
Striving to live

How did Jewish people respond and resist during the Holocaust?

Key Question: How did Jewish people respond and resist during the Holocaust?

Teaching Aims & Learning Objectives

- Lesson 1 - To consider the various challenges Jewish people faced.
- Lesson 2 - To consider how and why people responded and resisted in the ways they did.

Rationale

National research conducted into teaching about the Holocaust in English schools by the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education (Pettigrew *et al.*, 2009) revealed the potential for Jewish people to be portrayed in classrooms as passive victims without agency. More recently, UCL research published in 2016 on student knowledge and understanding, underlined a general lack of knowledge and some 'distorted understandings and misconceptions about who the Jews were' before the Holocaust, (Foster *et al.*, 2016: 105). The report also noted that whilst there was awareness of resistance during the Holocaust, it was 'not something they [students] chose to prioritise within their short accounts' (Foster *et al.*, 2016: 51).

These two lessons aim to develop students' appreciation of the diverse forms of response and resistance during the Holocaust. They work to establish secure knowledge and understanding of how Jewish people responded in increasingly deleterious circumstances. In doing so, the lessons position Jewish people as having agency rather than as passive victims, and as people who resisted Nazi persecution when facing overwhelming situations.

Key Information

- This material is intended for Year 9 students and older. It is specifically devised for the history classroom, but some elements could be adapted for other subject specialisms.
- Timings are suggested on the basis of two one-hour lessons.
- Prior study of the Holocaust is essential. Students will need to know the context within which Jewish people were living – including the progress of the Second World War and Nazi-occupation of Poland – and the circumstances in ghettos, camps or in hiding. As such, this lesson should sit towards the end of a sequence of lessons on the Holocaust.

Teachers will need the following resources:

- Accompanying PowerPoint
- A set of ten case study cards for each group of five students
- Rudolph Vrba worksheets with film transcript, additional context and reflection questions
- Rudolph Vrba film extract
- Post-it notes

Overarching Question: How did Jewish people respond and resist during the Holocaust?

Lesson Plan 1

Teaching Aims & Learning Objectives

- To consider the various challenges Jewish people faced.

Introduction - Who are the 'people' we are talking about? (15 mins)

Using slide 4, display the photograph of the Szwajcer family in 1930s Poland.

Explain that the next two lessons will explore the various ways Jewish people responded and resisted during the Holocaust.

Ask students to look at the photograph and describe what they can see. Ensure students know the photograph was taken in 1936 before the Second World War had started.

Beginning with this photograph, the first lesson follows two themes; the changing situation in Poland from the 1930s to 1940s (students will need to have prior knowledge of the chronology of Second World War and the occupation of Poland), and families. Families are a focus in the first lesson - spanning generations, genders, individual personalities, dispositions and temperaments. This is to enable students to grasp the concept of different kinds of people being caught up in the Holocaust. Of course families are not the only way to communicate the idea of diversity within communities, and sensitivity may be required when working with looked after children or those with difficult family histories.

You do not need to make the themes explicit, but make sure students know that the first photograph was taken in 1936 before the Second World War started. As the lesson progresses students will encounter a picture drawn in 1941 and a photograph taken in 1944. It will be important to point out the context of the images to highlight change over time.

Ask the following questions (you may wish to structure this discussion by asking some of the class to focus on the different genders and ages of people in the image):

- How would you describe these people? *Men, women, children, parents, grandparents*
- How are they related? *Consider varying generations and proximity to each other.*
- Let's go forward in time. As Poland fell under Nazi occupation in 1939 and the Holocaust unfolded, if families like these had wanted to 'fight back', what challenges do you think people might have faced? *Consider lack of weapons, training, leadership and direction, organization, solidarity or agreement (given differing cultural attitudes,*

expressions of faith – or no faith, and generational differences in ghettos for example). Consider the language barriers amongst so many different nationalities in one ghetto or camp, consider the poor mental, physical and emotional health of people (the result of cramped disease-ridden conditions, terrible treatment and starvation). It might also be helpful to highlight that in the face of German forces, Poland fell in two weeks and France within a month.

- Families span generations, genders and personalities. Would some have found it easier to act than others? *Explore youth versus community elders, parents with young children, adults with elderly parents, men with pregnant wives, women with multiple family caring roles, elderly people or very young children. What choices would people like these have to make and what might be the consequences?*

In the class discussion, it is important to bring out the following points:

- This photograph is from Poland in 1936. It was a place where Jews faced a considerable amount of animosity and persecution – some of it state-sponsored, but where their circumstances were not the same as for German Jews and the Holocaust had not yet been conceived.
- The people in the photograph are non-combatants, many other families would have been like them.
- They are people who have personal circumstances which will affect their actions and behaviour – their human relationships would impact how they might respond to the events of the Holocaust. The photograph ‘stands in’ for ordinary Jewish families across Europe.

See the Additional Information section for further information

What challenges did families face? (35 mins)

The remainder of Lesson 1 focuses on crucial context when considering Jewish responses and resistance during the Holocaust. It is important to cover in the first lesson the huge challenges faced by Jewish people: wrestling with despair, grappling with the deception of the perpetrators and battling the determined attempt to destroy Jewish families and centuries of culture and history. The three words ‘despair’, ‘deception’ and ‘destruction’ are an attempt to convey in a simple way the sheer, often insurmountable odds against survival faced by families. This material is bleak, so it is important to take things slowly and monitor student responses. Before offering the words ‘despair’, ‘deception’ and ‘destruction’, allow time for students to ponder the material and to suggest what words or labels best sum up each theme.

Despair (15 mins)

Whilst Jewish life in Poland before the war would have featured varying levels of antisemitism, we now turn our attention to Nazi-occupied Poland with the 'Final Solution' well under way. It will be helpful to remind students of any work you have done on conditions in the ghettos as you introduce Rozenfeld's drawing to them. This activity helps students to understand the despair with which people were forced to wrestle.

Using slides 6 – 9, explore the drawing of the man pulling a cart with a young boy. This is another family in the Warsaw ghetto in the winter of 1941.

This activity may need more time depending on student responses. A hugely powerful drawing, it may affect students in different ways, especially those bereaved.

As a whole class discussion, ask some of the following questions to develop the story. The drawing could also be printed out and students asked to annotate it before embarking on a wider discussion.

Ask some of the following questions:

What can you say about the person walking in front of the cart?

- What is their gender? *Male, bearded.*
- What are they wearing? What does this suggest about their life? *Bare feet and old clothes suggests poverty and a hard life. The scarf around his face suggests it is cold/winter.*
- What are they doing? *Pulling something heavy – the man has something tied around his body.*
- How do they feel? How does the artist try to communicate this? *Sad, downcast eyes. Bowed over – weight of the cart but also the weight of the world. A sense of suffering.*

What can you say about the person lying on the cart?

- What is their gender? *Woman in a dress. She has no shoes.*
- What has happened? *She has died. Just a newspaper covers her. A brick holds it down. There is no decent covering of her body. Her feet and knees are large in comparison to her thin legs and arms suggesting starvation.*

What can you say about the person walking behind the cart?

- *A young child with a thin drawn face. A small boy?*
- What are they wearing? What does this suggest about their life? *The boots are too big, so the child is making do.*
- What are they doing? *Holding onto the cart. Following behind.*
- How do they feel? How does the artist try to communicate this? *Thin drawn face, little hat, raised eyebrows suggests furrowed brow. Small – in sense of stature but also small in the sense of how he feels.*

What does the drawing tell us?

- Where might these people be going? *A cemetery, to bury the body.*
- What might be the relationship between them? *The boy has lost his mother. The man is someone who carries bodies, or maybe he's the father/husband.*
- Who else can you see in the picture? *Other people, inhabitants of the ghetto. They have old clothes too – this is shown by the lines to depict the fabric as old and worn. There are other children too.*
- Where might they have they come from? *Maybe they are coming back from the cemetery if they are walking in the other direction. Perhaps the artist is showing that there are other people but they have turned their backs on the family – shows the loneliness of dying – everyone is just getting on and trying to survive as best they can. Or perhaps it's a sign of respect – to not look at the body as it's meant to be a private situation.*
- What time of year is it? *Ber (the father) is wearing a scarf around his face but no shoes, it must be cold. He and Josele (his son) are wearing hats. The others are wearing heavy coats, covering heads, collars turned up. One person has their hands in their pockets. There is a suggestion of ice, frost, snow on the ground with marks from the footsteps. It must be winter.*
- What story is beginning to emerge? *Father, son, lost mother, wife, hard life, little food or adequate clothing. A husband trying to bury his wife.*
- What does this suggest about life in the Warsaw Ghetto? *Harsh, brutal, lonely, full of despair.*

Having discussed the drawing, share with students the historical context:

The drawing is by an artist called Benjamin (Benek) Rozenfeld, commissioned by Oneg Shabbat to record life in the Warsaw Ghetto. Students will learn about the Oneg Shabbat archive in Lesson 2.

The man in the drawing is Ber Ajzensztat (Eisenstadt), aged 42, with his son, 7 year old Josele in the winter of 1941. He was a wagon man who transported various goods. In the picture he is carrying his wife who died of starvation and exhaustion. He spent three days in vain to secure 20 Zlotys to bury her. He needed the money to give her a burial in a grave rather than a mass grave. He tried to bury her with dignity – even though he appears to be in poor health himself.

In the class discussion it is important to bring out the following points:

- Life in the Warsaw Ghetto was brutal and harsh. These conditions could have led many to feel overwhelmed by despair, desolation and anguish.
- Consider how hard it would have been for ordinary people to resist the events of the Holocaust when exhausted by an onslaught of physical, mental and emotional trials.

See the Additional Information section (below) for further information.

Deception (15 mins)

It is important to consider what people might have known about what was going to happen to them and even if they did 'know', whether they actually understood this.

Explore the idea of deception with the following activities.

Using slides 10-13 explore the photograph of the women and children at Auschwitz-Birkenau awaiting their murder.

As you share segments of the image, ask the following questions:

- What can you see in this photograph?
- Where has it been taken?
- How would you describe the appearance of these people?
- What are they doing?
- Do they appear to have any idea, knowledge or understanding of where they are?
- What strikes you about the people in the photograph?

Once students have established that these people seem unknowing regarding what will happen next, share with them the historical context of this photograph. This photograph was taken by SS guards at Auschwitz Birkenau in the summer of 1944. The people in the photo are Hungarian Jews. Other people from their communities, who came on the same train that brought them to Auschwitz, are already being gassed nearby, their bodies being burned in the crematoria. The same fate awaits the people in this photograph. Within hours all of them will be murdered, and yet their demeanor suggests little or nothing of this knowledge.

You may want to highlight it is mostly women and children in this image, that men and older boys were likely to have been taken for work. You may also want to focus in on the small child presenting their sibling or friend with a freshly picked flower, and the innocence which can speak for all victims.

To develop thinking on how people were deceived, complete Activity 1. If time allows, complete Activity 2.

Activity 1, use slide 14 to explore the following quotation:

‘In front of the building there were pots of geraniums and a sign saying “Hackenholt Foundation”, above which there was a Star of David. The building was brightly and pleasantly painted [...]

I do not believe that the people who had just arrived had any idea of what would happen to them.’

Professor Wilhelm Pfannenstiel, Waffen-SS hygienist

Klee, E., Dressen, W. and Riess, V. (1998) in “The Good Old Days” page 241.

Display the first part of the quotation and discuss:

- Focus on the first paragraph: what is being described is a building, it sounds innocuous, even safe perhaps. What makes it 'feel' benign? Perhaps because the building is seems pleasant with its bright paint? Perhaps because there are flowers outside? There seems to be a Jewish connection with the Star of David. Perhaps it's a charity – how does the word 'foundation' direct our thinking in these terms?

Encourage students to make reference to aspects of the quote to support their inferences.

Display the second part of the quotation and discuss:

- Looking at the second paragraph, what might this information add to our understanding of this place?

Encourage students to ponder how this additional information may suggest a sense of foreboding. There is a suggestion of the unexpected, but highlight that there is no concrete evidence that the unexpected will necessarily be bad.

Display the attribution:

What confirms our suspicions is the attribution. The building's description hasn't changed but how students look at it may have. This change in perception is in light of wider knowledge and understanding acquired (something the victims themselves may not have had). It is important to emphasise that the Nazis tried to keep their actions secret.

The quote (Klee *et al.*, 1998: 241) refers to the gassing facilities at Belzec – one of the death camps – where Lorenz Hackenholt served as an SS officer and helped to build and operate the gas chambers. He was also involved at other camps, and previously had been a member of the T4 'euthanasia' programme.

In the class discussion, it is important to bring out the following point:

There is initially a degree of ambiguity as to what this quote refers to. This stems, in part, from the way the building is decorated and the suggestion that this hides something more sinister. It is important to emphasize that although the Nazis tried to keep their actions secret this was neither possible nor feasible. However, in the context of the confusion of war, and the lack of reliable information, uncertainty abounded. The quote highlights the deception victims would have experienced and illustrates how the Nazis cultivated and exploited this.

Activity 2 use the clip of Rudolph Vrba from the *The World at War* TV series and accompanying worksheets. This activity could be used as an extension activity or for developing advanced discussions.

Use slide 15 to introduce Rudolph Vrba.

Explain that he survived the Holocaust and in the following filmed interview he talks about how almost impossible it was for people to believe what was happening and how they would be deceived. Highlight to students that they will learn more about Rudolf Vrba and his story of escape and resistance in Lesson 2.

Play the extract from the episode 'Genocide: 1941-1945' (1974).

Play the film and provide students with the 'Transcript from the film extract' worksheet.

Students can annotate and highlight the transcript and jot down thoughts for discussion.

The questions on the Rudolph Vrba 'Questions for reflection' worksheet can be used as prompts for discussion. Please refer to the Additional Information section to explain to students the full context of the interview. During discussion, teachers need to share with students the interviewer's preceding question and Vrba's full answer in order for students to fully understand Vrba's interview. This information is included in the Rudolph Vrba 'Additional context to add to the film' worksheet for students.

In the class discussion, it is important to bring out the following point:

Families were deceived by the perpetrators. Living in a post-Holocaust world, we know that humankind is capable of building gas chambers to murder thousands in a matter of minutes. The people we are learning about lived in a world where this had never before been conceived. It was impossible to imagine the unimaginable.

See the Additional Information section (below) for further information and context.

Destruction (5 mins)

Using slide 16 highlight to students that it is important to think about what 'the Holocaust' actually was, to understand the enormity of what Jewish people were facing.

Discuss the two images:

- 1) An image of a bone-crusher from a camp.
- 2) A photograph of Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, with a quotation.

Please be aware that the image of the bone-crusher could be considered an atrocity image and as such needs careful handling.

Draw out how this information signals the intent of utter destruction.

In the class discussion, it is important to bring out the following point:

Ordinary Jewish families faced the determined attempt to completely annihilate them as an entire group.

See the Additional Information section (below) for further information.

Plenary (10 mins)

Ask students to suggest themes which could be drawn out from the discussions on each section during the lesson. Indicate to them the themes of despair, deception and destruction as needed.

Using the themes of despair, deception and destruction as scaffolding, ask students to write a paragraph in answer to the following question:

What challenges did people face that would impact their ability to resist the unfolding genocide?

Remind students to include how these might vary for different members of a family.

How did Jewish people respond and resist during the Holocaust? Lesson Plan 2

Teaching Aims & Learning Objectives

- To consider how and why people responded and resisted in the ways they did.

Recap on the challenges (5 mins)

Recap on the work of the previous lesson. Ask students to recall the three themes of the previous lesson: 'Despair', 'Deception' and 'Destruction' which Jewish families faced when responding during the Holocaust.

Exploring case studies: exploring responses and resistance (30 mins)

Explain to students that they will work in groups with ten case studies to explore Jewish responses and resistance during the Holocaust.

1. Organise students into groups of five.
2. Each group should have ten case study cards. The ten cards cover the following themes:
 - A. Armed resistance in camps or ghettos or partisan activity
 - B. Keeping a visual record of the Holocaust
 - C. Creating a historical account of the Holocaust
 - D. Maintaining values: faith, friendship, humanity, identity, hope
 - E. Working to inform the outside world what was happening
 - F. Escape or hiding

For teacher information, the case study cards are labelled A-F in the top left hand corner. Some cards cover more than one theme.

Using slide 19, to prepare students for the discussion activities, as a whole class first read together the case study of Leon Greenman. If students have undertaken other UCL Centre for Holocaust lessons featuring Leon, ask them to recap on what they have already learnt about him and his family. Focusing on the case study card, ask students to draw out:

- What was he trying to achieve and why?
- What did he do?

- What was the outcome?
 - Identify some themes which could encapsulate his story. If none are forthcoming, suggest ideas around values, resolve, determination, resilience and maintaining hope.
3. Ask students to read through the group's remaining nine case studies.
 4. Ask students to complete some group discussion tasks in order to become familiar with the case studies:
 - Using Post-it notes, for each of the case studies, note down a theme which encapsulates the story on the case study card. Affix the post-it note to the card.
 - Using Post-it notes, for each case study note down what the person or group was trying to achieve and why. Affix the Post-it note to the card.
 - Group the cards together in any way where they share a similarity or have something in common.
 - For each case study card, consider whether the person/people achieved what they wanted. Discuss, 'does it matter if people didn't achieve what they hoped for?' It will be important to ensure students don't fall into judgement or a perception that people 'failed' to survive, they 'didn't try *hard* enough' or they should have enacted armed resistance or heroic deeds.

Reflecting on case studies: exploring how people responded (15 mins)

Having undertaken the above activities, follow with a class discussion on some or all of the questions below (you may choose to use slide 20)

- What, if anything, do these case studies have in common?
- Are there differences between these case studies? If so, what are these?
- Did people always achieve what they were trying to do? Does it matter if they didn't?
- What is the most significant factor for why people responded or resisted as they did?
- What do these case studies suggest about Jewish people's responses and resistance during the Holocaust?

As students contribute to the class discussion, encourage them to provide examples to support their answers.

Plenary (10 mins)

Based on the class discussion and drawing on the case studies with which the groups have been working, ask students to write a paragraph in answer to the following question:

In what ways did Jewish people respond and resist during the Holocaust and why?

Homework/assessment opportunity

Provide each student with one statement (or ask them to choose) and a copy of the ten case studies (alternatively you can load up the ten case studies on to the school's intranet for students to access). Drawing on work covered in the two lessons, and using the case studies to support their answer, ask students to respond to one statement in writing (slide 21).

These statements are deliberately provocative and simplistic. It is important to ensure students are clear that these statements are inaccurate. Students should aim to apply their new knowledge to demonstrate a more nuanced understanding of this complex history.

The statements are as follows:

1. The reason why people didn't 'fight back' was because they didn't have weapons.
2. Women couldn't 'fight back' or join partisan groups because they had to take care of their families.
3. The only way to resist during the Holocaust was to take up arms.
4. There was little point in resisting because the perpetrators would always win.
5. Given the terrible conditions, it was impossible to fight back in the ghettos or camps.
6. Children and teenagers didn't respond because they were too young to understand what was happening.

Time constraints

The material above consists of two one-hour lessons. This allows the important content focusing on context to be covered in the first lesson, and examples of responses and resistance to be explored in the second. It is important that the challenges faced by Jewish people are studied before students move on to look at examples of responses and resistance, otherwise students may not appreciate the huge task faced by Jewish people in mounting any form of resistance when they were struggling to survive.

If teachers have only one lesson to cover this content the following is suggested:

Select one activity from Lesson 1, either discussing the family photograph, the pencil drawing or the image of the bone crusher. The pencil drawing is recommended.

From Lesson 2, focus on a smaller number of case studies when facilitating class discussions/activities and for the assessment opportunity. For discussion purposes, teachers could divide the class in half, with groups in the first half looking at five case studies and groups in the second half working with a different set of five case studies, thus spreading the work of reading and digesting the ten case studies.

Engaging all learners

Students are working with a selection of case studies (with stories of varying complexity) and are interpreting visual information such as a drawings, film and photographs in addition to written text. This offers students a range of media with which to work.

Questioning is key to this lesson. Teachers are encouraged to use questioning to test students' understanding and extend their thinking. Examples of questions can be found in Lesson 1. Students should be encouraged to support their inferences and assertions with evidence.

When discussing the Rosenfeld drawing of Ber Ajzensztat (Eisenstadt), aged 42, with his only son, 7 year old Josele, the following scaffolding could be employed:

- The drawing could be printed out and students asked to annotate it before embarking on wider discussion.
- The image on the PowerPoint could be shown in sections.
- Prompt questions could be added to support students as they annotate the drawing, such as, 'Can you see the shoes the child is wearing? What does this suggest?' or 'Can you see the scarf the man is wearing? What does this suggest?'

When showing the photo of the families at Auschwitz-Birkenau on the PowerPoint, the image could also be shown in sections. Showing images piece by piece can slow down looking and encourage students to explore a small section fully and draw out all inferences before moving on to examine other parts of the image.

If using the Rudolf Vrba film extract, students can be provided with the transcript to help them follow the film. Students could also highlight key points and language they are not sure about for discussion.

There are opportunities for teachers to support literacy through the use of a key word bank to support students. Below is a list of some key words which come from the case studies. These are sorted into those with a generic literacy emphasis, and those which are more specialist historical terms in relation to the Holocaust. It is important to alert students to perpetrator euphemism (e.g. "Final Solution", "liquidation" etc.). You may wish to provide students with a glossary focusing on some of these words.

Literacy key words	Specialist historical terms	Specialist religious terms
<i>Convent, folklore, gallows, massacre, partisan, perimeter, pneumonia, prestigious, refuge, smuggle, staunchly, zealously.</i>	<i>Auschwitz-Birkenau, Final Solution, ghetto, Kindertransport, Oneg Shabbat, occupation, Operation Harvest Festival, rations, shtetl, Sonderkommando, Soviet Union, SS, transit camp, Westerbork.</i>	<i>Congregation, Hasidic, orthodox, rabbi, secular, synagogue, sermon.</i>

Additional Information

Pedagogical guidance

A key aspect of the pedagogical approach adopted here is the dynamic between teacher-led questioning and student-constructed knowledge which aims to achieve an increasingly sophisticated and contextualised understanding of how people responded in different ways during the Holocaust and why. Through a variety of case studies students are encouraged to think critically about why people might have responded in different ways.

Underpinning this is an emphasis on appreciating the role of contexts that were ever changing. The focus of most of the contextual information is to encourage students to think about the limited choices available to Jewish people. These were contingent not just on the unfolding events of the Holocaust but in the particular and localised situations individuals encountered.

Photograph of the extended Szwajcer family in Czena, Poland, 1936

It is important to remember that the people students are learning about were 'ordinary'. This photograph illustrates everyday Jewish people who would have faced a range of situations, it represents all those families who would come to encounter often insurmountable challenges. It is important to be careful in judging ordinary people who did not undertake what might be seen as brave or heroic actions.

Some might have wanted to fight back but didn't know what to do or have access to weapons and resources, some may have been scared of the consequences, some might have been too physically weak or ill, some may have been consumed by grief and despair, some were deceived by the perpetrators, and some may have been overwhelmed by the destruction meted out. The choices open to people often meant there was really no choice at all. Starting with this photograph may help to calibrate this discussion and encourage empathy in the classroom.

Actions always had to be considered in the light of consequences – just how feasible was it for a family with an elderly member to run off to the forest and join the partisans? At what point do you risk repercussions for your family by resisting?

The question 'would some have found it easier to act than others?' may open up discussion about the diversity of life stage twinned with responsibility, gender expectations at the time and literal opportunity. Students might explore considerations such as:

- youth versus the responsibility of community elders
- parents with young children
- adults with elderly parents
- husbands with pregnant wives

- women with multiple family caring roles
- options open to elderly people or very young children

In terms of mounting any form of armed or physical resistance, students could consider the challenges people might have faced. A range of issues present themselves when students consider the lack of weapons, training, leadership and direction, organization, solidarity or agreement. It is important to note the language barriers that would have existed amongst so many different nationalities in one ghetto or camp. It is also important to remind students of their work studying pre-war Jewish life where the diversity and variety of communities across Europe is clearly demonstrated. Other considerations such as the poor health (mental, physical, emotional) of people – the result of cramped disease-ridden conditions, terrible treatment and starvation – should be discussed. It might also be helpful to highlight the fact that in the face of German forces Poland fell in two weeks and France within in a month. Students might usefully come to the thought-provoking question, ‘what is it exactly that they expect ordinary families to accomplish in the face of such diminishing odds?’

Whilst this image is helpful for students to focus on people, it is important to note that this particular photograph was taken in Poland in 1936. It was a place where Jews faced a considerable amount of animosity and persecution, but it is a pre-war image not created during the Holocaust.

Information on the Szwajcer family in Czerna, Poland.

Text from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum - USHMM.org.

‘Hersch (now Zvi) Szwajcer [who provided the photograph] is the son of Yehuda Lajbus Szwajcer and Rachel Leah Moczniak. He was born on January 3, 1921 in Sosnowiec Poland where Yehuda worked as a merchant. He also was head of the community Kehilla in the 1930s, a member of the municipal council and served for five years as chairman of the Talmud Torah, a school that provided Jewish education to some 400 boys. Hersch had two brothers and three sisters: Yitzhak (b. 1907-08), Yaakov (b. 1908), Guta (b. 1913), Genia (b. 1923) and Hadasa (b. 1929). Hersch stayed in Sosnowiec until 1942. He then was sent to a mobile labor brigade in Bautrup-Saybusch. He was next in Annaberg, Germany for one week and Graditz for three months. He spent the remainder of the war in Grossbilau Sportschule until his liberation by the Soviets on May 8, 1945 at age 24. Hersch returned to Sosnowiec after his liberation and resumed working as a textile merchant in his fathers' old store that was returned to him. He remained there until he was recruited to fight for Etzel. In March 1949 he immigrated to Israel. Hersch's parents, brother Yitzhak and two youngest sisters, Genia and Hadasa, all were killed in Auschwitz. His sister Guta survived and married Moshe Toronczyk in Lodz.’

Information on the drawing by Rozenfeld

The man in the drawing is Ber Ajzensztat (Eisenstadt), aged 42, with his son, 7 year old Josele, in the winter of 1941. He was a wagon man who transported various goods. In the picture he is carrying his wife who died of starvation and exhaustion. He spent three days in vain to secure 20 Zlotys to bury her. He needed the money to give her a burial in a grave rather than a mass grave – how she was finally buried is unknown. He tried to bury her with dignity even though he appears to be in poor health himself.

In Judaism burial should take place within 24 hours of dying or as soon as possible, so taking three days suggests desperation. A funeral is meant to be a private occasion with no public viewing of the body, but he was forced to drag his wife's body through the streets with nothing but a lightweight cloth/paper covering held down by a brick.

The drawing is one of a series depicting life in the Warsaw Ghetto. The series was commissioned for the Oneg Shabbat archive. A commentary by the artist accompanies each drawing providing details of the date, subjects, location etc.

Information about the drawing is from the website:

<https://delet.jhi.pl/pl/search?searchQuery=Rozenfeld&searchIn=library> And the workshop, 'The fate of the children in the Warsaw Ghetto', by Olga Szymanska:

<https://delet.jhi.pl/pl/lessons/public/70>

Key points to note about the Warsaw Ghetto:

- Created in October 1940
- All Jewish people in Warsaw had to move into the ghetto by 15 November 1940
- The overall area of the ghetto was very small
- Ghetto was sealed: walls were built across streets to separate the ghetto from non-Jewish people
- At the beginning, around 350,000 people lived in the ghetto
- People continued to be sent to the ghetto, by April 1941 around 460,000 people were inside
- Living conditions were extremely bad, usually at least 8 people lived inside one room
- Food and medical supplies were very limited, starvation and disease was widespread
- Between October 1940 and July 1942, around 90,000 people died from hunger or illness
- In July 1942, large numbers of people began to be taken from the ghetto to the Treblinka death camp - around 300,000 people were deported in this way over a few months

- On 19 April 1943 the Germans tried to clear the ghetto. In response, those left inside the ghetto went into hiding or actively fought back - after 27 days the resistance movement had been defeated by the Germans

Please note the distressing nature of this drawing. Students may need additional time to discuss and process this art, especially if they have been bereaved.

Photograph of Hungarian Jews at Auschwitz-Birkenau

This photograph was taken by SS guards at Auschwitz Birkenau in the summer of 1944. It is one photograph from the Auschwitz Album donated to Yad Vashem by Lilly Jacob-Zelmanovic Meier. The album can be seen online at:

https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/album_auschwitz/index.asp

The people in the photo are Hungarian Jews. Other people from their communities, who came on the same train that brought them to Auschwitz, are already being gassed nearby, their bodies burned in the crematoria. The same fate awaits the people in this photograph - within hours all of them will be murdered.

Looking at the expressions and demeanour of the people in this photograph, they do not appear to understand what awaits them. We cannot know exactly what these people knew, believed or felt at this time, so caution is required when making tentative claims about how much people knew or understood. Some people knew what was happening, whilst others did not. For example, some Jewish women acted as couriers and followed trains to Treblinka to see where they went. They returned to the ghetto (e.g. Warsaw) with news. In Warsaw there was an underground network and an underground newspaper. Some people wrote poetry and songs, but some people also couldn't really understand the significance of information available. The historian Yehuda Bauer has argued there is a distinction between information and knowledge: knowledge is to understand what the information means (Bauer, 2001: 218).

You may want to highlight it is mostly women and children in this image, that men and older boys were most likely to have been taken for work. You may also want to focus on the child presenting her sibling or friend with a freshly picked flower and the innocence that speaks for all victims.

Film extract of Rudolph Vrba

The film transcript (to be found in a separate student worksheet) is as follows:

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.

This extract from ‘The World at War’ TV series. Episode 20 - ‘Genocide: 1941-1945’ communicates the essence of how difficult it was for people to comprehend their imminent murder. As Vrba states, for a mother the notion of her children being murdered was unthinkable. The perpetrators also relied on the victims’ sense of what was civilised, that this horror was taking place in a modern, civilised Europe, was inconceivable. Living in a post-Holocaust world, we know that humankind is capable of building gas chambers to murder thousands at a time. The people we are learning about lived in a world where a crime like this had never been perpetrated. It was impossible to imagine the unimaginable.

It is important to know the context of this interview extract. Unlike perhaps more familiar Holocaust filmed testimony where a survivor gives an account of their life, White (2019: 143) notes that interviews undertaken for the documentary ‘were not life history interviews or opportunities for survivors or witnesses to give testimony; rather, they represent, first and foremost, an effort to elicit useable video material.’ White (2019: 144) explains, ‘the questions were designed to elicit specific information that would be of most use in the documentary feature and, moreover, to generate responses that were sufficiently personal to provoke an emotional response in the viewer.’ White (2019: 144-145) goes on to provide additional context for the extract in the documentary, and the text we are dealing with. It is therefore important for teachers to share with students the interviewer’s preceding question and Vrba’s full answer in order for students to fully understand what Vrba is saying.

The preceding question is as follows:

Interviewer 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?

Rudolph Vrba 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, **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 our mind, because after all what she suffered, here comes a gangster who wants to increase her suffering,**

so she was expected 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?”

Vrba tries to explain why it would have been impossible for someone to comprehend such inconceivable information. The text in bold is what is included in the Genocide episode, but Vrba’s earlier words reveals the ‘gangster’ he speaks of is himself. Under such brutal camp treatment, prisoners like him may have appeared to new arrivals like ‘criminals’ in prison uniform, not to be listened to when there was a seemingly civilized and smart ‘neat officer’ to ask nearby.

White (2019:145) argues ‘the targeted nature of the questioning produces a powerful, almost indignant response from him that offers a small window onto Vrba’s efforts to comprehend and make sense of an impossible situation.’ In addition it reveals the complexity of deception involved as longstanding prisoners could see how they might be perceived by newly arriving prisoners. Vrba felt silenced and unable to warn people of the horror awaiting them. In another interview in the *Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection* (not included in this lesson) Vrba recalls the shooting of a prisoner who tried to warn a mother recently arrived from Theresienstadt with her two children (Lanzmann, 1978). He also gives an account of this event in his memoir entitled, ‘I escaped from Auschwitz’ on pages 166-167.

Professor Wilhelm Pfannenstiel, Waffen-SS hygienist

Wilhelm Pfannenstiel visited Belzec Death Camp and he gave testimony after the war. From 1931-1945 he was Professor Ordinarius of Hygiene and Director of Institute for Hygiene at the University of Marburg/Lahn. He was SS-Standartenführer and consultant hygienist to SS.

Lorenz Hackenholt served as an SS officer – SS-Hauptscharführer. He helped to build and operate the gas chambers, and delivered bottled gas to gassing centres. He had previously worked for the T4 ‘euthanasia’ programme.

This information comes from the 1998 book, “The Good Old Days” by Klee, E., Dressen, W. and Riess, V.

Bone-crusher image and portrait of Himmler

One photograph shows a bone-crusher from one of the camps. It was used to grind down the bones of victims. Another photograph is of Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, with a quotation. His words come from a speech he delivered to SS officers in Posen in 1943, the first known instance of a high-ranking Nazi speaking of the ongoing extermination of Jews in death camps. The Holocaust was not just about physical extermination, but also about the way the perpetrators of genocide determined how the past would be remembered. The Holocaust was not intended to be something that would be remembered, at least not on any terms other than those of the perpetrators. Their victims of course could not know the entire totality of this planned destruction whilst in the midst of this crime.

Acknowledgements

The original lessons *Why didn't the Jews fight back?* and *Telling the story of resistance*, created by Andy Pearce and Paul Salmons and updated by Tom Haward (2018), have provided the foundations of these two revised lessons. The online lesson *Resistance and the Holocaust* (devised by Andy Pearce 2020) has also provided the basis and much of the content of these redeveloped lessons. *Striving to live: how did Jewish people respond and resist during the Holocaust* is a redevelopment of these original materials by Emma O'Brien (December 2021). Updated March 2022, June 2022. November 2022. Updated May 2024.

Thank you to Andy Pearce and Tom Haward for their feedback and reflections on the development of this material.

With special thanks to Paul Salmons – Paul Salmons Associates:

www.paulsalmons.associates

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Lanzmann, C. (1978). Shoah Collection, Interview with Rudolph Vrba. New York. United States. FV3228: Clip 2 03:10:16:22 'Do you recall precise cases where people tried to warn the arriving?' to 03:12:26:23 '... and that was the last we heard about him'. The Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection is jointly owned by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yad Vashem. Sourced from USHMM:

<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn1004165>

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<https://delet.jhi.pl/pl/lessons/public/70> [Last accessed 25-11-2022].

Vrba, R. (2020). *I escaped from Auschwitz*. New York, Racehorse Publishing.

White, M. (2019). 'A Museological Approach to Collecting Oral Histories: A Case Study of the Holocaust Collections at the Imperial War Museum'. *The Journal of Holocaust Research*, 33:2, 138-156, DOI: 10.1080/25785648.2019.1598071

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10 case study cards

1. **Mordecai Anielewicz** – Yad Vashem #64255

- Photograph of Mordecai Anielewicz – Yad Vashem #64255
- Quote from letter – Yad Vashem. Document number 145, Shoah Resources Centre, International School of Holocaust Studies.

www.yadvashem.org

2. **The Auschwitz revolt**

- Rosa Robota – Yad Vashem #84526
- Ella Gärtner – USHMM #08518. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Anna and Joshua Heilman
- Esther Wajsblum – USHMM #80566. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Sheldon Schwartz
- Regina Safirsztajn – USHMM #77570A. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of J.L. Murawiec

www.yadvashem.org

www.ushmm.org

3. **Faye Schulman**

- Polesye, Poland. Russian partisans from the Molotov Brigade, 1943-1944 – Yad Vashem #51324
- USSR, Partisans. Winter 1944 – Yad Vashem #53434

www.yadvashem.org

4. **Zalman Gradowski**

- Portrait – Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum
- Image of cannisters and documents – Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum
- Extract of note – Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

www.auschwitz.org

5. **Emanuel Ringelblum**

- Portrait with son – Yad Vashem #4406
- Uncovering the archive – Yad Vashem #39262
- Milk churns and tins – Yad Vashem #11671
- Quote from Ringelblum diary – Yad Vashem

www.yadvashem.org

6. **Yitskhok Rudashevski**

- Yitskhok in Vilnius (Vilna) with his father Eli: A Jewish father and son walking outside near a body of water in Vilna. Pictured are Eli Rudashevsky and his son Yitzhak. – USHMM #14730. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Cilia Jurer Rudashevsky
- Extracts from diary Yitzhak Rudaszewski/Yitskhok Rudashevski – Catalogue #53237 With kind permission from the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum.

www.ushmm.org

www.gfh.org.il

7. **Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira**

- Portrait – Yad Vashem #14253693

www.yadvashem.org

8. **Leon Greenman**

- Family portrait – Jewish Museum, London
- Quote from 'An Englishman in Auschwitz' by Leon Greenman, 2001, Vallentine Mitchell publishers, United Kingdom (page 96).

www.jewishmuseum.org.uk

9. **Rudolf Vrba & Alfred Wetzler**

- Rudolf Vrba portrait – negative number 20892/2 Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.
- Alfred Wetzler portrait – negative number 14047 Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

www.auschwitz.org

10. Ursula Klipstein

- Ursula Klipstein poses holding the traditional Schultuete [a school cone] filled with candies on her first day of school 1937. USHMM #99697. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

www.ushmm.org

Classroom PowerPoint

The extended Szwajcer family in Czerna, Poland

- Portrait of the extended Szwajcer family in Czerna, Poland 1936. USHMM #25051. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum courtesy of Zvi Szwajcer.

www.ushmm.org

Rozenfeld drawing

Delet Portal: The Association of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland working in cooperation with the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute.

<https://delet.jhi.pl/pl/search?searchQuery=Rozenfeld&searchIn=library>

Workshop, 'The fate of the children in the Warsaw Ghetto', by Olga Szymanska

<https://delet.jhi.pl/pl/lessons/public/70>

Further information about the artist Benjamin Rozenfeld can be found here:

<https://www.jhi.pl/en/articles/benjamin-rozenfeld-draftsman-of-the-warsaw-ghetto,2270>

Photograph of Hungarian Jews at Auschwitz

Photograph 132 from The Auschwitz Album, donated to Yad Vashem by Lilly Jacob-Zelmanovic Meier.

www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/album_auschwitz/index.asp

Film extract of Rudolph Vrba interview and transcript of extract on student worksheet

The World at War TV series. Episode 20 - 'Genocide: 1941-1945' (1974), FreemantleMedia International. Original version restored. Series Narrated by Sir Laurence Olivier, Series Producer Jeremy Isaacs, Historical Advisor Noble Frankland, music by Carl Davis.

Episode written by Charles Bloomberg, produced and directed by Michael Darlow, narrated by Sir Laurence Olivier. Original TV transmission 27 March 1974. ©1973-74 Thames Television Ltd. Packaging Design © 2016 Network. Licensed by FreemantleMedia International.

The film extract may be watched solely for non-commercial educational purposes and must not be copied or shared.

Quote from Wilhelm Pfannenstiel

Klee, E., Dressen, W. and Riess, V. (Eds.) (1998). "The Good Old Days". New York: Konecky & Konecky. Page 241.

Photograph of Himmler

Imperial War Museum

IWM photo © IWM HU 7315 Heinrich Himmler (1900 - 1945): Formal portrait of Himmler.
BECKETT W (MR) COLLECTION

www.iwm.org.uk

Quote from Himmler

Speech by Himmler before Senior SS Officers in Poznan, October 4, 1943

Yad Vashem Shoah Resource Center, The International School for Holocaust Studies

Documents on the Holocaust, Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland and the Soviet Union, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1981, Document no.161. pp. 344-345.

www.yadvashem.org

Photograph of bone crusher

View of the bone crushing machine used by Sonderkommando 1005 in the Janowska concentration camp to grind the bones of the victims after their bodies were burned.

USHMM #69978. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Herman Lewinter.

www.ushmm.org

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UCL's Centre for Holocaust Education is jointly funded by Pears Foundation and the Department for Education.