

UCL CENTRE FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATION



Striving to live

How did Jewish people respond and resist during the Holocaust?

Rudolph Vrba worksheets

Transcript from the film extract

Narrator: Some suspect the worst, most have no idea.

Vrba: The idea for a mother, being told after this terrible journey that her children are going to be gassed, was an utter outrageous idea in her mind. Because, after all what she suffered, here comes a gangster who wants to increase her suffering. So, she was tempted to go immediately to the next neat officer and say that, “this man says, sir, that my children are going to be gassed!” And he says, “Madam, do you think we are barbarians?”

Narrator: Those selected to be gassed were told they would be deloused in the showers before starting work, then they would rejoin their families. They waited their turn, sometimes for hours.

Additional context to add to the film extract

TT Can I ask you...I mean, can I ask you a very direct question? *You* and people like you who were prisoners, *you* knew what was going to happen so why—what would have happened if *you* had warned them, and indeed why didn't you warn them?

RV Because it was incredible for them to take...Don't forget that by time we were prisoners we didn't look like people whom they knew. For them, we were people dressed in criminals' uniform, so if somebody went there and said, "Look you are going to be gassed" or something, ...

White, M. (2019) 'A Museological Approach to Collecting Oral Histories: A Case Study of the Holocaust Collections at the Imperial War Museum' page 144

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The World at War TV series. Episode 20 - 'Genocide: 1941-1945' (1974)

Questions for reflection

How does Vrba explain a mother's inability to accept someone telling her what was about to happen?

How does Vrba explain that a mother would be more likely to believe an officer rather than a fellow prisoner (gangster)?

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What does Vrba suggest an officer might have relied on to persuade a mother she was being foolish or hysterical?

Why does Vrba believe it would have been hopeless to warn newly arrived prisoners about their imminent murder?

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