



LESSON PLAN: Establishment of the Ghettos and the Jewish Response

- 1** Write the word “ghetto” on the board. Have students share what they know about the word and record their responses. Follow this discussion by sharing the history of the word¹.
- 2** Introduce students to **Joseph Morton (bio)** and **Ellis Lewin (bio)**. As students watch the two clips of testimony, encourage them to listen for specific examples of how ghettos during the Holocaust were different from their understanding of what is referred to as a “ghetto” today. Discuss the testimonies using the questions below:
 - In their testimonies, Ellis Lewin and Joseph Morton share some of their early feelings and experiences in the ghetto. How does Ellis say his life changed after being forced into the ghetto? What does Joseph share about his observations of life in the ghetto?
 - Based on the testimonies you just watched, how were ghettos during the Holocaust different from your understanding of what a ghetto is today?
 - What images have begun to emerge for you about ghetto life after listening to these two testimonies?
 - How do you think Ellis and Joseph felt sharing these memories? How did you feel listening to them?
- 3** Ask a volunteer to explain (or draw) what Joseph said about the bridge in the Lodz ghetto. Share information about the bridge and show the photograph **Jews Crossing the Bridge in the Lodz Ghetto**. Ask students to discuss what they think the Jews crossing the bridge were feeling as they looked down upon the scene below.
- 4** Explain to students that Nazi ideology called for expanding the rule of Germany. After conquering Poland in September 1939 (after already controlling Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia), Germany sought to dominate the whole world along with its partners, and arrange it in a “new order” based on Nazi racial ideology. According to the Nazi racial view, the populations living in Poland were deemed to be Slavs, who were considered inferior and therefore treated as such.

¹ Throughout history, a ghetto referred to a street or city section where only Jews lived. The word ghetto was first used in Venice in 1516, as part of the phrase “Gèto Nuovo,” meaning “New Foundry.” This referred to the closed Jewish section of the city, which had originally been the site of a foundry. During World War II, the Jews of Eastern Europe were forced to leave their homes and move to ghettos where they were essentially held as prisoners.

5 Distribute **The Ghettos** handout; have students read the text individually or as a whole group. [Optional: Teachers may want to pose several of the questions listed in procedure #6 below prior to reading the material.]

6 Have a whole-class discussion based on the questions below. Encourage students to cite evidence from the text to support their answers whenever possible².

Questions about Nazi ideology:

- What were the Nazis' intentions in closing Jews in the ghettos?
- The Germans wanted to concentrate Jews living in the countryside into the larger cities, and establish ghettos in the vicinity of railroad junctions. What do you think was the purpose of concentrating Jews together in certain central locations? Why did the Germans want to establish ghettos near railway transports?
- Heydrich writes, "For the time being, the first step toward the final goal is the concentration of the Jews...." What do you think Heydrich meant by "for the time being"? What do you think Heydrich meant by "the final goal"?
- Why did the Germans establish a Jewish Council, or *Judenrat*, in each ghetto?
- What are some possible reasons why the Germans themselves didn't govern the ghettos?
- How might the establishment of a *Judenrat* have given Jews in the ghetto a false sense of security?

Questions about Jewish responses:

- Share the following statement made by Chaim A. Kaplan, a teacher from the Warsaw ghetto: "Ghetto life does not flow-rather it is stagnant and frozen. Around us-are walls! We have no space, we have no freedom of movement and action." What is the main feeling that emerges from hearing this passage?
- Identify some of the dilemmas that the Jews faced on a daily basis in the ghettos.
- What were some ways that Jews attempted to keep their dignity and sanity in the ghettos?
- How does this description of ghetto life compare to the descriptions of ghetto life presented in the testimonies at the beginning of this lesson?
- Discuss the difference between physical and economic segregation.
- When people describe a neighborhood today as a "ghetto," how is it different from the Nazi ghettos? Are there any similarities?

² The first several questions address Nazi ideology and the second group of questions ask students to consider Jewish responses to the ghettos. It is important that students have sufficient time to explore both perspectives.

7 Show students the **Ghettos in Europe** map. Ask students to consider the following questions after studying the map:

- In which countries were the ghettos located? (Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, Soviet Union)
- Looking at this map, how many ghettos would you estimate were established across Eastern and Central Europe?
- Why do you think that there were no ghettos in Western Europe?
- What other observations do you have after looking at this map?

8 Explain to students that they will now concentrate on one ghetto in particular, the Lodz ghetto in Poland. Tell students that in addition to learning background information on this particular ghetto, they will also analyze primary source documents and watch first-person visual history testimonies from survivors of the Lodz ghetto. These sources will provide a glimpse into what life was like for Jews living in ghettos between 1940 and 1944.

9 Distribute a copy of **The Lodz Ghetto** handout to each student and read together as a whole class. Follow with a discussion using the questions below. Have students cite evidence from the text to support their answers.

- Why did the Nazis completely seal the Lodz ghetto?
- Why did Chaim Rumkowski encourage the people in the Lodz ghetto to work and produce war supplies for the Nazi troops?
- What was the reasoning behind having children work in the workshops?
- Why were the city inhabitants hostile to Jews in the Lodz ghetto?
- How do you feel about the decisions made by Rumkowski?
- Do you agree with what Zalman Loewenthal wrote that the accusatory finger needs to be pointed at the Nazis? Explain why.

10 Divide the class into small groups and give each group a copy of the following documents: **Lodz Ghetto, 1941**, **Poem by an Unknown Girl**, and **Poem by Avraham Koplwicz**. Provide students with information about the photographer available in the corresponding **Note**.

- What specifically do you see in the photograph?
- What do you think is happening in the photograph?
- What are you able to determine about life in the Lodz ghetto from studying this photograph? How, if at all, is what you have already learned about the Lodz ghetto influencing your answer? Do you think you would have come to similar conclusions had

you seen this photograph without background on the Lodz ghetto?

- Do you think knowing who took this particular photograph and under what circumstances influenced your reaction or response to it? Is it possible that your response might have been different if you hadn't known who the photographer was, or if you had assumed it was taken by the Nazis? Discuss your answer.
- How would you describe the tone of each of the poems? Identify how specific words or phrases have an impact on the meaning and tone of each poem.
- What is the significance of time in both poems? Which poem talks about the past and which talks about the future?
- What is Avraham Koplowicz's dream? Do you think the dream Avraham describes is figurative or literal? What words or lines in the poem have influenced your answer?
- Does it appear from reading these poems that both these children believed that they would survive the ghetto? Support your response with specific words, phrases, or lines from the poems.
- What are your feelings as you look at the photograph and read the poems from the Lodz ghetto?

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 90-120 MINUTES