Educational materials produced as part of the 'Education Against Anti-Semitism: Learning from the Past to Understand Contemporary Challenges' project. A multimedia educational resource pack,
under the European programme "Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values" (CERV)

Contents:

I. A pack of 4 lesson plans for Larissa Cain's book "The Girl from the Locked City", by Katarzyna Niewczas

Guidelines:

- each lesson plan is designed for a 45-minute session; teachers may choose all the suggestions and deliver them sequentially in separate lessons or as part of a longer workshop, or use only a selected lesson;

- although reading the entire book is recommended for participants, the lesson plans also suggest selected excerpts from the book that participants can read during the session – it is up to the teacher to decide whether to encourage the group to read the whole book before the session or to use excerpts from the text during the lesson;

- the pack is designed for Years 7–8 of primary school,

- the pack consists of a presentation, lesson plans and worksheets.

Lesson 1 plan: Before the war

Objectives:

- to get to know the main character of the story and spark interest in her story,

- to acquire basic knowledge about the Jewish community in pre-war Poland, with particular emphasis on its internal diversity,

- to create an opportunity to find information about the history of the Jewish community in the pupils' local area.

Methods:

1. Working with a photograph of the protagonist and her parents included in the book: in small groups, creating a description of the photograph based on suggested questions, attempting to situate the photograph within specific historical and social contexts.
2. Reading an excerpt from the text describing the main character's family. During the discussion of the excerpt, returning to the questions from the photograph to compare the students' intuitive answers with the information contained in the book.
3. Based on the text excerpt, a comparison of the lifestyle of the girl's parents and grandparents (celebration of holidays, language).
4. A presentation with graphics and photographs relating to the pre-war Jewish community in Poland (population size, presence in towns and villages, differences in attitudes towards tradition, religion, and the majority culture). The presentation is followed by worksheets to be completed in pairs.
5. Individual activity: visiting the Virtual Shtetl website and checking information about the Jewish community in the students' place of residence.

Lesson Plan II: In the Ghetto

Objectives:

- to organise knowledge about the situation of Polish Jews in the early years of the Second World War (1939–1942),

- to examine the phenomenon of escalating discrimination against Polish Jews based on Allport's pyramid model,

- to reflect on what gave the main character strength during her time in the ghetto. Methods:

1. Gathering and summarising the pupils' existing knowledge of the situation of Polish Jews at the start of the Second World War. The teacher writes the word 'ghetto' on the board and invites the class to share historical facts related to this topic. The teacher collects the group's knowledge and organises the information using the attached presentation.
2. Introduction to Allport's pyramid model and discussion of the issue of escalating discrimination.
3. Reading of selected excerpts from the text. Based on these, students work in pairs to place subsequent events from the text (such as the requirement to wear an armband with the Star of David, the closure of the ghetto) on the Allport pyramid model. Discussion of the group work in front of the class.
4. Joint reflection on what was a source of support/strength for the protagonist during her time in the ghetto. The students write down their ideas individually on sticky notes, which the teacher collects on the board and summarises.

Lesson Plan III: In Hiding

Objectives:

- to acquire basic information about social attitudes in the face of the Holocaust,

- to organise existing knowledge about the realities of Jews hiding outside the ghetto,

- to reflect on what was needed during the war to save the life of a Jewish child. Methods:

1. The teacher displays on the screen or projector an appendix containing newspaper headlines relating to the stories of Jews in hiding outside the ghetto during the Second World War in Poland.
   Reading the headlines serves as an introduction to a discussion with the group about what they know or have heard regarding the stories of those in hiding.
2. Reading excerpts from the text. Based on these, working on worksheets in pairs and creating a description of the attitudes of selected characters (such as those who took the protagonist into their homes, or those who denounced them). Focus on the actions taken by these characters, their motivations, and their impact on the protagonist. Discuss the worksheets as a class.
3. 'Chain of Help' exercise: a joint reconstruction, in front of the class, of the places where the protagonist hid after leaving the ghetto. Draw attention to the complexity of the process of helping Jews living outside the ghetto, the number of people involved, and the significance of Jewish activists in this process. The exercise is supplemented by a short presentation placing the girl's story in a broader historical context.
4. Class discussion: What was difficult for the protagonist whilst in hiding outside the ghetto? What was difficult for those hiding her?

Scenario IV: After the war

Objectives:

- to acquire basic knowledge about the causes and directions of Jewish migration from Poland after the Second World War,

- to reflect on the difficulties experienced by Jewish survivors,

- to summarise the work on the biographical

account. Methods:

1. The teacher projects a chart onto the screen showing the size of the Jewish community in Poland immediately after the war and today, in 2026. They check with the class their intuitions regarding the reasons for Jews leaving Poland after the war.
2. Reading of text excerpts. Working in pairs with worksheets on the dilemma of staying or leaving (what makes the protagonist want to stay in Poland? What makes her and her family plan to leave? Where do they intend to go?). In the class discussion, draw attention to post-war anti-Semitism, the loss of loved ones, the desire to rebuild a life elsewhere, reuniting with extended family, and the creation of a Jewish state. The discussion is summarised with a short presentation bringing these themes together.
3. Individual work: a letter to the book's protagonist. Based on the suggested questions , pupils individually write a letter in which they personally reflect on the story they have learnt about, share their impressions of the book, what they found difficult in it, and what moved them, and what gave them a sense of strength.

II. A pack of 2 lesson plans for secondary schools based on Hedi Fried's book, Was I Afraid of Death? Questions about the Holocaust, author: Katarzyna Niewczas

Lesson Plan I: Identity

Educational objectives:

- to learn the basics of social identity theory,

- to examine the significance of belonging to a minority,

- reflecting on one's own identity.

Lesson plan:

1. Introduction: what does identity consist of? Group work using the diagram provided, with the aim of getting the students to suggest the elements that make up .
2. Reading of the chapters: 'How did you live before the war?' and 'Do you feel Swedish?'
3. Relating the passages read from the book to the categories of identity proposed by the young people . On this basis, answer the question of who the narrator of the texts is. How does she present herself? Which aspects of her identity does she refer to?
4. A brief presentation on the theory of social identity, minority and majority groups, and the risk of discrimination against people belonging to .

5. Individual reflection on one's own identity based on the provided worksheet.

Scenario II: The Rise of Discrimination

Educational objectives:

- to trace the escalation of discrimination against European Jews during the Second World War,

- to acquire basic knowledge about the mechanisms of discrimination,

- to reflect on the measures currently in place to protect minorities and their importance in combating discrimination.

Lesson plan:

1. Introduction: the titles of the book's chapters that the students will read during the lesson are written on the board. For a few minutes, the students discuss them in pairs and consider how the author might respond to them.
2. Reading of book excerpts: "When did you realise that your family was in danger?" and "How is it possible that an entire nation sided with Hitler?"
3. Group work with worksheets: reconstructing the changes taking place in the narrator's family during the Second World War.
4. A short presentation on the growing discrimination against European Jews during the Second World War.
5. Individual work with information on measures to protect minorities introduced after the Second World War, followed by a class discussion on the topic.

III. Introduction and selection of sources, together with questions relating to moral dilemmas in connection with the Holocaust, by Robert Szuchta

IV. Tools for responding to resistance, dehumanisation and emotional overload in Holocaust education, by Alicja Kotowska

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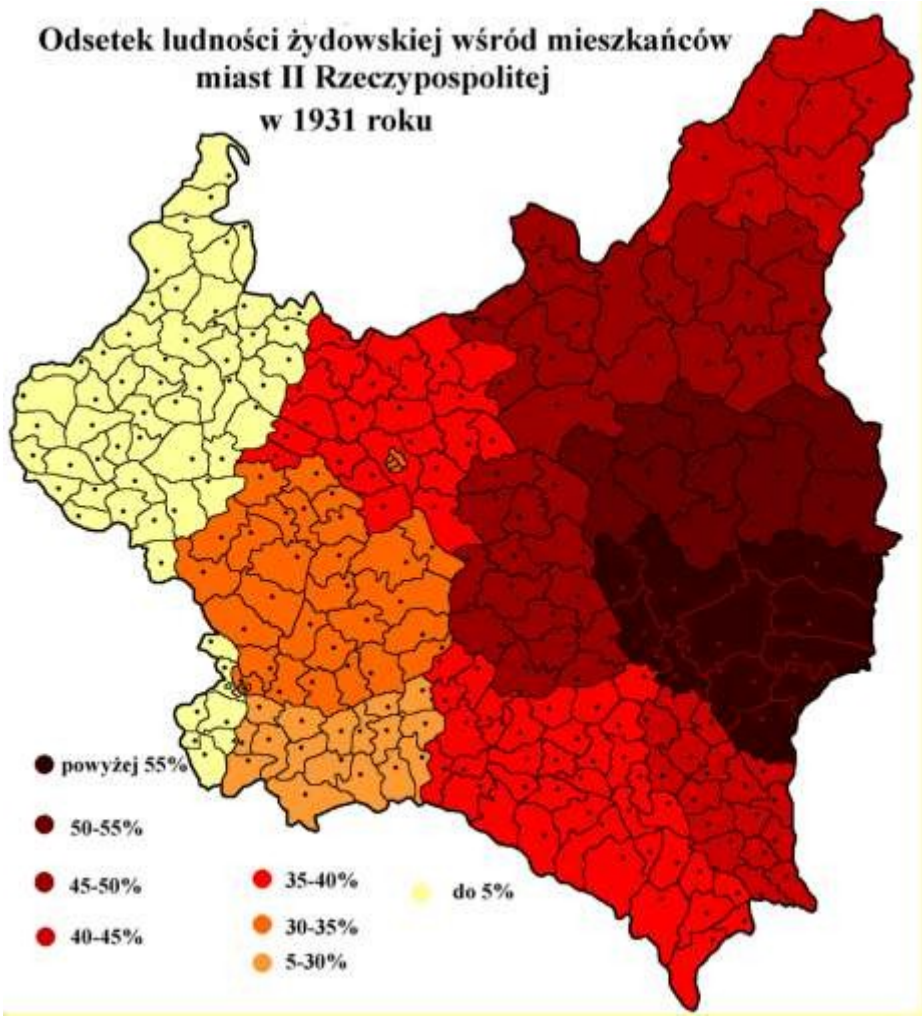
Jews in pre-war Poland

Daily life, culture and social relations

The size of the of the Jewish community

- In the Second Polish Republic, there were approximately 3.3 million Jews.
- They accounted for about 10% of Poland's population.
- It was one of the largest Jewish communities in the world.



https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historia_%C5%BByd%C3%B3w_w_Polsce#/media/File:Percentage_of_the_Jewish_population_in_the_cities_of_the_Second_Polish_Republic_in_1931.png, CC BY-SA 3.0

Jews in towns and villages

- Most Jews lived in towns and cities.
- They often ran shops, craft workshops, printing works, bakeries and tailoring businesses.
- In many small towns, they made up a significant proportion of the population.

Jewish grain merchants in conversation at the market in Słomniki. https://audiovis.nac.gov.pl/obraz/125577/23c48c1fa444653bcc5df3dc9b37b56b/, National Digital Archives

Differences in attitudes towards tradition and religion

- There were many religious people among Polish Jews who observed the principles of Judaism, such as the Sabbath and kosher dietary laws.
- However, the Jewish community was not homogeneous, and not all Jews were religious.

A section of the building with the entrance to the Scala Theatre. Theatre posters are visible in the display cases. https://audiovis.nac.gov.pl/obraz/150931:1/

Attitudes towards the majority culture

- Many Jews wished to preserve the Yiddish language and Jewish traditions. In pre-war Poland, there were Jewish schools, newspapers and sports clubs.
- Some Jews also considered themselves Polish. They wrote in Polish and participated in Polish culture.
- Some Jews sought to establish an independent Jewish state.

Members of the He-Chaluc (Hebrew for 'Pioneer') organisation, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hahalutz_in_Turobin.jpg?utm_source=chatgpt.com, Public domain

Anti-Semitism in the Second Polish Republic

The Second Polish Republic was not free from
anti-Semitism. Before the war, there were boycotts of Jewish shops, street violence and discrimination at universities (‘bench ghetto’) in Poland.

Student record of a Jewish student at the University of Warsaw from 1934 with a stamped entry in the ‘bench ghetto’, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historia_%C5%BByd%C3%B3w_w_Polsce#/media/File:Index_of_Jewish_student_in_Poland_with_Ghetto_benche_seal_1934.PNG, Public domain

The situation of Polish Jews in 1939–1942

1939

- **1 September 1939** – Germany invades Poland; the Second World War breaks out.
- **September 1939** – Persecution of the Jewish population begins in the territories occupied by Germany: confiscation of property, forced labour, restrictions on freedoms.
- **Autumn 1939** – Jews are forced to wear armbands or Stars of David.

Armband with the Star of David, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%BBydowska_opaska#/media/File:POLIN_04.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0

1940

- **Spring 1940** – The Germans begin to establish closed Jewish districts – ghettos.
- **16 November 1940** – The , the largest ghetto in occupied Europe, is completely enclosed by a wall.
- **1940** – Harsh living conditions in the ghettos: starvation, disease and overcrowding cause the deaths of thousands of people.

Construction of the ghetto walls on Świętokrzyska Street in Warsaw (August 1940), https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Getto_warszawskie#/media/Plik:The_Wall_of_ghetto_in_Warsaw_-_Building_on_Nazi-German_order_August_1940.jpg, Public domain

1941

- **22 June 1941** – The Germans attack the Soviet Union during Operation Barbarossa. Special units operating behind the German army carry out mass murders of Jews.
- **Summer–autumn 1941** – Executions of the Jewish population in German-occupied territories intensify.
- **8 December 1941** – The extermination camp at Chełmno nad Nerem begins operations – the first German camp designed for the mass murder of Jews.

Site of mass graves, Rzuchowski Forest, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ob%C3%B3z_mass_graves_in_Che%C5%82mno_on_the_Nerem#/media/File:LasRzuchowski4.jpg CC BY-SA 4.0

1942

- **20 January 1942** – At the Wannsee Conference, German leaders plan the "final solution to the Jewish question", i.e. the Holocaust of European Jews.
- **22 July 1942** – A large-scale deportation operation begins from the Warsaw Ghetto to the Treblinka extermination camp.
- **By the end of 1942** – Most Jews from occupied Poland are murdered.

Aufruf

An die Einwohner des jüdischen Wohnbezirks.

Gemäss Anordnung der Behörden vom 22. Juli 1942 werden alle Personen, welche nicht in Anstalten und Unternehmen tätig sind, unbedingt umgesiedelt.

Die Zwangsaussiedlung wird ununterbrochen weitergeführt. Ich fordere erneut die der Aussiedlung unterliegende Bevölkerung auf, sich freiwillig auf dem Umschlagplatz zu melden und verlängere auf weitere 2 Tage, d. h. den 2., 3. und 4. August 1942 die Ausgabe von 3 kg. Brot und 1 kg. Marmelade an jede sich freiwillig meldende Person.

Freiwillig zur Abreise erscheinende Familien werden nicht getrennt.

Sammelpunkt für Freiwillige: Dzika 3 – Stawki 27.

Der Leiter des Ordnungsdienstes

Warschau, den 1. August 1942

Wezwanie

Do Mieszkańców Dzielnicy Żydowskiej.

Zgodnie z zarządzeniem Władz z dnia 22 lipca 1942 r. przesiedleniu ulegają wszystkie osoby, nie zatrudniające w instytucjach i przedsiębiorstwach.

Przymusowe wysiedlenie będzie konsekwentnie bez przerwy. Wezwanie ludności podlegającej wysiedleniu, do dobrowolnego stawienia się na Placu Przeładunkowym, przyczem przedłuża się dalsze 3 dni, tj. na 2, 3 i 4 sierpnia 1942 wydawanie na każdą dobrowolnie zgłaszającą się osobę 3 kg chleba i 1 kg marmolady.

Zgłaszające się dobrowolnie rodziny nie będą rozłączane.

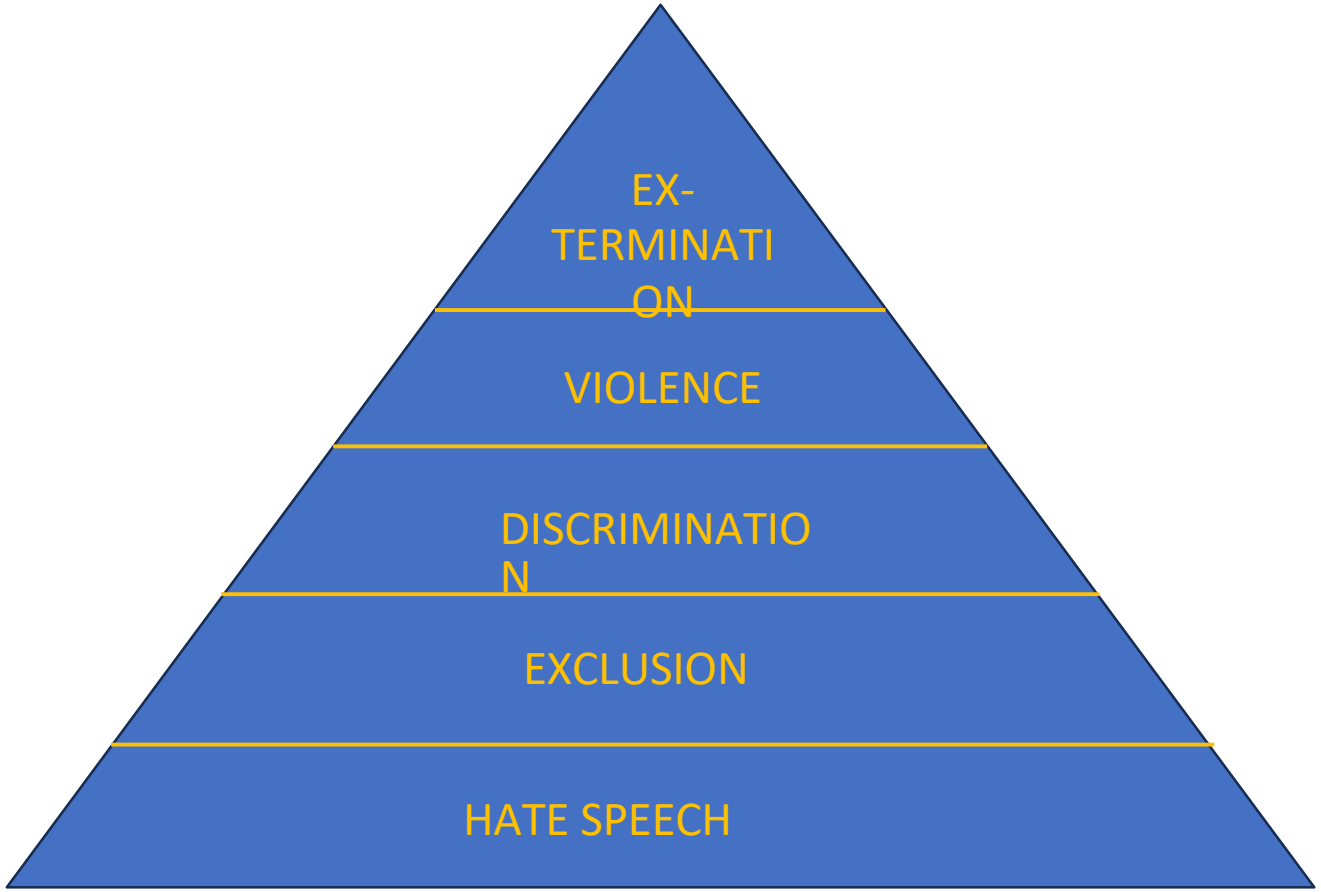
Punkt zbiorczy dla ochotników: ul. Dzika 3—Stawki 27.

Kierownik Służby Porządkowej

Warszawa, dnia 1 sierpnia 1942 r.

An announcement by the head of the Jewish Order Service dated 1 August 1942, stating that those who voluntarily report to the Umschlagplatz will receive 3 kg of bread and 1 kg of marmalade, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wielka_akcja_deportacyjna_in_the_Warsaw_Ghetto#/media/File:The_Great_Evacuation_of_the_Ghetto_announcement_of_voluntary_reporting_to_Umschlagplatz.jpg, Public domain

The Pyramid of Hate



The Pyramid of Hate is a model created by social psychologist Gordon Allport, which illustrates the process of escalating violence against minority groups.

In secret

fear

“the Aryan side”

false documents

hiding place

ghetto

survival

Żegota Council for Aid to Jews

loneliness

Righteous Among the Nations

al

blackmailer

support network

betray

solida
rity

Why were Jewish children hiding outside the ghetto?

- In the early years of the war, most Jewish families remained together in the ghetto. Being surrounded by their loved ones gave them a sense of security.
- However, as living conditions in the ghetto became increasingly difficult and news of mass murders reached the ghetto with increasing frequency, many families began to look
  ways to find shelter for their
  children outside the ghetto.
- Jews living outside the ghetto, as well as those providing them with shelter, faced the death penalty at that time.

Residents of the Warsaw Ghetto, May 1941, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Getto_%C5%BCydowskie#/media/Plik:Bundesarchiv_Bild_101I-134-0782-24,_Polen,_Ghetto_Warschau,_Markt.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0 de

What was needed to hide outside the ghetto?

- First and foremost, a place to hide and people willing to provide shelter. Without contacts on the so-called ‘Aryan side’, leaving the ghetto was extremely difficult.
- It was necessary to completely conceal one’s Jewish identity by changing one’s name, obtaining false documents, or learning
  Christian prayers.
- Those in hiding and their helpers were very afraid of being denounced, so they made every effort to ensure that no one found out about the Jews and
  Jewish women living outside the ghetto.

The gate of the Kraków ghetto, 1941, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Getto_%C5%BCydowskie#/media/File:Krakow_Ghetto_Gate_73170.jpg, Public domain

The ‘Żegota’ Council for Aid to Jews

- The Council was established in 1942 and was a Polish-Jewish institution supporting Jews in occupied Poland.
- The Council was responsible for raising and providing
  the money needed to support Jewish children in Catholic families, and organised
  false documents.
- Żegota’s activities were funded by the Polish government-in-exile’s treasury and foreign Jewish organisations.

The Żegota Monument in Warsaw, the Council for Aid to Jews at the Delegation of the Polish Government for Poland 1942–1945, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rada_Pomocy_%C5%BBydom#/media/File:%C5%BBegota_Polska_Rada_Pomocy_%C5%BBydom_przy_Delegaturze_Rz%C4%85du_RP_na_Kraj_1942-1945.jpg, CC BY 2.0

After the war

The Jewish community in Poland

- Before the Second World War: **3.3 million Jews**
- After the Second World War, in 1945: **approx. 180–270 thousand Jews**
- Today, in 2026: **approx. 10–20,000 Jews**

The consequences of the Second World War

- During the Holocaust, 90% of Polish Jews were murdered.
- Most of them perished in extermination camps and ghettos.
- After the war, survivors tried to return to their pre-war homes and towns, searching for their relatives and friends.

https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/II_wojna_%C5%9Bwiatowa#/media/File:Bundesarchiv_B_285_Bild-04413,_KZ_Auschwitz,_Einfahrt.jpg, Public domain

The post-war landscape

- After the war, Poland was a poor and devastated country.
- Survivors returned to their towns where the Jewish community no longer existed.
- Often their homes were destroyed or occupied by new owners who refused to move out.
- In post-war Poland, Jews were vulnerable to acts of physical violence.

St Augustine's Church amidst the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Warsaw_Ghetto_after_the_war_and_St_Augustine

_Church.jpg, Public domain

The Kielce pogrom

- On 4 July 1946, a pogrom took place in Kielce.
- Following a rumour the abduction of a Polish boy, a mob and some police officers attacked the Jews living in a house at 7 Planty Street.
- 42 Holocaust survivors were murdered.
- The event caused a huge stir in Poland and abroad, and reinforced the feeling that Poland was not a safe country for Jews.

The grave of the pogrom victims at the Jewish cemetery in Kielce, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pogrom_kielecki#/media/File:Memorial12.jpg, Public domain

Reasons for post-war emigration

- Fear of experiencing violence again.
- The loss of loved ones and friends.
- The desire to start a new life.
- The desire to settle in the newly established Jewish state. The State of Israel was established in 1948 and became an important destination for Jewish emigrant

A crowd gathered in Tel Aviv awaiting the signing of the Declaration of Independence of Israel, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proklamacja_niepodleg%C5%82o%C5

%9Bci_Izraela#/media/Plik:Israel_-_Independence_May_14,_1948.jpg, Public Domain

Where did Polish Jews go?

- Palestine / Israel
- United States
- France
- Canada
- Australia

Larissa, France, 1946; ‘The Girl from the closed city”

What was emigration like?

- Many people left legally, but some crossed the borders secretly.
- Jewish organisations helped organise the departures.
- Emigrants often ended up in transit camps in Europe.

A Jewish family in a transit camp in Vienna, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dipisi#/media/Plik:Jewish_refugees_in_Vienna.jpg, Public domain

Lesson plans for the book

“The Girl from the Locked City”

Lesson plan author: Katarzyna Niewczas

Aims of the lesson plan pack:

1. The pack is designed for Years 7–8 of primary school.

2. Each lesson plan is designed to be delivered during a 45-minute lesson. Teachers may conduct four consecutive lessons as separate teaching units, deliver them as a longer, approximately 4-hour workshop, or use only a selected lesson.

3. Although reading the entire book *The Girl from the Locked City* by Larissa Cain is recommended for participants, the lesson plans suggest selected excerpts from the book that pupils can read during the sessions. It is up to the teacher to decide whether to encourage the group to read the whole book before the sessions or to use excerpts from the text during the lessons.

Lesson 1: Before the war

Learning objectives:

1. To get to know the book’s main character and spark an interest in her story,

2. To acquire basic knowledge about the Jewish community in pre-war Poland, with particular emphasis on its internal diversity,

3. To find information about the history of the Jewish community in the pupils’ place of residence.

Lesson plan

1. Project a photograph of Larissa Cain with her parents from 1939 and tell the class that during this lesson they will learn more about the story of the girl in the photograph and her family.

   Divide the class into small groups and hand out a worksheet with the photograph and accompanying questions to each group. Tell the groups that in the first part of the exercise, you are encouraging them to freely interpret the photograph.

Krynica, lipiec 1939 roku.
Nasze ostatnie wakacje

Once the groups are ready, invite the class to share their initial thoughts with the whole class.

2. To find out who the family in the photograph really were, hand out printed excerpts from the book to the class, containing the chapters: ‘The Happy Girl’ and ‘At the Grandparents’’, pp. 11–15.

Once the group has finished reading, return to the worksheets and invite the class to answer the questions again. Discuss together what came as a surprise to the students and what was confirmed.

What do we learn from the texts:

- Larissa's parents run a sweet shop in Warsaw,
- they are not well-off; the three of them live in a rented room,
- her mother is caring and is there for her when she is ill,
- the girl's grandparents live in Częstochowa,
- Larissa loves visiting her grandparents, who call her 'a little spark',
- the girl is Jewish,
- her grandparents observe Jewish holidays (such as Shabbat or Passover) and also speak Yiddish,
- many of the girl's other relatives also live in Częstochowa,
- the family encounters anti-Semitism in their local community.

When discussing the text, pay attention to information related to Jewish culture, but do not overlook other characteristics of this family, such as social status, occupation or the personality traits of individual members. It is important to view Larissa's family as a whole, not only from the perspective of their religion, but also other aspects
their identity. Religion, language and origin are never the whole story when it comes to another person.

3. Show and discuss the attached presentation "Jews in pre-war Poland" to provide a broader historical context for the information from the reading.

4. Invite the pupils to work individually. Write the address of the Virtual Shtetl website on the board: sztetl.org.pl, and invite everyone to visit the site and search for information about the pre-war Jewish community in your town or the nearest town. Discuss the information found in class.

Scenario II: In the ghetto

Learning objectives:

1. To organise knowledge about the situation of Polish Jews in the early years of the Second World War (1939–1942),

2. To trace the phenomenon of increasing discrimination against Polish Jews based on Allport's pyramid model,

3. To reflect on what gave the main character strength during her time in the ghetto.

Lesson plan:

1. Write the word “ghetto” on the board and invite the students to share any historical facts they know that relate to this topic. Gather the group’s existing knowledge and organise it.

2. Discuss the attached presentation with the class to broaden the students’ knowledge of the situation of Polish Jews in the early years of the Second World War (1939–1942). Introduce Allport’s pyramid of hatred and outline the issue of escalating discrimination.

3. Invite the students to read the following excerpts: “The First Period of German Occupation”, “November 1940 – The Warsaw Ghetto”, “The Year 1941 in the Ghetto”, pp. 27–36; and “The Deportation Campaign in July, August and September 1942”, pp. 39–44.

   Hand out the printed text excerpts and the worksheet featuring the pyramid of hatred to the pupils. The class’s task is to read the texts and then place the events described in them on Allport’s pyramid of hatred model. Hand out a printed worksheet featuring the pyramid of hatred to each pair.

   Topics covered in the texts:
   - the requirement to wear an armband with the Star of David (exclusion),
   - a ban on attending school (discrimination),
   - the closure of the ghetto (discrimination),
   - overcrowded housing (violence),
   - the typhus epidemic (violence),
   - lack of medicines (violence),
   - lack of food (violence),
   - the mass deportation (extermination).

   We suggest discussing conditions in the ghetto as examples of violence against Jews. Overcrowding, disease, and shortages of medicine and food were the result of the deliberate sealing off of the ghettos and the concentration of large numbers of people in a small area without adequate resources. The appalling living conditions in the ghetto caused the deaths of tens of thousands of people even before the liquidation operation.

   Discuss the prepared worksheets with the class. In the discussion, focus on the factual aspect (the escalation of violence), but also on the emotional aspect of working with difficult historical material. Check how your pupils feel after reading the texts and what emotions the historical facts they have learnt have evoked in them.

4. At the end of the lesson, invite the class to reflect together on what was a source of support and strength for Larissa during her time in the ghetto. Ask the students to write down their ideas individually on sticky and stick them on the board. Discuss and summarise the themes raised by the students.

In the text, the narrator refers to

- reading books,
- the presence of loved ones,
- playing in the yard with friends,
- studying

as strategies that gave her support during her time in the ghetto.

Scenario III: In hiding

Educational objectives:

1. To acquire basic information about the attitudes of the majority population in the face of the Holocaust,

2. To organise existing knowledge about the realities of Jews hiding outside the ghetto,

3. To create a space for reflection on what was needed during the war to save the life of a Jewish child.

Lesson plan:

1. Display a slide from the presentation on the screen containing keywords relating to Jews hiding outside the ghetto during the war. Ask the class what all these keywords have in common and what topic they relate to. Use this discussion to organise the class's existing knowledge about Jews hiding outside the ghetto.

2. Invite the class to read the following excerpts: "In the ghetto from September 1942 to January 1943", "In Warsaw on the Polish side", pp. 45–51, and "At Hanka's", pp. 53–57.

   After reading, divide the class into groups and hand out a worksheet to each group. Using these, the pupils will create a description of the attitudes of selected characters from the chapters they have read.

   Characters mentioned in the book excerpts:

   - Uncle Aleksander, who organises an escape from the ghetto with the help of friends from the Polish underground;
   - Alexander's friends, in whose home Larissa is treated warmly, learns to cook and has access to books;
   - a seamstress, with whom the girl feels out of place, is treated harshly, and suspects she was taken in for a fee;

- blackmailers who want a bribe and threaten to hand Larissa over to the Gestapo;
- a family with a daughter, Aleksander's fiancée, who warmly welcomes the girl into their home;
- Hanka and Janek, who may be double agents or members of the Polish underground; Larissa is not allowed to leave her room during the day, but her father visits her in the flat from time to time.

Discuss the worksheets as a class, drawing attention to the diversity of behaviours, attitudes and motivations of the people presented. Draw the group's attention to how different the experience of being in hiding could be depending on who provided the shelter.

3. Together with the class, reconstruct the list of people with whom Larissa went into hiding after leaving the ghetto. Draw a 'chain of help' on the board, connecting all these people with arrows.

   Draw the class's attention to the complexity of the process of helping Jews outside the ghetto, the number of people involved, and the significance of Jewish activists in this process (Uncle Aleksander). The fact that many people helped to save a single Jewish child is a recurring theme in the accounts of children rescued from the ghetto.

   Supplement this exercise with the attached presentation, which places the girl's story in a broader historical context.

4. Summarise the lesson with a class discussion on the difficulties Larissa faced whilst in hiding outside the ghetto and the difficulties faced by those who hid her.

   Examples of topics you might discuss:

   What was difficult for Larissa?
   - being separated from her dad,
   - not knowing the people who were taking her in,
   - having to hide her name, background and history,
   - having to hide at home without being able to go out,
   - loneliness,
   - the cold behaviour of some of the people sheltering her,
   - fear of her identity being discovered and the threat of the

   death penalty. What was difficult for those hiding her?

   - the fear of being discovered hiding a Jewish woman and the threat of the death penalty,
   - taking a stranger and a dependent person into their home,
   - organising food for another member of the household,
   - the responsibility for the person in hiding.

Scenario IV: After the war

Learning objectives:

- To acquire basic knowledge about the causes and directions of Jewish migration from Poland after the Second World War,

- Reflecting on the difficulties experienced by Jewish survivors,

- To summarise the work with the biographical account.

Lesson plan:

1. Project a slide showing information on the size of the Jewish community in Poland before the war, immediately after the war, and today, in 2026. Ask the class for their thoughts on the reasons for the difference in the size of the Jewish community immediately after
the war and today.

2. Invite the class to read the text excerpts: pp. 92–100, and then to complete the attached worksheets in pairs.

   Discuss the worksheets prepared by the students with the class and supplement their comments with the attached presentation.

   What do we learn from the text?
   - Post-war violence directed against Jews (such as the Kielce pogrom) meant that many survivors did not feel safe in the country and decided to leave.
   - A common experience among Polish Jews after the war was a sense of emptiness: 90% of the pre-war Jewish community had perished in the Holocaust. The survivors had thus lost their families, friends and acquaintances; religious communities, schools and sports clubs had also disappeared.
   - For many, the decision to leave Poland was preceded by a dilemma. Leaving meant abandoning the country of their birth, leaving behind the burial places of their family and ancestors, and having to find their feet in a new place.
   - Larissa's aunt and uncle decide to emigrate to France, where they have relatives. The girl would prefer to go to Palestine, where their relatives also live, and where a new Jewish state is being established.

3. To conclude the series of lessons, suggest an individual task to the class: writing a letter to the book's protagonist.

   Suggest that the pupils answer the following questions in their letters:
   - How do you feel after learning Larissa's story?
   - What was important to you in her story?

- What would you like to remember from this story?
- What would you like to say to Larissa?

Writing individual letters will allow the young people to conclude their work on this difficult topic by engaging in personal reflection on the impressions and emotions that coming into contact with this personal story has evoked in them.

Worksheet for the lesson "Before the War"

Krynica, lipiec 1939 roku. Nasze ostatnie wakacje

1. Who is pictured in the photo?

2. How do you imagine these people might be? Where do they live, what do they do?

3. When was this photo taken? Why is it captioned "Our last holiday"?

After reading the texts, answer the questions again:

1. Who is pictured in the photo?

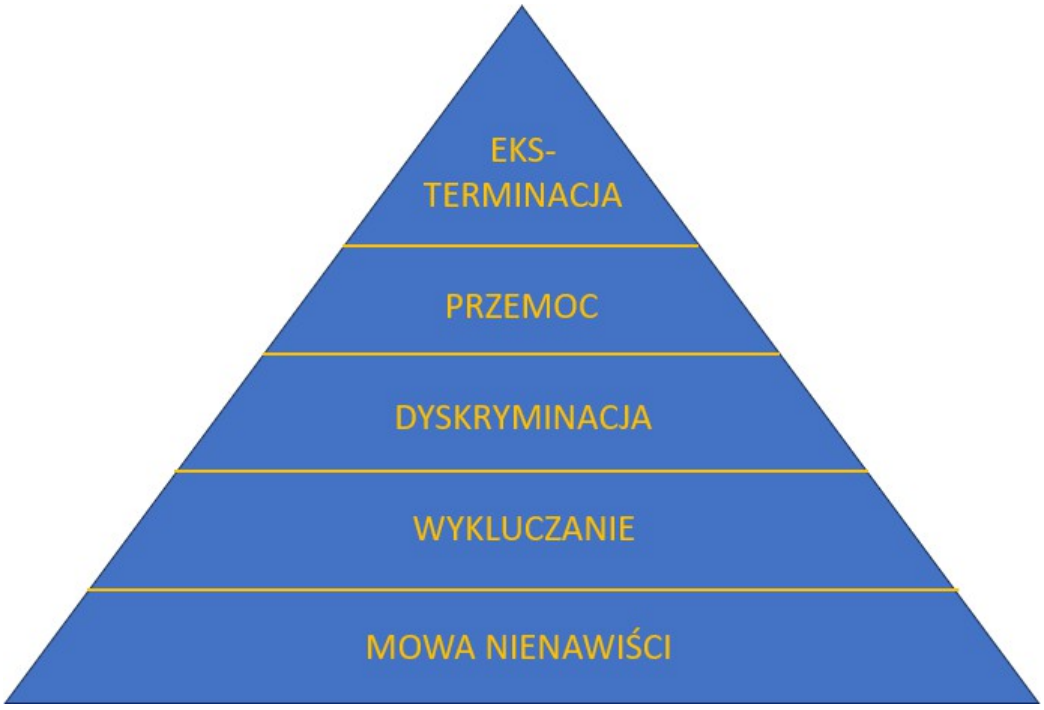
2. Who are these people? Where do they live, and what do they do?

3. When was this photo taken? Why is it captioned "Our last holiday"?

Worksheet for the lesson “In the Ghetto”

Plot the historical events described in the excerpts you have just read on the Pyramid of Hate model.

For example, the narrator describes in the text the imposition on Jews of the obligation to wear an armband with the Star of David, which is an example of exclusion.



Worksheet for the lesson "In Hiding"

After reading the book excerpts, complete the table below.

	What actions do they take?	What are their motives?	What effect do their actions have on Larissa?
Uncle Alexander			
Alexander's friends			
The seamstress			
Blackmailers			
A family with a daughter			
Hanka			

Worksheet for the lesson ‘After the War’

After reading the excerpts, answer the questions below.

Why are Larissa and her family planning to leave Poland?

Where does Larissa’s uncle plan to take the family, and where would Larissa like to go?

Why is it difficult for Larissa to leave Poland?

Identity

The Great Dictionary of the Polish Language defines identity as:

- an awareness of one's own characteristics and distinctiveness,
- an awareness of shared characteristics and a sense of unity with others within a given social group,
- the totality of characteristics and personal details that enable a person to be identified.

Secondary and primary characteristics of identity

Our identity consists of **primary characteristics**, which we have from birth, and **secondary characteristics**, which we acquire throughout our lives.

Take a look at the list below. Which of these characteristics are primary and which are secondary?

hobbies, country of origin, education/level of education, physical and mental characteristics, family status, age, living conditions,

, foreign languages spoken, mother tongue, occupation, sexual orientation, lifestyle, gender

Primary identity traits are marked in red, and secondary ones in green:

hobbies, country of origin, education/level of education, physical and mental characteristics, family status, age, living conditions, ethnic group, foreign languages spoken, mother tongue, occupation, sexual orientation, lifestyle, gender

Each of our identities consists of many elements, both primary and secondary.

Depending on the characteristics of our identity, we belong to **majority and minority groups**.

Majority groups are those that have greater social influence; they are often (but not always) more numerous as well.
include, for example, the national majority in a country, people who follow the dominant religion, and able-bodied people.

Minority groups are those that have less social influence and are often (but not always) fewer in number. Examples of minority groups include national and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and refugees.

Who is more vulnerable to discrimination and unequal treatment?

People belonging to majority or minority groups?

According to the PWN Dictionary of the Polish Language, **discrimination** is the persecution of individuals or social groups, or restricting their rights on the grounds of nationality, religion, gender, etc.

Discrimination is a phenomenon to which people are particularly vulnerable if, due to a particular identity trait, they belong to **a**
.

It is often the case that the characteristic on the basis of which a person is treated unequally is **an innate one**, something they were born with. This is the case, for example, with discrimination on the grounds of nationality, religion or gender.

The rise of discrimination

Before the war

1933

- Adolf Hitler comes to power in Germany
- The start of official anti-Jewish policy
- Boycott of Jewish shops and institutions

1935

- Introduction of the Nuremberg Laws
- Jews lose some of their civil rights and the ability marry Germans

9–10 November 1938

- Kristallnacht
- Destruction of synagogues, shops and Jewish homes

https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noc_kryszta%C5%82owa#/media/Plik:T, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noc_kryszta%C5%82owa#/media/Plik:The_day_after_Kristallnacht.jpg, Public domain

World War II

1 September 1939

- German invasion of Poland
- The start of the Second World War

1939–1940

- Restrictions on the rights of the Jewish population in the occupied territories
- The creation of ghettos in the occupied territories
- Appalling living conditions in the ghettos lead to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people

Construction of the ghetto walls on Świętokrzyska Street in Warsaw (August 1940), https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Getto_warszawskie#/media/Plik:The_Wall_of_ghetto_in_Warsaw_-_Building_on_Nazi-German_order_August_1940.jpg, Public domain

The Holocaust of European Jews

1941

- Germany's attack on the Soviet Union
- Mass executions of Jews carried out by the Einsatzgruppen

1941–1942

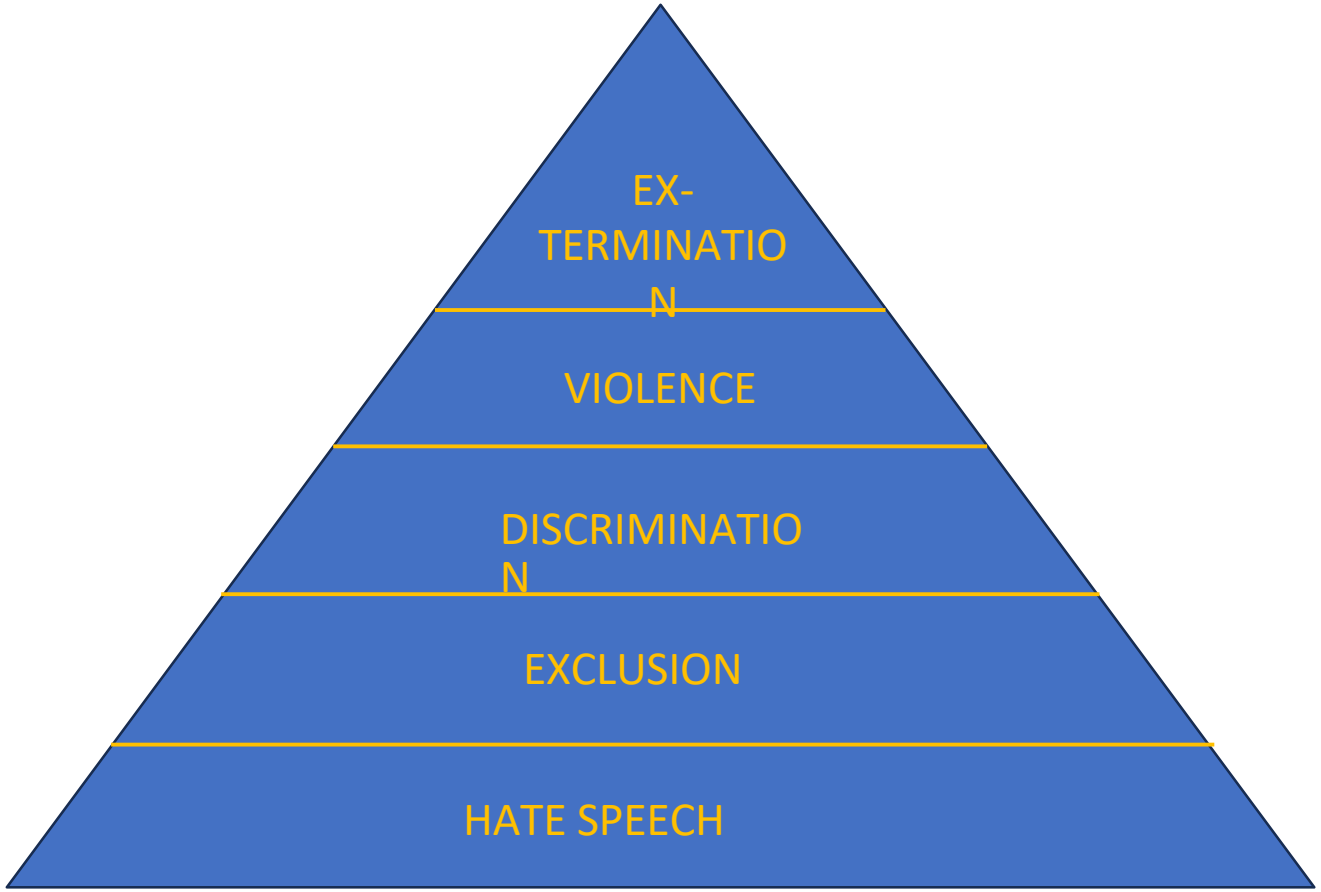
- Establishment of the extermination camps

20 January 1942

- The Wannsee Conference
- Establishment of a plan for the mass extermination of European Jews,
  which resulted in the murder of 6 million people

Site of mass graves, Rzuchowski Forest, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ob%C3%B3z_zag%C5%82ady_w_Che%C5%82mnie_nad_Nerem#/media/Plik:LasRzuchowski4.jpg
CC BY-SA 4.0

The Pyramid of Hate



The pyramid of hatred is a model created by social psychologist Gordon Allport, which illustrates the process of escalating violence against minority groups.

Lesson plans for the book

“Was I afraid of death?”

Lesson plan author: Katarzyna Niewczas

Purpose of the lesson plans:

1. The lesson plans are designed for secondary schools.

2. Each lesson plan is designed to be delivered during a 45-minute lesson. Teachers may conduct two consecutive lessons as separate teaching units, deliver them as a longer, approximately 2-hour workshop, or use only a selected lesson.

Lesson 1 scenario: Identity

Learning objectives:

- To learn the basics of social identity theory,

- To examine the significance of belonging to a minority,

- Reflecting on one’s own identity.

Lesson plan:

1. Start the lesson by dividing the class into pairs or small groups and hand out to each the worksheet attached to the lesson plan. Invite the students to reflect in groups on the characteristics that make up a person’s identity.

   After 5–10 minutes of group work, invite volunteers to share their ideas with the whole class.

2. Hand out to the pupils a printed excerpt from Hedi Fried’s book *Was I Afraid of Death?*: the chapter *‘Do you feel Swedish?’*.

   After they have read this excerpt individually, invite the class back to work in groups or pairs. Ask the students to look at the characteristics of identity they have written on the puzzle pieces and relate them to the excerpts they have read from the book. Give the groups a few minutes to discuss, then ask the class:

   - Who is the narrator of the texts?
   - How does she introduce herself?

- Which aspects of her identity does she refer to?
- How does the way she sees herself differ from the way others see her?
- How has her identity changed over time?
- How did you find this story? Did anything in it surprise

you? From the excerpts in the book, we learn that:

- Hedi was born in Romania,
- she is Jewish,
- Hungarian was spoken in her family home, but she herself does not wish to describe herself as a Hungarian Jew,
- in 1940 she felt like a "full-blooded Romanian nationalist",
- after seven years of living in Sweden, she obtained Swedish citizenship, which allowed her to feel Swedish, although she does not always speak openly about it for fear of others' reactions,
- she is married,
- and a mother of three.

3. Referring to points raised in the class discussion, present the attached presentation on the theory of social identity, minority and majority groups, and the risk of discrimination against people belonging to minority groups.

4. At the end of the lesson, invite the students to reflect individually on their own identity using the suggested worksheet.

Lesson Plan II: The Rise of Discrimination

Learning objectives:

- To understand the process of escalating discrimination against European Jews during the Second World War,

- To acquire basic knowledge of the mechanisms of discrimination,

- To reflect on the measures currently in place to protect minorities and their importance in combating discrimination.

Lesson plan:

1. To begin the lesson, write on the board the title of the chapter from the book that the students will read during the lesson: "How is it possible that an entire nation sided with Hitler?"

   Invite the class to spend a few minutes discussing the question in pairs, and then ask those who wish to speak to share their thoughts with the whole class.

2. Hand out the printed chapters of the book *Was I Afraid of Death?*: “When did you realise that your family was in danger?” and “How is it possible that an entire nation sided with Hitler?”, and ask the students to read them.

3. After reading the texts, discuss them with the class:
    - What social factors does the narrator cite as having brought the Nazis to power?
    - How did the narrator perceive the growing danger? The

    texts mention:

    - Traditional anti-Semitic prejudices, which became the foundation for the Nazi narrative,
    - Germany’s economic and political situation after the First World War (economic crisis, loss of territory), which contributed to the growing popularity of the Nazi party,
    - The importance of propaganda and ideological youth organisations in consolidating the Nazi narrative,
    - Personal experience of observing growing hostility towards Jews.

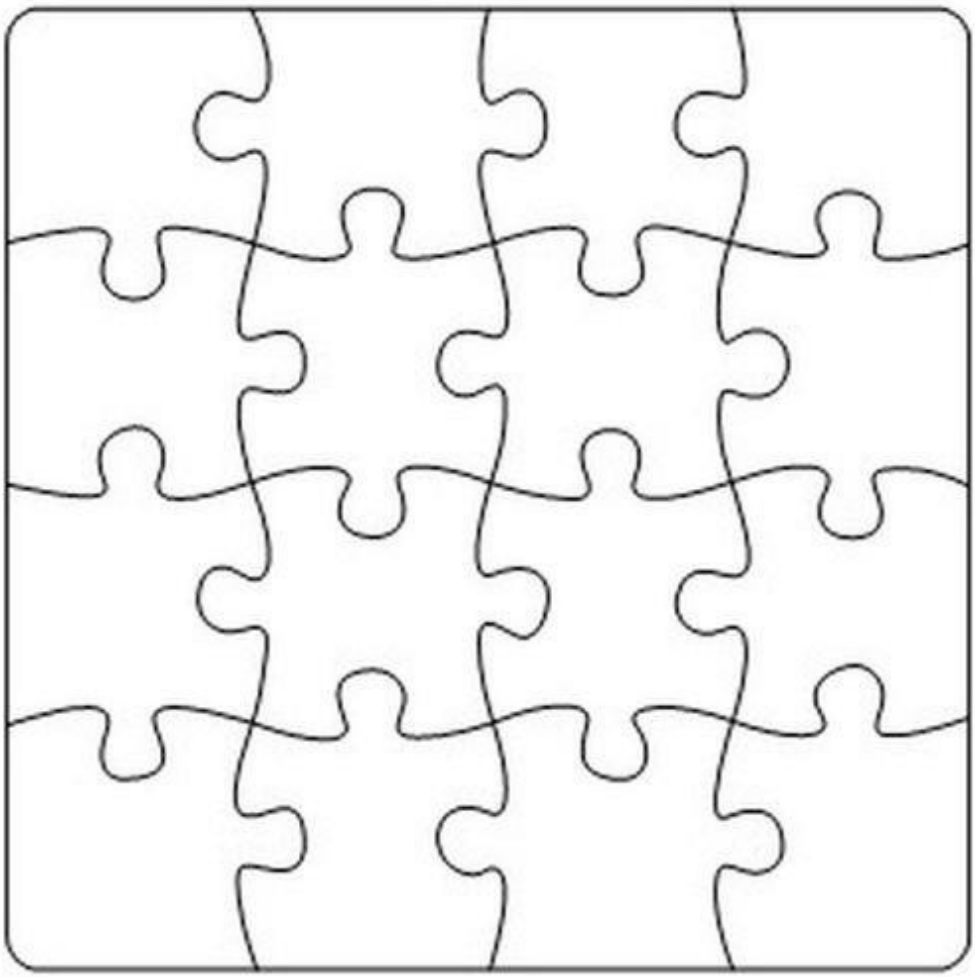
4. To provide a broader historical context, present the attached presentation to the class on the growing discrimination against European Jews during the Second World War.

5. At the end of the lesson, ask the students to work individually. Hand out a worksheet to each student containing a list of institutions and documents established after the Second World War to protect minorities. The students’ task is to choose one of these institutions, find information about it themselves, and write a short note on the subject.

Worksheet for the lesson 'Identity'

Identity is a set of characteristics that allow an individual or a group to define who they are and distinguish themselves from others. Identity encompasses both the way a person perceives themselves and the way they are perceived by those around them.

Discuss what characteristics shape a person's identity and write your ideas in the puzzle below.



Individual worksheet for the ‘Identity’ lesson

The worksheet below is a tool to help you reflect on who you feel you are, how you define yourself, but also how others see you.

The questions provided are not test questions; they are not for marking. Their aim is to help you reflect on what influences who you are and what is important to you.

1. Which social groups do I feel I belong to? Why are they important to me?
2. Which aspects of my identity are constant, and which change with experience?
3. Does the way others see me match the way I see myself?
4. How do my family, school or friends influence my views and values?
5. Have I ever felt judged on the basis of a particular characteristic or a group to which I belong?
6. How do I react to people who differ from me in terms of their views, culture or lifestyle?
7. What values are most important to me and where do they come from?

Worksheet for the lesson 'The Rise of Discrimination'

Familiarise yourself with the list of institutions and documents established after the Second World War to protect the rights of minorities. Choose one of them and prepare a short note on it, answering the questions below.

Institutions:

United Nations European Court of

Human Rights **Documents:**

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide

European Convention on Human Rights

Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

Questions:

1. Why was it deemed necessary after the Second World War to establish an international system for the protection of human rights and minorities?
2. What are the main objectives of the selected organisation? / What rights does the selected document guarantee?
3. What are the main limitations on the activities of this organisation? / What are the main limitations on the enforcement of the rights contained in this document?

TEACHING THROUGH DILEMMAS IN HOLOCAUST EDUCATION.

Robert Szuchta

Dilemma-based learning (also known as *the dilemma case method*) is a teaching method in which the learning process is based on the analysis of difficult and ambiguous situations where there is no single, ideal solution. In this method, pupils are encouraged to consider the decisions that the characters in a story must make when faced with a conflict of values. This method typically employs active teaching methods such as drama, simulation or role-play by students. By engaging them in analysing the difficult choices faced by people in the past, it promotes critical thinking rather than the memorisation of dates.

With regard to teaching about the Holocaust, the validity of applying these teaching methods in their entirety should be questioned. It does not seem that active teaching methods, based on students identifying with historical figures and taking on their roles, are appropriate for resolving difficult and ambiguous situations from the past.

The term ‘dilemma’ refers to a difficult situation requiring a choice between two (or more) equally valid, often equally unfavourable or mutually exclusive solutions. It is the necessity of attempting to resolve a situation where each of the available solutions may have unpleasant consequences or requires giving up one that is equally valuable and important (e.g. *to have or to be*). Therefore, a “dilemma” may remain unresolved, unlike a “problem”, which can be resolved.

Hédi Fried, a former prisoner of concentration camps including Auschwitz, writes on the basis of her experiences from meetings with schoolchildren: *“Questions are sometimes more important than answers. By asking questions, one begins to realise what happened*.” This, such an important observation, corresponds to the tenets of

of critical pedagogy. It emphasises critical thinking and reflection, which encourage pupils to ask critical questions rather than necessarily seeking ready-made textbook answers. This approach to historical material leads far more effectively to an understanding of the complexity of past events, whilst also developing the desired skills in pupils.

A method based on the analysis of case studies of dilemmas in Holocaust education encourages a shift away from the presentation of dry facts towards an understanding of human behaviour in *extreme situations*. It allows students to explore the moral choices made by **victims**, **perpetrators**, **witnesses** and **rescuers**, whilst avoiding simplistic *'good* versus *evil'* judgements.

In the situation described above, *a "liminal* experience" should be understood as an extreme, deeply personal existential experience of a human being. It shatters one's sense of security and daily routine, and calls the meaning of life into question. Following Karl Jaspers, we may regard the following as "*borderline experiences*": **death**, **suffering**, **guilt**, **struggle**, **chance** and **uncertainty**. We encounter such experiences in the context of camp situations. Descriptions of them can be found in the pages of numerous personal testimonies from former prisoners of German concentration and extermination camps, ghettos, those in hiding on the so-called 'Aryan side', and those who experienced the horrors of war, expulsion, natural disasters and other events[1] .

Main approaches to understanding the concept of 'Holocaust dilemmas'

1. The concept of 'Choiceless Choices'. Introduced by Lawrence Langer[2] , it describes situations faced by victims in which no available course of action was morally 'good' (e.g. the choice between one's own death and endangering one's closest friends or family members

[1] Jacek Leociak, *The Borderline Experience. Studies on Twentieth-Century Forms of Representation*, second revised edition, Institute of Literary Research, Warsaw 2018

[2] Lawrence L. Langer, *Testimonies of the Holocaust. In the Rubble of Memory*, translated by Marcin Szuster, Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw 2015

of their families). It serves to demonstrate that traditional ethical categories often failed within the camp system. The author concludes that traditional ethics (based on free will and the distinction between good and evil) do not apply in the camp reality. Hence the assertion that camp victims cannot be judged according to standard ethical frameworks, because the Nazi ethical system was designed to destroy human dignity even before taking a person's life.

2. The concept of 'The Gray Zone', introduced by Primo Levi in *If This Is a Man* [3] . Levi analyses the space between ordinary prisoners (victims) and prisoner functionaries ('executioners'), e.g. kapos and members of the Sonderkommando. He notes that the latter were corrupted by the system created by the Nazis, which not only drew them into the machinery of extermination but also offered them survival at the expense of other victims. The key conclusion to which Levi arrives is that totalitarian systems seek to blur responsibility, forcing victims to participate in the crime, which paralyses their moral judgement and destroys group solidarity.
3. Concepts: 'the **banality** of evil', **obedience** and **conformism**. Such perspectives and analyses of the dilemmas of the Holocaust can be found in the works of Hannah Arendt[4], Stanley Milgram[5]and Christopher Browning[6]. They are based on an analysis of the perspectives of both perpetrators and victims. The key question is: how

   do 'ordinary people' become murderers, but also victims? Arendt suggests that Adolf Eichmann was not a depraved monster, an unfeeling bureaucrat, who 'did not think' but merely carried out his duties without reflection

[3] Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man*, chapter *'The Grey* Zone', translated by Stronisław Kasprzysiak, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2007, pp. 38–81

[4] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, translated by Adam Szostkiewicz, ZNAK Publishing House, Kraków 2004

[5] Stanley Milgram, Obedience to Authority, translated by Małgorzata Hołda, WAM Publishing House, Kraków 2008

[6] Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: The 101st Reserve Police Battalion and the 'Final Solution' in Poland*, 2nd revised and expanded edition, translated by Piotr Budkiewicz, REBIS Publishing House, Poznań 2019

instructions and orders in accordance with established procedures. Milgram demonstrated how far a person can go in obedience to authority (including centres of power), not shying away from inflicting pain or even death upon others if submission to authority so requires. Browning, analysing the behaviour of German police officers involved in the mass shootings of Jewish civilians in the Lublin region, demonstrated how easily they succumbed to group pressure, and that conformism was a significant source of their criminal activity.

4. The concept of the **'lesser** evil' is present in analyses of the conduct of *the Judenrats*, which had to carry out the orders of the German authorities, for example by drawing up lists of people destined for deportation to extermination camps. An example of the 'lesser evil' strategy is the conduct of Chaim Rumkowski, chairman of the Łódź Judenrat. He was convinced that sacrificing a portion of the population (5–12 September 1942 – the 'Great Round-up') would save the 'productive' remainder from the Holocaust. The key dilemma posed by this concept is: "Is it permissible to sacrifice one person to save many others?"
5. The concept of **the "modern great** Evil" formulated by Zygmunt Bauman in his work entitled "Modernity and the Holocaust"[7]. The Polish sociologist showed how contemporary, modern technical civilisation, completely bureaucratised, distances the perpetrator from the victim, making murder a technical process having nothing to do with morality. Bauman uses the metaphor of the "gardener". The process of the Holocaust resembles the cultivation of a garden, in which the gardener, tending to the noble crops, clears the garden of weeds. The Holocaust was therefore not a return to barbarism, but a product of modern technical civilisation, which is capable of effectively suspending the morality of the individual in favour of the efficiency of the system. And such was

[7] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, translated by Tomasz Kunz, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2009

be German, Nazi plan "final solution of the Jewish question".

Objectives of teaching using the dilemma method

- To deepen and consolidate knowledge of the past and of human behaviour in extreme situations.
- Developing ethical competence: Learning to analyse behaviour in terms of right and wrong.
- Improving critical thinking and the ability to construct arguments for one's position. The ability to rationally justify one's decision.
- Fostering tolerance and respect for other choices and the ways in which they are justified: Learning to listen to other points of view, even if they contradict one's own views.

Moral dilemmas of the Holocaust (*choices without a choice*) – examples Example 1

Situation: The leaders of the Łódź Judenrat, Chaim Rumkowski, and the Warsaw Judenrat, Adam Czerniakow, were ordered by the Germans to deliver a specific number of people (including young children) for 'resettlement'. They knew that in reality they would be sent to an extermination camp and murdered.

Dilemma: Both leaders were faced with the necessity of making a decision: whether to draw up the lists of deportees themselves, thereby condemning them to death; or to refuse to cooperate with the Germans, which would result in their own deaths and the takeover of the deportation operation by their tormentors.

Example 2

Situation: Among the Jews in hiding (in bunkers, hideouts, forests) were families with small children. During round-ups organised by the Germans, the group was in mortal danger if a child began to cry loudly.

Dilemma: Parents had to make a choice: whether to silence the child by covering its mouth, which often led to its suffocation; or to let it cry, which in turn gave away the hiding place and exposed everyone in hiding to accidental discovery.

Example 3

Situation: Prisoners who were assigned to *the Sonderkommando* in the extermination camps, whilst carrying out the tasks and work ordered of them, remained in a constant state of moral conflict.

Dilemma: Working in the Sonderkommando meant direct participation in the extermination of one's own people, in exchange for prolonging one's own life by a few weeks or months. The alternative was to refuse to take part in the Sonderkommando's work, which was tantamount to being shot or burned alive in the crematorium. This did nothing to halt the machinery of death.

WHAT DOES HISTORY TEACH US? DOES HISTORY REPEAT ITSELF?
Dilemma: ***Can the memory of the Holocaust, of which education about this event is a part, be an effective panacea against the repetition of this history?***

Source text:
Hédi Fried on the role of remembrance of the Holocaust.

"Many years have passed since I published my autobiography, *Fragments of Life* (1992), and several subsequent books. Since then, I have met with pupils in schools and lectured at universities, with the deep conviction that young people must carry the memory of the Holocaust if we do not want this tragedy to be repeated. What happened once, unfortunately, may happen again, even if not in the same way. To prevent this, we must remember; the past influences the present and casts a shadow over the future […]
The aim of this book is to avoid the mistakes of history. I trust that its readers will understand that no one is born to don the mask of a persecutor or a bystander. Each of us has our own free will; only by taking responsibility for our actions can we prevent history from repeating itself. […]
I often hear the question: what can be done to ensure this never happens again? In my view, there is only one way – education. Education in general, and school education in particular. […] The Holocaust took place. If it is forgotten, it will happen again. That is why schools must ensure that they tell the story, in the finest detail, of exactly what happened in Germany between 1920 and 1945. […]
It is very important that the story of the Holocaust finds its place in all school subjects, from religion and geography to PE and chemistry. All teachers should be aware of and discuss how their subjects relate to what happened."

Source: Hédi Fried, *Was I Afraid of Death? Questions about the Holocaust*, translated by Justyna Czechowska, Karta Centre Foundation
KARTA Centre Foundation, Warsaw 2025, pp. 8, 11, 114–115]

Source text
Haim Ginnot is pessimistic about the effectiveness of education

I am one of the survivors who lived through a concentration camp. My eyes have seen what no human being should ever witness: gas chambers built by learned engineers; children poisoned by educated doctors; infants killed by trained nurses; women and children shot and burned by graduates of secondary and higher education. And so I have my doubts about education.
That is why I ask: help your pupils to become human beings. Do not allow the result of your efforts to be learned monsters, qualified psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing and arithmetic are important, but only if they serve to help our children become human beings.

Haim Ginott, *'Teacher and* Child', Macmillan, New York 1972, p. 317, trans. Piotr Trojański)

Questions for pupils:

- *What motivated Hédi to talk about her wartime experiences?*
- *Do you think Hédi achieved her goal? Is keeping the memory of the Holocaust and crimes against humanity alive a good way to ensure that IT never happens again?*
- *Do you think that history repeats itself, 'even if not in the same way'? Present arguments in support of the position you hold.*

THE DUTY TO REMEMBER. WHY REMEMBER?
DILEMMA: DID THE MEMORY OF CAMP EXPERIENCES HELP PRISONERS TO SURVIVE?

Source text
"We also had the conviction that we had to survive so that we could tell everyone about it after the war. Although we doubted that anyone would want to listen."

Source: Hédi Fried, *Was I Afraid of Death? Questions about the Holocaust*, translated by Justyna Czechowska, KARTA Centre Foundation
KARTA Foundation, Warsaw 2025, p. 48

Questions for students:

- *What role did the imperative to remember camp experiences play in sustaining the will to survive in a concentration camp?*
- *Where did the doubt among concentration camp prisoners come from that anyone would want to listen to their camp memories after the war?*

Source text:
Transcript of a conversation between *SS-Unterscharführer* Joachim Wolf, serving as *Blockführer* and *Rapportführer* in the men's camp, in section BIId at Birkenau, and Heinz Lewin, a Jewish prisoner and member of the camp orchestra. Both were from Halle in Saxony.

- *Herr Unterscharführer*, do you think the Germans can still win the war?
- Not necessarily – replies Wolff after a moment's thought – the chances are getting slimmer…
- If so, then surely… everything that's happening here… here and in other camps… the world will find out about it, if it hasn't already… Don't you think the Germans will have to answer for this…
- Not at all… There will be no reckoning. No one will find out anything.
- I see… Are you saying that none of us prisoners will get out of here alive…, that there will be no eyewitnesses…
- But no! That's not what I meant at all…
A long moment of silence. Wolff seems to be gathering his thoughts, weighing the words that will best express them. He begins to speak slowly, as if committing a forbidden act:
- You see, it might even be better for you to know how things really stand. Essentially, according to *the Führer's* own instructions, not a single *prisoner* should leave any concentration camp alive. In other words, there will be no one who could tell the world what has been happening here over the past few years. But even if such witnesses were to be found – and this is precisely the genius of our *Führer's* plan – NO ONE WILL BELIEVE THEM. […] Even if we lose the war – which is not yet certain – no one will hold us to account. At most, a few leading figures will have to justify themselves. Your 'trial' – if it comes to that at all – will take place before a tribunal based on outdated legal formulas that have no application to our 'crimes'. Your judges will be forced to admit their own incompetence, because no 'human' court can punish arbitrariness with arbitrariness. The Germans will get off scot-free and live forever…

Source: Szymon Laks, *The Auschwitz Games*, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Oświęcim 1998, pp. 80–81]

Questions for students

- *Why does Wolf doubt the post-war prosecution of war criminals?*
- *Why will the post-war world not believe the witnesses to the crimes committed during the Holocaust?*

The concept of 'Choices without choice' (Lawrence Langer)
The dilemma: Concentration camp prisoners faced situations in which none of the available solutions was morally 'good', and when assessed today, traditional ethics fall short.

Source text:
Hédi Fried on the survival instinct and prisoner solidarity.

"If someone from the group was given a role, for example working in the kitchen, this gave the others the chance to get larger portions. They shared these privileges with those in their own group, making sure that 'their girls had it better. When food was being served, they made sure to get the soup from the bottom of the pot. That's where the vegetables were, sometimes even a piece of meat. Standing in the queue for soup, we watched jealously as they swirled the ladle. Would it dip properly, or would they only give us water today? The block leader wanted to appear fair; she didn't look to see who was in the queue—the ladle was supposed to dip the same for each of us. But she knew full well where her group was standing, whether they were at the front, in the middle or at the back of the queue. Then the ladle would dip properly.
The will to live was so strong that people would even steal bread from their own kin; a daughter would steal from her mother, a sister from her sister. It happened the other way round too, but far less often. In my group there was a woman long known as stingy and selfish. Now she showed her self-sacrificing and generous side, helping as best she could and giving up her own privileges if someone else was in greater need."

Hédi Fried, *Was I Afraid of Death? Questions about the Holocaust*, translated by Justyna Czechowska, Karta Centre Foundation
KARTA Foundation, Warsaw 2025, pp. 48–49

Question for students:

- *In a situation of extreme hunger, which turns a person into a "controlled automaton", do concepts such as "family loyalty" still apply, or are they superseded by biology?*
- *Where are the limits of human endurance? Can we speak of a breakdown of social norms in the camp?*

Source text
Hédi Fried on the role of the 'Kapo':

"Denunciations were not uncommon. To gain some advantage for themselves, some of the girls would betray their companions. It happened to me. I was one of those who spoke German, and besides, I was taller than the others, so when we were to work in Eidelstedt, I was appointed kapo. A Kapo is the SS's right-hand woman; the role meant I had to force the group to do hard labour. The reward was an extra bowl of soup. You couldn't refuse the appointment, but you could sabotage the task.
After a short march, we reached a ruined factory; we had to clear away the rubble. We were to form a chain and pass bricks to one another so that we could stack them neatly on the other side. My job was to urge the girls on so they worked efficiently. I put one on the lookout; she was to warn us if any SS man was approaching. The girls were to work calmly, but speed up if the lookout spotted a soldier.
After just two days, a Polish girl gave me away. A bowl of soup meant so much to her."

Question for students:

- *Does a victim's acceptance of a supervisory role (kapo) constitute a step into the realm of evil, or can it be seen as an attempt to retain some influence over the fate of fellow prisoners?*
- *In camp conditions, where 'a bowl of soup meant so much', can informing be judged as betrayal, or rather as a tragic instinct for survival?*

THE CONCEPT OF THE 'GREY ZONE' (PRIMO LEVI) – THE CASE OF CALK PERECHODNIK
Dilemma: ***In extreme circumstances, can a victim protect themselves from complicity in a crime?***

The following excerpts illustrate the blurring of boundaries between victim and perpetrator, which is characteristic of totalitarian systems that destroy group solidarity.

Source text:
Calek Perechodnik describes his decision to join the Jewish police, motivated by a desire to avoid round-ups and protect his family.

"Seeing that the war was not ending, and in order to be free from round-ups to the camps, I joined the ranks of the Ghetto-Polizei in February 1941. One good thing about the ghetto, according to the thinking of the time, was that the Germans did not hang around the ghetto; robberies and requisitions had ceased. If they needed anything, they turned to the Judenrat, which supplied them with everything, so I collected my belongings from Alchimowicz and *omnia mea mecum habeam* (Latin: *'All that I possess, I shall have with* me') in a small room, where I spent the winter and summer of 1941 in relative peace, looking after and raising my little Alinka."

Source: Calek Perechodnik, *Confession. The History of a Jewish Family during the Nazi Occupation in Poland*, edited, with an afterword and footnotes by David Engel, based on the manuscript, KARTA Centre, Warsaw 2004, pp. 23–24

Question for students:

- *Does ensuring the safety of one's loved ones give one the right to participate in the apparatus of violence (imposed by the occupier) against fellow Jews?*
- *Where, if at all, does the line of compromise with the occupier lie?*

Source text:
Calek Perechodnik, as a policeman, personally escorts his wife and daughter to the deportation square, believing the Germans' promises that police families would be spared.

"In a daze, I rush to the police station, I get to Kronenberg[1] , I tell him that my wife is hiding in the cellar. What should I do?
- Bring her to the square with the child, she will be spared, on my responsibility.
I rush as if on wings to the flat […] I still find Anka in the room, but at what a moment! She's already halfway down into the cellar, with only her head and shoulders sticking out.
- Anka – I shout – Kronenberg has ordered you to report to the square; you're in no danger, you'll be released.
[…]
Anka comes out of the cellar; we cover the opening so that her aunt and her little son, and the others who have hidden there, are not found; I take the child in my arms and lead my wife.
It wasn't enough that I'd lost her; I was left with the realisation that I was her executioner, the one who'd led her to her death.
We join the group of police wives, surprised that the group is no longer homogeneous, that other people have slipped in; we console ourselves with the thought that the proper selection will take place in the square anyway. Anka stands in line with the child, and I hover nearby.

[1] Bernard (Berek) Kronenberg – a member of the Judenrat in Otwock, appointed commander of the Jewish police in the Otwock ghetto in November 1940.

A huge line of people is approaching from the direction of the Judenrat; they are officials led by the chairman, together with their families. Everyone is marching calmly, for they know they will be released shortly anyway. [...] There are 8,000 people sitting in the square out of a total population of 12,000. 8,000 people, the vast majority of whom have turned up of their own accord.
My wife looks at me with silent eyes, says almost nothing, but that look... […]
– Calek, where is Kronenberg's wife, the one who ordered you to bring me to the square? I remain silent; what am I to say?
– Calek, those who have gone into hiding will survive, won't they?
I say nothing; I don't know, am I even capable of comprehending anything at this moment? [...]
The sun is beating down, my little girl hasn't eaten anything yet today, and it's already time to put her down for her second nap. She's always asleep in the woods at this time of day.
[...]
Meanwhile, the Germans are bringing out chairs, sitting down all round, drinking beer, smoking cigarettes, eating and laughing. From time to time they fire into the crowd so that no one dares to stand still. They also pull a few people out of the crowd and beat them with truncheons until they die.
The Jews watch this and, strangely enough, still do not grasp the horror of the situation. Some demand the money owed to them from others, that accursed money—will people always believe that it saves a man from all misfortunes? [...]
Twelve o'clock. Lipszer[2]arrives, Inspector Frank[3]appears with Dürr, they hold a meeting; all the policemen are to report for roll call in the square in front of the police station, where they will hear of their fate, as well as that of their families.
[…]
Lipszer speaks. His voice is slow, firm, emphatic, emphasising every word. Is this a man or God? No one realises it. [...]
Lipszer returns to the veranda and his words flow slowly. Oh God! What is he saying?!
- You, the police, are to remain in Otwock; you will clear out the entire ghetto, taking all belongings, goods and furniture to the warehouses, and you will guard the people in custody until the military police arrive. You must not take anything, neither belongings nor money. When you take down the curtains, do not tear them; do not damage the furniture; as for gold and dollars, you are to hand them over to him personally. [...] Once the whole ghetto has been cleared, you will be sent to a labour camp, to Karczew or elsewhere, where you will work for the duration of the war, and after the war you will be released.
If your wives were here,' Lipszer continues calmly, 'I would let them go, but since they're already in the square, they have to leave. [...]
I return to the square, where Anka is sitting, waiting for her sentence of freedom. What can I say to her? What can I do? We're here now, Calek, Calek, are we free? – her hands, now far away, reach out to me imploringly. The child also instinctively looks at me with outstretched hands. I remain silent; Willendorf[4]speaks for me.
He says nothing to his wife; in silence, he takes off and tosses aside his armband, cap and police badge, and calmly sits down on the ground. "We're going together," is the silent reply from Willendorf, a man of honour, a communist of the oldest school.
[...]
The carriages are approaching. God, work a miracle!

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[2] Lipszer (Lüppschau) – district commander of the German military police in Otwock.
[3] Hans Frank – nephew of Governor-General Hans Frank, served as inspector of the labour camp in Karczew near Otwock.
[4] Abram Willendorf was a medical assistant at the sanatorium in Otwock; he was about 40 years old. In the Otwock ghetto, he was a policeman.

[…]
The policemen are herding their own fathers and mothers into the carriages, locking the doors themselves, as if they were hammering nails into the lid of a coffin whilst they were still alive. The pace of work is frantic, a throbbing in the temples, unbearable pain in the heart, and a single thought: soon we will take our wives and children and flee this accursed square. [...]
As dusk falls, everything has already been loaded.
The Germans approach the policewomen, begin to sort them out; the children will not be spared!
[...]
[...]
The German devil reveals his true face; there is no longer any point in playing the charade; the Germans can trouble themselves to load 199 people onto the carriages themselves. They depart into the dark night without a farewell. From a distance, we see only a haze and silhouettes that we can no longer distinguish. Everything is lost […]
Hurry up, policemen, you executioners of your own wives, your own brothers, do them a final service, hand out bread through the carriage windows. Let no one say that the Germans begrudge the Jews their bread. A long whistle, you have set off, Anka, on your final journey. 'God, have mercy on me'!

Source: Calek Perechodnik, *Confession. The History of a Jewish Family during the Nazi Occupation of Poland*, edited, with an afterword and notes by David Engel, based on the manuscript, KARTA Centre, Warsaw 2004, pp. 51–63

Question for students:

- *How did the Nazi regime manipulate the concept of 'responsibility', making the victims feel guilty for the deaths of their loved ones?*

THE CONCEPT OF THE 'LESSER EVIL'
Dilemma: ***Is it permissible to sacrifice part of a community in order to save the rest?***

Source text
Letter from Adam Czerniakow to his wife Felicja, 23 July 1942

"They are demanding that I kill the children of my nation with my own hands. I have no choice but to die."

Source: *Adam Czerniakow's diary of the Warsaw Ghetto, 6 September 1939 – 23 July 1942*, edited and annotated by Marian Fuks, Warsaw 1983, p. 306

Source text
Note by Adam Czerniakow to the Community Council, 23 July 1942

"Worthoff[5] and his comrades came to see me and demanded that preparations be made for the transport of children[6] tomorrow. This is the last straw; after all, I cannot send defenceless children to their deaths. I have decided to leave. Do not regard this as an act of cowardice or an escape. I am powerless; my heart is breaking with grief and pity; I can bear this no longer. My action will reveal the truth to everyone and may lead them onto the right course of action. I realise that I am leaving you a heavy legacy."

Source: *Adam Czerniakow's diary of the Warsaw Ghetto, 6 September 1939 – 23 July 1942*, edited and annotated by Marian Fuks, Warsaw 1983, p. 41

Source text
Speech by Chaim Rumkowski, delivered to the inhabitants of the Łódź ghetto regarding the implementation of the order to hand over 20,000 children and elderly people for 'resettlement' (excerpts), 4 September 1942

"A great sadness has fallen upon the ghetto. They are demanding that we give up what is most precious to us: our children and our elderly. […] It has fallen to me to reach out to you today and beg: brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers – hand over your children to me... [a huge sob shakes the crowd].
[…]
Yesterday afternoon we received an order to deport 20,000 people from the ghetto. If not – we were told – 'we will do it ourselves'. We were faced with a dilemma: should we do it ourselves, or leave it to them? With this in mind – not how many would perish, but how many we could save – my closest colleagues and I came to the conclusion that, however terrible it is for us, we must take

[5] Hermann Worthoff – (1910–1982) a member of the special unit of the Security Police (*Sonderkommando der Sicherheitspolizei*) which had arrived in Warsaw from Lublin, tasked with liquidating the ghetto and deporting Jews to Umschlagplatz.

[6] The deportation operation in the Warsaw Ghetto began in the afternoon of 22 July. A. Czerniaków wrote in his diary: "22 July 1942 – […] At 10 o'clock, Sturmbahnführer Hoefle and his companions arrived. […] We were told that, with certain exceptions, Jews, regardless of gender or age, were to be deported to the east. Today, 6,000 people are to be delivered by 4 pm. And so it will be (at least) every day", *Adam Czerniakow's diary of the Warsaw Ghetto, 6 September 1939 – 23 July 1942*, edited and annotated by Marian Fuks, Warsaw 1983, p. 304

I must take responsibility for carrying out this decree. I must carry out this bloody operation. I must amputate limbs to save the body. I must take your children from you, for otherwise others will perish with them. I have not come to comfort you, I have not come to ease your hearts – I am here to share the enormity of your grief. I have come like a thief to steal what is most precious to you. […]

We have a great many people in the ghetto infected with tuberculosis, who have only a few days, perhaps weeks, left to live. I do not know, perhaps this plan is diabolical, but I must appeal to you: hand over these sick people so that the healthy may be saved in their place. I know how every family cares for its sick. But in the face of such a threat, we must consider and decide: who can, who ought to be saved? Common sense dictates that we should save those who can be saved, those who have a chance of survival, and not those who will die anyway. We live in conditions where there is not enough food for the healthy, let alone the sick. […]

I understand you, mothers; I see your tears. I feel the sorrow in your hearts, fathers, who tomorrow, when your children have been taken from you, will go to work as you do every day. I know all this, and my heart is breaking. Since 4 o'clock yesterday afternoon, when this decree was announced to me, I have been broken; I share your pain, I do not know where to find the last of my strength to get through this. I will tell you one thing – the demand was for 24,000 victims, 3,000 a day for eight days, but I managed to negotiate that figure down to 20,000, or perhaps a little less, but only on condition that all children up to the age of ten are sent. Since there are only 13,000 children and elderly people, we must make up the shortfall by sacrificing the sick. It is hard for me to speak; my strength is failing me. I appeal to you: help me carry out this operation. I tremble at the thought that, God forbid, other hands might carry out this operation. You see before you the ruin of a man. This is the most difficult moment of my life. I reach out to you and beg you: place these victims in my hands, protecting us from greater sacrifices, protecting the community of one hundred thousand Jews...

Source: Rafael F. Scharf, *The Role of Ch. Rumkowski in the Łódź Ghetto* [in:] "The History of the Jews in Łódź 1820–1944. Selected Issues", ed. Wiesław Puś, Stanisław Liszewski, University of Łódź Press, Łódź 1991, pp. 308–309.

Questions for pupils:

- *Can the actions of Czerniakow and Rumkowski be considered effective, given their main objective?*
- *Can the conduct of Czerniakow and Rumkowski be assessed, and if so, how, using the criterion of the supreme value of human life?*
- *In your opinion, when assessing people's conduct, can moral criteria from 'normal' times be applied in extreme situations (in ghettos, concentration camps)?*

Tools for addressing resistance, dehumanisation and emotional overload in Holocaust education

What is the purpose of these tools?

According to a report published by the KARTA Centre Foundation, **84.6%** of the teachers and educators surveyed agree that they lack teaching tools to deal with students' difficult emotions, and **60.4%** believe that their studies did not prepare them to deal with emotions in the classroom. At the same time, **70%** of teachers report a lack of available materials illustrating the mechanisms of manipulation and disinformation.

Link to the report

This collection of teaching tools aims to address the issues raised by teachers by supplementing their toolkit with resources to support work on difficult historical topics, particularly regarding resistance, prejudice and students' emotional overload.

Before using specific methods or exercises from the collection, we suggest reading all the recommendations. We hope that this brief overview of the proposed topics will facilitate teachers' daily teaching efforts.

Guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust

When teaching about the Holocaust, teachers may encounter behaviour from pupils that is difficult to accept or even unacceptable. Pupils may breach the guidelines, either consciously or unconsciously, through jokes, hurtful comparisons, hate speech, or provocative questions and comments. Each of these situations requires a response from the teacher.

Simply saying that something is not allowed is often not enough. Students may ask why it is forbidden. They may also view the teacher's reaction as a restriction on their freedom of expression. It is therefore advisable to establish the rules of discussion in advance. Clear rules help maintain order in the lesson and show students that the teacher's requirements are not arbitrary.

A good practice in psychological workshops or support groups is to draw up a so-called contract. A contract is a set of rules governing interactions within the group, including the manner of communication and the subject area of the work.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD CONTRACT

A good contract can make it easier for the teacher to refer to previously agreed rules when tension, laughter, comments that violate others' dignity, or hate speech arise in the classroom.

Another advantage of the contract is that it reduces interpersonal uncertainty among participants, which in the classroom context means students are more willing to cooperate and share their emotions honestly.

Given the reality of school life, where there is little time for Holocaust education, the contract should be short, specific and easy to understand. We recommend presenting pupils with a few points written in simple language using positive phrasing, that is, describing desired behaviours rather than prohibitions. It is also important to discuss the contract with the pupils, encouraging them to ask questions and suggest individual changes. Pupils should agree to the final form of the contract, for example by raising their hands.

It is also important to take the pupils' age into account. Older pupils in secondary schools may be better able to understand abstract rules, whereas for younger pupils, rules based on examples will work better.

TIPS FOR INTRODUCING THE CONTRACT

1. When should the contract be introduced?

→ The contract should be introduced at the start of the lesson.

→ It can be introduced in detail during a lesson on the Holocaust

→ It is possible to create a general contract covering all lessons and introduce it at the start of the term or school year

2. What should you say to the pupils at the start?

→ You should openly state that you are introducing the contract and explain what it is.

→ For example: “We will be following a contract in today’s lesson. I would like to present it to you and ask if you have anything to add. It is a set of rules, and I am introducing it so that we are all clear about what we will be doing.”

3. How can you make sure the students have understood the contract?

→ One option is to ask the students for their opinion directly. If the students do not respond, you can ask them to raise their hands to indicate that they have understood the contract.

→ You could also ask the students additional questions, such as: “Which rule do you think should be the most important?” “Should any of these rules be worded differently?”

4. How do you ensure the contract is followed?

→ When someone breaks the agreement, remind them that the class agreed on the contract at the start of the lesson. It is worth pointing out the specific rule that has been broken.

→ If a particular class consistently refuses to adhere to the contract, it is worth setting out clear consequences for breaking it. The consequences should directly relate to the pupils’ behaviour.

Proposed contract for primary and secondary school pupils

For elementary schools	For secondary schools
Our lessons focus on the history of the Holocaust*	Our classes focus on the history of the Holocaust*
We talk about real people who once lived and their stories	We talk about real people, their experiences, and historical events
We explain our opinions and verify where our information comes from	We distinguish facts from opinions, and base our statements on evidence
We ask questions when we don't understand something and want to learn more	We ask questions out of curiosity respect, or genuine ignorance
We treat everyone with respect, regardless of appearance, background, or suffering	We use neutral language grounded in respect
We remember that our situation is different from that of people who lived in the past	We exercise caution with historical comparisons and avoid drawing parallels between historical events and the present

* In the case of a general contract, the first point may be omitted or replaced with the statement "our lessons are about history".

Taking pupils’ age and sensitivity into account in teaching practice

Teaching about difficult history involves engaging with emotionally demanding content. An excess of distressing stimuli can lead to overload. The risk is greater when the content exceeds pupils’ current cognitive, empathic or moral capacities.

According to some psychologists (such as Lawrence Kohlberg or Martin Hoffman), individuals gradually acquire the ability to understand others’ perspectives, assess moral situations and respond to the suffering of others through cognitive and empathic development.

For this reason, it is advisable to introduce difficult content relating to the Holocaust step by step.

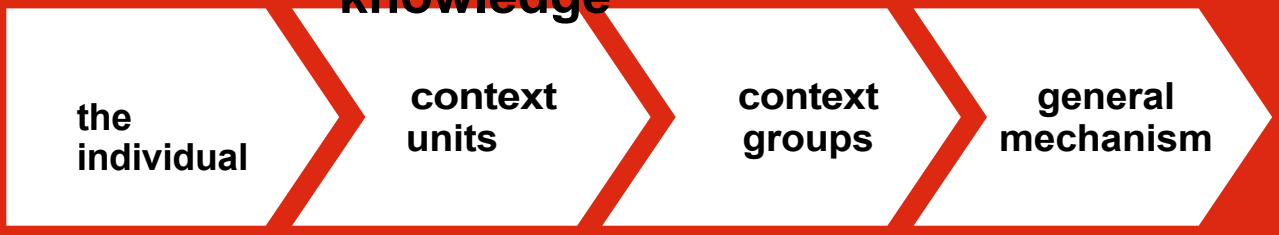
Younger students in particular find it easier to understand history through the lens of individual stories. A starting point could be a photograph, a letter, an excerpt from a diary, a short biography or the story of a single family. Such material helps pupils see that history concerned specific people, their lives, relationships, emotions and everyday existence. After working with an individual story, it is then worth introducing pupils to a broader historical context, for example by comparing the individual’s fate to the average situation of a member of that person’s national, ethnic or religious group.

Assuming the pupils are of a suitable age, the next step is to move on to more complex historical and social mechanisms. Teenage pupils can analyse dehumanisation, propaganda, contempt, poverty and institutional violence as broader mechanisms that shaped the lives of entire groups.

Gradual introduction of difficult content using the Holocaust as an example

Step	What do we do?	Example
1. We start with an individual and describe their experience	We present an individual's story. We discuss what that person might have gone through.	We start with a photograph, a letter, a biography, an excerpt from a diary, or the memoirs of a Holocaust survivor. We describe the individual's difficult experiences.
2. We present the individual's context	We explain the circumstances that person faced.	The ghetto, the occupation, prohibitions, coercion, lack of safety.
3. We connect the individual's story with the group's story	We show that many people of that ethnicity had similar experiences.	The individual's fate as a starting point for a discussion about the Jewish community.
4. We analyze the mechanisms	We move on to the more complex mechanisms that shaped the lives of entire	Dehumanization, propaganda, contempt, exclusion, violence, collaboration.

Graduating knowledge



LET'S START WITH THE PERSON

Lessons based on the story of Hédi Fried can begin by showing one of the photographs. It is worth introducing the pupils to the basic biographical details:

→ What is the name of the person we will be focusing on today? Where and when was she born?

Hédi Fried was born in Syhot in 1924 in Transylvania.

→ Did she have any siblings? Did her family belong to a particular faith or were they part of an ethnic minority?

Hédi had a younger sister, Livi. Hédi came from a Jewish family.

WE PRESENT THE INDIVIDUAL CONTEXT

It is worth beginning the individual context with the personal story of the person being described. An example of such a story is Hédi's recollection of a school visit to the post office:

> Six schoolgirls went to the post office with their art teacher. I was excited and a bit nervous. Firstly, I was going to meet my beloved; secondly, I was going to learn Morse code, something I'd long dreamed of. The post office manager welcomed us, gave a formal greeting, and explained the uncertain political situation and the important role of the post office. "Everything that happens here is confidential." He looked around. "I assume you're all Romanian?" The teacher looked at me and replied in an uncertain voice: "Nooo, not all of us." Then the director put down the piece of paper he was holding and said: "In that case, we must stop." We were sent home.

Next, it is worth asking the pupils a few questions:

→ What was the purpose of Hédi's visit to the post office?

The protagonist went to the post office with her art teacher and school friends to learn Morse code.

→ What emotions did Hédi feel?

The protagonist felt both joy and tension.

→ What question caused the school visit to the post office to be interrupted?

The visit was interrupted after the question of whether all the pupils were Romanian.

LINKING THE CONTEXT OF THE TEXT TO THE GROUP'S HISTORY

It is worth providing pupils with the historical context of the protagonist's experience. Following the annexation of Northern Transylvania to Hungary in September 1940, some of the Nuremberg Laws were introduced. Jews were dismissed from public office, the work of doctors and lawyers was restricted, non-Jews were forbidden from buying from Jews, and schools and universities were closed to Jewish children. In 1944, Hédi and her family were forced to move to the ghetto in Syhot. Later, the Jews from the town were deported to Auschwitz. Hédi describes how over three thousand Jews were deported from Syhot.

After presenting the basic facts about the group's life, it is worth ensuring that pupils understand the key terms and know the significance of the most important places. Pupils should, for example, know what the Nuremberg Laws, a ghetto, deportation and Auschwitz were.

ANALYSING THE MECHANISMS

Having presented the group's situation, the next stage involves explaining the abstract mechanisms that determined its functioning. Using Hédi's story as an example, one can explain to students the significance of dehumanisation in the spread of anti-Semitism:

> Anti-Semitism permeated every sphere of life: film, art, literature and science. Prejudices were cemented; every German growing up knew that Jews were not human and had to be exterminated. Jews were vermin that had to be eradicated, tumours on the country's healthy body, and a tumour must be cut out.

→ Nazi propaganda portrayed Jews as non-human. What examples of non-human terms used to describe Jews can be found in the text?

The text contains terms such as 'tumour' and 'pest'.

→ What emotions are such terms intended to evoke? What do they bring to mind?

Such terms can provoke a reaction of disgust or aversion. They are associated, for example, with disease.

→ Why call someone in a way that evokes such associations and emotions?

THE ROLE OF FACTUAL KNOWLEDGE IN PROTECTING PUPILS' MENTAL WELL-BEING

According to Hanneke Bartelds, empathy-based history education should aim to provide pupils with reliable factual knowledge.

To avoid information overload, as well as cognitive errors such as historicism (applying contemporary standards to judge the past), empathy-based education requires an understanding of the context, causes, limitations and circumstances of historical figures. Pupils should know who the people in question were, where they lived, the circumstances they found themselves in, and the historical processes that influenced their situation. Factual information serves an organising function, enabling pupils to better understand what happened, why it happened, and what decisions people made under specific circumstances.

An excessive focus on the suffering of victims can be emotionally overwhelming for pupils. It can also hinder the acquisition of knowledge. A pupil experiencing intense anxiety, fear or overwhelm may focus primarily on their own discomfort. In such a situation, it is more difficult for them to analyse sources, understand historical mechanisms and adopt another person's perspective.

Issue	Significance for education on difficult history
The role of difficult emotions	Engaging with difficult emotions can foster the development of empathy. Students recognise different emotional states and gain a better understanding of other people's experiences.
The risk of overprotection	Overprotection from difficult content may limit pupils' understanding of emotions.
The risk of overload	An excess of difficult content can lead to overload. The pupil may then focus mainly on their own discomfort rather than on the other person's situation.
The importance of social skills	The development of empathy and social skills supports peer relationships, self-esteem and a child's social functioning.

Regular reference to factual information whilst gradually introducing difficult content

To encourage pupils to engage cognitively with the knowledge being conveyed to them, it is worth ensuring appropriate **references to facts** at every stage of the knowledge progression.

Suggested question for pupils:	Role
What do we know for certain about this person?	Distinguishes facts from speculation. The question can be asked as early as when introducing a specific story.
Where does this information come from?	Teaches how to work with sources. The question can be asked as early as when introducing the individual story.
When and where did this happen?	It places the story in a basic and emotionally neutral context.
What factors influenced this person's life and choices?	It prevents us from judging victims from today's perspective. It is worth asking this question after providing a broader contextualisation of the individual's experiences.
What does this person's story tell us about broader historical processes?	It links the biography to a broader historical context. It is worth asking this question after providing a broader contextualisation of the individual's experiences.
What is worth remembering as a fact, and what was our emotional reaction?	It clearly distinguishes between the cognitive and emotional reception of history. The question can be asked at any stage of the knowledge progression.

Dehumanisation can take many different forms. How should we respond to it?

→ Dehumanisation refers to a way of thinking and speaking that strips people of their full humanity.

→ Its aim is to increase distance from a particular group or person and to weaken the sense of responsibility for how they are treated.

→ When people are portrayed as a mass, animals or objects, it becomes easier to justify violence, exclusion or indifference towards them.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF DEHUMANISATION

Dehumanisation can take various forms; it involves referring to people solely as numbers, comparing them to animals, or describing them as objects, a labour force or a biological threat. Each of these forms works differently, but ultimately leads to a weakening of empathy and makes it easier to suspend moral standards towards the dehumanised group.

In the context of the Holocaust, dehumanisation was a mechanism of Nazi propaganda, which portrayed Jews as an alien, threatening and subhuman group. The language of propaganda distanced the perpetrators and witnesses of violence from the victims' suffering by denying that the victims were human beings with names, families, feelings, needs and their own stories.

It is worth noting that dehumanisation also appears in jokes, memes, insults and 'off-the-cuff' comments. Statements comparing people to 'vermin' or a 'plague' may seem to students like a humorous exaggeration. Such language, however, has a long history as a tool of dehumanisation.

Suggested ways of responding to various forms of dehumanisation

During lessons on the Holocaust, it is worth teaching students to recognise the mechanisms of dehumanisation. This helps them to better understand the language of historical propaganda and to respond to contemporary forms of contempt.

Type of dehumanisation and characteristics	Example in the context of the Holocaust	How to respond
Deindividuation portraying a group of people as an anonymous mass	Talking about people as transports, numbers, a crowd	Restoring perspective individual. Introduction of names, biographies, photographs, letters, accounts or diary extracts
Animalisation comparison of people to animals or attributing animal traits animal	Using terms such as ‘vermin’; referring to human body parts by names (e.g. paws instead of hands)	Depicting a reductionist characteristic of such thinking; reflection on the role of animalisation in the process of dehumanisation
Mechanisation describing people as objects, tools or components of a system	Referring to victims as cargo, material, labour or a problem to be solved	Highlighting the reductionist nature of such thinking; Reflection on the role of mechanisation in the process of dehumanisation
Biologisation reducing people to biological issues, ancestry or blood,	Talking about Jews as a race or a biological threat	Explaining the role of pseudoscience and racism in Nazi ideology. Demonstrating the reductionist nature of such thinking; reflecting on the issue eugenics

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