

# Case study cards

- Print these case study cards
- Each group of five students will need a set of 10 cards for discussion

Mordecai Anielewicz led the first armed uprising against the Nazis in any town or city anywhere in German-occupied Europe. This became known as the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. He wrote to his friend, Yitzhak Zuckerman:

“It is impossible to put into words what we have been through. One thing is clear, what happened exceeded our boldest dreams. The Germans ran twice from the ghetto. One of our companies held out for 40 minutes and another for more than six hours... Several of our companies attacked the dispersing Germans. Our losses... are minimal. That is also an achievement. Yechiel fell. He fell a hero, at the machine-gun. I feel that great things are happening and what we dared do is of great, enormous importance...

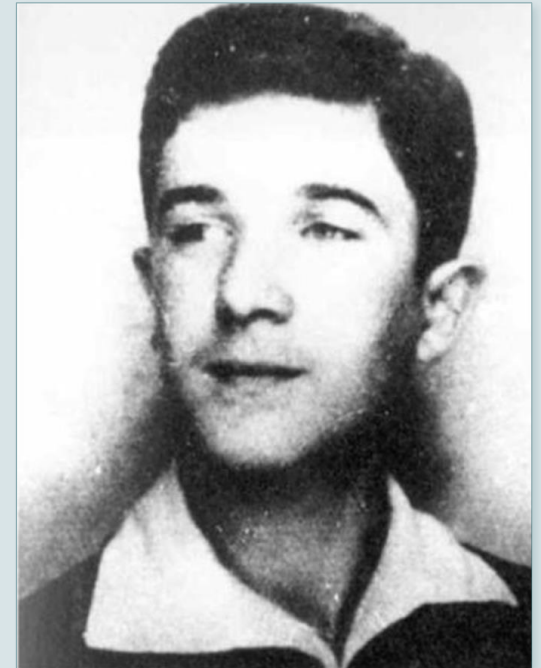
It is impossible to describe the conditions under which the Jews of the ghetto are now living. Only a few will be able to hold out. The remainder will die sooner or later. Their fate is decided. In almost all the hiding places in which thousands are concealing themselves it is not possible to light a candle for lack of air...

We heard the marvellous report on our fighting by the Shavit radio station. The fact that we are remembered beyond the ghetto walls encourages us in our struggle.

Peace go with you, my friend! Perhaps we may still meet again! The dream of my life has risen to become fact. Self-defence in the ghetto is a reality. Jewish armed resistance and revenge are facts. I have been a witness to the magnificent, heroic fighting of Jewish men in battle.”

*23 April 1943*

Yad Vashem. Document number 145, Shoah Resources Centre, International School of Holocaust Studies.



Yad Vashem #64255

On 8 May 1943, after holding out for several weeks with just a few smuggled guns and homemade grenades against German soldiers armed with tanks, machine guns and flamethrowers, 23 year old Anielewicz took his own life rather than surrender. By 16 May the resistance was overwhelmed and any survivors in the ghetto were deported.

In 1944, the Jewish *Sonderkommando* – prisoners working at the gas chambers of Auschwitz – plotted to fight back against their SS guards. Rosa Robota, a young Jewish prisoner aged just 23 years old, had the task of getting explosives for the *Sonderkommando* to blow up the crematoria buildings.

Rosa persuaded Jewish women prisoners to steal gunpowder from a factory where they worked making weapons for the German army.



Rosa Robota  
Yad Vashem #84526



Ella Gärtner  
USHMM #08518



Esther Wajsblum  
USHMM #80566



Regina Safirsztajn  
USHMM #77570A

17 year old Esther Wajsblum, her 15 year old sister, Hanka, and their friend Regina smuggled out tiny amounts of gunpowder from the factory, wrapped in pieces of paper or cloth and hidden in their clothing. They gave these little packages to Ella Gärtner who then handed them to Rosa. Rosa in turn passed the packages to other members of the Auschwitz resistance, hidden in the false bottom of a food tray. Homemade bombs were made with the gunpowder, small pieces of stone and crumbled brick. These were then smuggled to the *Sonderkommando*.

On 7 October 1944, the *Sonderkommando* attacked their SS guards with hammers, stones and axes. With their homemade bombs they blew up the crematoria then cut the barbed wire surrounding the camp and fled into a nearby wood. Hundreds of prisoners escaped, but all were soon recaptured and killed.

The SS discovered that Rosa, Ella, Esther and Regina had stolen the gunpowder. Despite being tortured they refused to give the names of others in the resistance. The four women were taken to the gallows to be hanged in front of the other inmates. At the last moment of her life, Rosa cried out to the crowd, 'Hazak Ve'ematz!': 'Be strong and have courage!'

Faye was born in 1919 into a large, orthodox Jewish family and lived in Lenin – a small Polish shtetl close to the border with the Soviet Union. In 1935 at the age of just 16, Faye took over the running of the family's photography business.

With the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Lenin fell under Nazi occupation. Soon afterwards all able-bodied men were deported from Lenin before a ghetto was established in May 1942. By August the Nazis had decided to liquidate the ghetto and killed 1,850 Jews who had been living there – including Faye's family. Only a handful of people were spared, one of whom was Faye who was ordered by the Nazis to develop their rolls of film documenting the massacre. This she did, making copies for herself.

Faye fled the town during a partisan raid, and found refuge in the forest where she joined a group of partisans and worked as a nurse. A little while later Faye retrieved her camera and other equipment, and over the next two years took thousands of pictures documenting life as a partisan.



USSR, Partisans. Winter 1944  
Yad Vashem #53434



Polesye, Poland. Russian partisans  
from the Molotov Brigade, 1943-1944  
Yad Vashem #51324



Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum



Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

This aluminium flask was found after the war, buried in the ashes of the Auschwitz-Birkenau crematoria. It contained eyewitness accounts of mass murder, written by the Jewish *Sonderkommando* forced to work in the gas chambers.

In the death camps Jewish prisoners were forced to lead thousands of Jewish men, women and children into the gas chambers. Then they dragged out the dead bodies, pulled gold teeth from their mouths, and burned their bodies.

After the war, documents were found buried in the soil of Auschwitz-Birkenau, written by some of these Jewish prisoners – the *Sonderkommando*. Among them were the writings of Zalman Gradowski:

“Dear Finder, search everywhere, in every inch of soil. Tens of documents are buried under it – mine and those of other persons – which will throw light on everything that was happening here.

Great amounts of teeth are also buried here. It was we, the *Sonderkommando*, who have strewn them all over the ground, as many as we could, so that the world should find material traces of the millions of murdered people. We ourselves have lost hope of being able to live to see the moment of liberation...”

Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

The *Sonderkommando* knew that the Nazis would try to hide all trace of their crimes, and that they themselves would be murdered to stop them telling what they had seen. So they hid these papers in the human ashes they were made to bury, in the hope that one day the truth might be discovered.

Zalman Gradowski was also one of the leaders of the *Sonderkommando* revolt of 7 October 1944. He was killed after the *Sonderkommando* attacked their SS guards and blew up one of the crematoriums in Auschwitz-Birkenau.





Portrait with son  
Yad Vashem #4406

Ringelblum's archive, buried in tins and milk churns was discovered under the ruins of the ghetto after the war.



Uncovering the archive  
Yad Vashem #39262



Milk churns and tins  
Yad Vashem #11671

The historian Emanuel Ringelblum led a group who kept a record of daily life and death inside the Warsaw ghetto. This secret archive was called *Oneg Shabbat*.

As Jewish people arrived in the ghetto, they brought with them stories of what was happening in the rest of Poland. This too was recorded.

All kinds of people contributed, with different political views and religious backgrounds, adults and children, men and women.

The group also collected documents on the deportations and murder of Jews so that there would be a record of what was happening and the world would know. They buried the archive of papers, photographs, drawings and so on, to keep them safe.

“It must all be recorded with not a single fact omitted. And when the time comes – as it surely will – let the world read and know what the murderers have done.”

Yad Vashem

In March 1943, Ringelblum and his family escaped the Warsaw ghetto and went into hiding. Ringelblum returned to the ghetto a month later to join the uprising. He was captured but escaped and rejoined his family.

In March 1944 their hideout was discovered. Emanuel Ringelblum, his wife, 13 year old son, and about 30 other Jews they had been hiding with were taken into the ruins of what was left of the ghetto, and murdered.

Born 10 December 1927 in Vilnius, Lithuania, Yitskhok's childhood was disrupted by the outbreak of World War Two. After a period of living under Soviet rule, Vilnius fell to the Nazis in the summer of 1941. Soon afterwards young Yitskhok began to keep a diary which he continued to write after the family had been moved to the Vilna ghetto.

“The first ghetto day begins. I run right into the street. The little streets are still full of a restless mass of people...I feel as if I were in a box. There is no air to breathe. Wherever you go you encounter a gate that hems you in.”

Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, Catalogue #53237

Yitskhok quickly adapted to ghetto life, taking on adult roles and responsibilities. Nevertheless he also found time to attend various clubs, and when the ghetto school was established in October 1942 he wrote about it enthusiastically in his diary. In September 1943 as the ghetto was being evacuated, 15 year-old Yitskhok and his family went into hiding. Two weeks later they were discovered and were murdered in mass graves at Ponary. Yitskhok's cousin Sarah, who had managed to escape the ghetto, discovered his diary when she later returned with partisans. No one had known about the diary.

“In our group two important and interesting things were decided. We create the following sections in our literary group: Yiddish poetry, and what is most important, a section that is to engage in collecting ghetto folklore. This section interested and attracted me very much... I feel that I shall participate zealously in this little circle, because the ghetto folklore which is amazingly cultivated...must be collected and cherished as a treasure for the future.”

Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, Catalogue #53237



Yitskhok in Vilnius (Vilna)  
with his father Eli circa 1930

A Jewish father and son walking outside near a body of water in Vilna.  
Pictured are Eli Rudashevsky and his son Yitzhak. – USHMM #14730

# Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira

A Rabbi, a writer, and a teacher, Kalonymus acquired a reputation during the inter-war period as someone staunchly committed to young people and their education. Kalonymus came from a lineage of significant Hasidic figures and while his intellect brought him rapid academic achievements, his skill with people also allowed him to emerge as a religious leader.

Kalonymus had strong religious beliefs and he was disillusioned with increasing secularisation. This, together with his passion for learning, led him to establish a prestigious religious school which became the largest in inter-war Warsaw. For Kalonymus, students had to be active in their own learning and have a vision of their 'potential greatness'.

With the Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939 his wife, son and close family were all killed in a bombing raid. Kalonymus was given opportunities to flee Warsaw, but he instead chose to stay and was interned in the ghetto. There, he worked tirelessly to maintain Jewish cultural life and act as a spiritual leader. He upheld various social customs, created a secret synagogue, and delivered sermons to a small congregation.

In early January 1943 Kalonymus buried his writings. A couple of months later he was deported from the ghetto, and after passing through various camps was murdered in Operation Harvest Festival in November 1943.



Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira  
Yad Vashem #14253693



Born in London in 1910, Leon Greenman lived in Rotterdam in the Netherlands with his wife Esther ('Else') and their two and a half year old son Barney. In October 1942 they were rounded up with other Jewish families and interned in Westerbork transit camp. Leon, Else and Barney were deported to Auschwitz in January 1943. Else and Barney were murdered upon arrival.

Of the 700 people who arrived from Westerbork that day, 50 men were counted off for work. Leon was one of the men selected. Not knowing of the fate of his wife and young child, Leon used his initiative to survive. He connected with people for mutual support. He visited barracks in Auschwitz III-Monowitz offering to sing for extra bread or soup and supplemented his rations by using his barber skills. He made decisions such as choosing where to sleep during a death march to ensure he didn't die in the frozen night. He was determined to see his family again and tell the world what had happened.

Seriously ill with pneumonia, Leon had a dream where Else and Barney were missing. Telling a friend of his dream and that he no longer wanted to go on, his friend asked what Else and Barney would do if they returned to England and found Leon had given up. This made Leon resolve to survive in the hope of being reunited with his family.

*An Englishman in Auschwitz, page 96. Vallentine Mitchell Publishers*



Leon Greenman with his wife Esther ('Else') and son Barney (Barnett)  
Jewish Museum, London



Rudolf Vrba  
Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum 20892/2



Alfred Wetzler  
Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum 14047

On 7 April 1944, Rudolf and Alfred – two Slovak Jews – began their escape from Auschwitz-Birkenau. Wearing clothes taken from the “Canada” warehouses, the men initially hid in a hollowed-out wood stack close to where inmates worked during the day, just inside the external perimeter fence of the camp. After staying there for three days as the SS searched for them, the pair made their way on foot towards the Polish border with Slovakia to spread the word about what was in store for the Jews of Hungary. Over a week later they finally reached the town of Žilina, where they made contact with local Jewish leaders and told them about their experiences. The men set about compiling a written report, complete with sketches, which was finished by the end of April and translated into German.

The Vrba-Wetzler report, as it became known, confirmed previous accounts of what was happening at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Jewish leaders in Slovakia passed the report on to others, but it was not until June that the document reached the Allies and started to be publicised. In between this time deportations from Hungary to Auschwitz had intensified. On 7 July 1944, the Hungarian head of State halted deportations. The report was finally published in full in November 1944.

Ursula was born in Plauen, Germany, on 7 December 1930 to her parents Irma and Leo. As the situation for German Jews deteriorated throughout the 1930s, the family waited in vain to receive visas to travel to America. In February 1939 Ursula was put onto a Kindertransport train from Cologne to Brussels, where she stayed in an orphanage until her parents arrived later.

For the next few years the family lived with the help of the Belgian underground before going into hiding with a Belgian family in 1942. A few months later, Irma and Leo were arrested after being denounced as Jews. Ursula was left unharmed, as the police believed that she was the child of a Dutch neighbour.

Ursula turned to a family friend who helped the 12 year-old find refuge in a nearby convent where other Jewish children were already in hiding.

Ursula was forced to change her name to Janine Hambenne, and from June 1943 until liberation in September 1944 lived undetected in the convent. After the war she was reunited with her parents. The family emigrated to the United States in 1947.



Ursula Klipstein poses holding the traditional Schultuete [a school cone] filled with candies on her first day of school 1937  
USHMM #99697