

CHILDREN AND THE HOLOCAUST



ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.

Full statistics for the tragic fate of children and youth who died during the Holocaust will never be known; it is estimated that 1.5 million Jewish children and youth were murdered. In many respects, Jewish children were treated just like adults by the Nazis and their collaborators, suffering from the same difficult and terrible situations that adult Jews faced. Like the adults, many suffered through the deadly conditions in ghettos and camps, the terror of shootings and deportations, and the horrors of the industrialized mass murder. Being smaller and less able to understand what was going on around them, the youngest children often had the hardest time. Older children sometimes were better equipped to try to cope with their situations.

The systematic murder of Jewish babies and children—who could not be rationally blamed for anything—was a direct result of Nazi racial ideology. In the eyes of the Nazis, Jewish babies were born guilty of ruining the world and sentenced to death before they took their first breath.

Most Jewish children under the age of fourteen or fifteen were selected to be put to death immediately upon arrival at extermination camps. Not only in the camps, but in the ghettos, in hiding, and in all of occupied Europe, Jewish children were often the first to die.

Throughout Europe during the war, children were on the forefront of suffering both from Nazi policies and from the war itself. They were among the first victims of Nazi murder during the outset of the war when German children and adults who had been institutionalized with mental and physical disabilities were murdered. Sinti-Roma children whom the Nazis deported also had a terrible fate. Although they were not necessarily killed immediately, the vast majority of these children also met their death at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators.

For all children and youth who survived the war, the difficulties they experienced frequently left their mark on them both physically and psychologically.