with the Soviet Union and German troops occupied the area. In effect, the people of this region experienced first occupation by the Communist forces of the Soviet Union, and later by Nazi Germany. Life under both regimes was brutal, but for Jews living under Nazi control meant certain death. Additionally, penalties for hiding Jews or helping them were severe, and often resulted in death. The Germans also offered rewards to anyone who revealed where Jews were hiding making survival extremely difficult.

Questions:

- 1** What does people mean by his town and region was cut off from what was happening? What are some of the ways in which Peter and the other people in his hometown of Jody, learnt what was happening during the war?
- 2** Why do you think some people changed their minds about hiding or sheltering Jews during the Holocaust?
- 3** Peter describes the process that was carried out by the Einsatzgruppen and their collaborators in killing the Jews.

ACTIVITY II

Analyze a Primary Source Document-Historic Photograph

APPROACH:

Look carefully at the Primary Source photograph (Appendix II) of the Einsatzgruppen scene. Look for details as to its composition, what is in the forefront, the background, at the sides of the image, and what stands out to you.

Copyright: Public Domain.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

Photograph: Ivangorod, Ukraine. A German policeman aims his rifle at a woman and her child, 1942.

Where was this photo taken?

Ivangorod, in the Ukraine.

What does this photo tell us?

The mass murder of Jews in the occupied areas of the former Soviet Union began with the German invasion of the USSR on June 22, 1941. The Wehrmacht combat units were accompanied by four SS death squads (Einsatzgruppen A,B,C,D), whose mission was the immediate liquidation of all Jews (men, women and children). Day after day, together with local collaborators, the Einsatzgruppen carried out this mission – without restraint or compromise.

Who took the photo?

German army photographers documented the killings. One such individual, Reinhard Wiener, recorded a personal testimony in the early 1980s describing his work as a photographer documenting the killing of Jews and civilians in the Ukraine.

When was this photo taken?

1942

What was happening in other areas while this photo was being taken?

Think for a moment about the chronology of the Holocaust and the Second World War. It was a time of tremendous killing across Europe as the Einsatzgruppen swept across the Baltic states, the Balkans, and Eastern Europe.

How did the photo survive?

Many photographs survived because of the official role of the photographer. If you do not expect to lose a war, you have nothing to fear by photography.

Does it change or alter what you think of the people involved in the crimes of National Socialism? Of officers, their wives and family members, of everyday citizens?

Entire families were often wiped out in a single day – grandparents, adults and children. They were murdered in forests, Jewish cemeteries, anti-tank trenches, on the banks of rivers and in the rivers themselves, and in pits dug along the way (mostly by the victims themselves). The horror was revealed in its entirety when the postwar Extraordinary Soviet Commission began to investigate Nazi crimes and discovered that entire communities of Jews had been completely destroyed. Their fate was related, in many cases, by local neighbors (some of them collaborators), as well as the very few Jews who had survived the murder operations and lived to tell their tale.

Questions:

Summarize what is this photograph reveals to us considering the points below. You don't need to include all of these points but you should choose at least 3 to inform your response.

- What is happening in the photograph?
- Where was the photograph taken?
- When was it taken? (season, year etc)
- From what vantage point is the photograph taken?
- Who do you think was taking the image?
- Why do you think this photograph was taken?
- How do you think this photograph survived?
Why do you think it survived?
- How can we go about finding out more about this photograph?

ACTIVITY III

The Work of Father Patrick Desbois

APPROACH:

Read the article about Father Desbois (Appendix I) that appeared in the Winnipeg Free Press in 2013. Father Desbois was in Winnipeg to speak to high school students about his work and his motivation. After reading the article answer the questions below.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

Father Patrick Desbois has spent many years researching the Holocaust, fighting anti-semitism, and building relations between Catholics and Jews. Father Desbois is a Roman Catholic priest and the President of Yahad – In Unum, a global humanitarian organization he founded in 2004 dedicated to identifying and commemorating the sites of Jewish and Roma mass executions in Eastern Europe during the Second World War. He has interviewed and recorded the testimonies of Holocaust witnesses as part of his work documenting the killing fields and unmarked graves that resulted from the actions of the Einsatzgruppen during the Holocaust.

Questions:

- 1** Why is it important to Father Desbois to study the Holocaust and discover where victims of the Einsatzgruppen are buried?
- 2** What does Father Desbois believe is the role of the individual in society when we encounter or see human rights abuses?
- 3** Compare what Peter Silverman says about the role of local people during the killing actions to that of Father Desbois. What are some of the different ways in which people responded? Why?
- 4** What point of view does the journalist take in her article?
- 5** In what ways were the local population affected by the Holocaust?

The following resources will provide you additional information about the Einsatzgruppen:

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/einsatzgruppen>
The website of the USHMM provides a detailed overview of the Lodz Ghetto including primary source materials

<https://www.yahadinunum.org/patrick-desbois/>
The website of Yahad in Unum (lit. together in one) the organization founded by Father Desbois.

APPENDIX I

Winnipeg Free Press Article on Father Desbois

Documenting the Holocaust

Catholic priest dedicates life to hearing witnesses' stories

Father Patrick Desbois is coming to Winnipeg to speak to high school students and receive an honorary degree from the U of W. A tool to prevent genocide might be right in your pocket, suggests a Roman Catholic priest who has devoted the last decade to uncovering stories of Holocaust victims.

"Take out your telephone and send a picture to CNN" or another news organization, says Rev. Patrick Desbois, explaining how anyone with a cellphone camera can document human-rights abuses or other atrocities. "We see that in the world (now); one person sends an image, and it changes things." Since 2002, the French priest has been changing how the world understands the Holocaust by documenting the deaths of more than 1.5 million Jews at the hands of the Einsatzgruppen, the Nazi mobile killing units that operated in German-occupied Europe between 1941 and 1944. Desbois visits Winnipeg next week to speak to high school students and accept an honorary degree from the University of Winnipeg. He is scheduled to participate in a discussion on indifference with Sen. Roméo Dallaire at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 2, at Shaarey Zedek Synagogue, 561 Wellington Cres. The free public event is jointly sponsored by the university, the synagogue and the Freeman Family Foundation Holocaust Education Centre. Intrigued initially by his grandfather's reluctance to speak of his Second World War experiences in the Rawa-Ruska concentration camp on the border between Poland and Ukraine, Desbois decided to visit it himself. He discovered thousands of prisoners -- mostly Jewish -- had been killed and buried in mass graves during the war. Local citizens had witnessed the events and sometimes were forced to participate in the burials. Spurred on by these stories, Desbois set out to interview more witnesses and recorded the interviews, interspersed with his own story, in his 2008 book, *The Holocaust by Bullets*. Desbois now divides his time between working in Jewish-Catholic relations in his native France and interviewing witnesses through the research organization Yahad-In Unum, which he helped found in 2004. Teams from Yahad-In Unum visit communities throughout Eastern Europe for up to 17 days at a time, interviewing witnesses to events that occurred decades in the past. "Most of the time, they were forced to do things; they had no choice," Desbois says of how citizens of the former Soviet Union were requisitioned to dig graves, remove gold teeth or otherwise assist the Germans in the atrocities dating back to 1941, when the Germans invaded the U.S.S.R. Along with hearing the stories and identifying graves, Desbois uncovered much guilt in those who were reluctant witnesses to the killings. Many of them had never before shared their stories. "These people were not free because of the German Reich, and they were not free after" the war, he says, adding they remained silent about the killings for decades. To date, Desbois and his team have conducted 3,300 interviews, collecting memories from witnesses about the locations of the killings and asking for details about the colour of army uniforms and the weather conditions in order to corroborate accounts and document the lives and deaths of Jews. "We're fighting hard to find the last mass graves," he explains in a telephone interview en route to Romania on another interview mission. "We give the dead back to their families, and now families are asking us to find their loved ones." Desbois' work helps the Jewish community and beyond understand the broader history of the Holocaust, says Belle Jarniewski, chairwoman of the Winnipeg-based Holocaust education centre. "It's very moving to me that a Catholic priest would dedicate his life to restoring the memory and the humanity of these victims of the Shoah," explains Jarniewski, daughter of two survivors of the Holocaust, or Shoah, as it is referred to in Hebrew. "He has gone in there, and being a Catholic priest, people were willing to talk to him. He has been able to restore humanity to these people who were murdered." Restoring that humanity has deeply affected the 57-year-old Desbois, who

considers this work his life's mission. Now when he prays, he calls up the names of murdered Jewish children, some whom he has discovered were buried alive alongside their dead parents. "It changes your faith. You present yourself to God with all the names of people who were children when they died," he says of the impact of hearing hundreds of gruesome stories. "I am not alone when I pray to God." However disturbing the stories, Desbois believes this type of research and study is vital to prevent history from repeating itself. "If you study the Holocaust, you will be strong to fight a new genocide," he says. "The first step to fight the disease is to know the disease."

brenda@suderman.com

April 26, 2013

To learn more:

FOR more information about Rev. Patrick Desbois and his work, check out the website of Yahad-In Unum (www.yahadinunum.org/), the organization that carries out research into mass murders of Jews and Roma people in Eastern Europe between 1941 and 1944. The organization's name means "together" in Hebrew and Latin.

APPENDIX II

Archival Photograph of an Einsatzgruppen Killing Site

Copyright: Public Domain



VOCABULARY LIST

SURVIVAL AND THE EINSATZGRUPPEN

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Prison camps where Jews, political prisoners, and other victims of the Nazis were confined for various reasons. Inmates were forced to work very long hours for the Nazis and did not receive much food or medical care. Camp conditions were overcrowded, unsanitary, and brutally violent.

DEATH CAMP

A type of prison camp established with the intent of systematically killing the people who were sent there.

DEATH MARCH

At the end of the war, as the Red Army approached the death and concentration camps in Nazi-occupied Europe, the Nazis forced the inmates of several camps to march to camps located within Germany. Conditions were brutal and many died on these forced marches.

DEPORTATION

The forced removal of Jews from their homes in the countries occupied by Nazi Germany. These Jewish people were told that they were going to be 're-settled' in new homes and communities in 'the East'. In reality they were transported to killing centres, death camp, concentration and labour camps.

DISPLACED PERSON (DP)

After the Holocaust, the survivors were classified as Displaced Persons, which means that they did not have a place or a home to go back to after the War.

EINSATZGRUPPEN

Mobile killing squads that often preceded the regular army troop. They swept across Eastern Europe, the Balkans and the Baltics killing approximately 1.5 million Jewish by mass shootings.

SURVIVAL AND THE EINSATZGRUPPEN

FINAL SOLUTION

Term used by the Nazis to describe their plan to murder the Jews of Europe.

GESTAPO

The Gestapo were the official secret police of Nazi Germany and German-occupied Europe. They played a central role in the Nazi plan to destroy European Jews.

GHETTO

A place where Jews were forced to live by the Nazis and the people who helped them. These places were often dirty, and without much food or medicine. Jews were prevented from leaving these places by the Nazis.

THE HOLOCAUST

The Holocaust was the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its allies and collaborators. The Nazis also persecuted the Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, Jehovah Witnesses, the disabled, and other groups it deemed to be “inferior” according to its racist policies.

LIBERATION

Liberation refers to the moment when Allied forces reached a concentration camp, death camp, or forced march.

MOLOTOV-RIBBENTROP PACT

Sometimes simply referred to as the Ribbentrop Pact, it was a non-aggression treaty between Nazi Germany and the former Soviet Union (today Russia). It was signed in Moscow on August 23, 1939 just before the start of the Second World War. Under the agreement the two powers divide-up Poland between them. The agreement was terminated on June 22, 1941 when Germany invaded the Soviet Union.

YIDDISH

The language used by Jews in many parts of central and eastern Europe before the Holocaust. It is derived from German but also includes vocabulary from other European languages such as Russian and Polish. Although Yiddish has its origins in German, it is written with Hebrew letters.

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