



LESSON PLAN: Role of the Ghettos – The Lodz Ghetto as a Case Study

- 1** Begin this lesson by explaining to students that the role of the ghetto was to control and confine Jews and that the situation in the ghetto led to Jews being weakened as well¹. Have students share what they already know about specific ways that the Nazis attempted to control and confine Jews in the ghettos.
- 2** Instruct students to divide a piece of paper into three columns and label the columns “control,” “confine,” and “weaken.” Introduce students to **Leo Berkenwald (bio)**, **Milton Belfer (bio)**, and **George Shainfarber (bio)** and then show their clips of testimonies. Have students complete the chart with specific examples they hear in the testimonies about what life was like in the Lodz ghetto.
- 3** Have students review their charts with a partner, sharing the examples that they wrote down for each of the three categories. Encourage students to discuss differences and similarities in their answers and also consider how some of the experiences that the survivors discussed might fit into more than one category. Follow with a discussion using these questions:
 - Leo Berkenwald lived within the confines of what would eventually become the Lodz ghetto. Even though he was still living in the same city, how did his life change once the ghetto was created?
 - What does Milton Belfer’s testimony add to your understanding of life in the ghetto? What does Leo’s add?
 - What role did food play in George Shainfarber’s experience in the ghetto?
- 4** Show students the **Diary Entry from the Lodz Ghetto** handout and read the entry together. Have students identify examples from Josef’s diary entry that also illustrate how the Nazis controlled, confined, and ultimately weakened Jews forced to live in the ghetto.

¹ This lesson uses the Lodz ghetto as a way to tell a larger story. While each ghetto was unique, this lesson uses Lodz as a prism to try and understand the ghettos in general and something of the mentality of the people who would confine human beings in such an inhumane manner. What happened in Lodz and the decisions made by people who established the ghetto shed light on larger decisions that were being made elsewhere, even though the Lodz ghetto had its own uniqueness and special historical circumstances.

5 Ask students to review what they have learned thus far about what life was like for children in the Lodz ghetto. Introduce students to **Eva Safferman (bio)**, **Ellis Lewin (bio)**, and **George Shainfarber (bio)** and then show their clips of testimony. Follow with a discussion using the questions below.

- What are some specific things that you learned about what life was like for children in the ghettos from Eva Safferman, Ellis Lewin, and George Shainfarber?
- Would you describe their behavior as uncharacteristic for most children? Why or why not?
- What were some of the ways in which families and neighbors tried to cope with circumstances in the ghetto?

NOTE: To learn more about what life was like for children in the ghettos, see the Jewish Resistance and The Children and Legacies beyond the Holocaust units.

6 Explain to students that one of the diaries discovered after the city of Lodz was liberated on January 19, 1945 was the diary of a teenager named Dawid Sierakowiak. Distribute the **Excerpts from The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak** handout and read the background information. Read as many of the entries as possible².

7 Have a discussion using some or all of the questions below. Whenever possible, students should use specific examples from the primary sources they have investigated in this lesson to support their answers.

- What do you learn from reading diary entries and listening to testimonies that is different from what you learn from a textbook or informational text? How are both types of information useful and necessary when studying a topic like the ghettos?
- What does Josef Zelkowicz mean when he asks “Do you have any children at all in the ghetto?” What are some examples from the testimonies that illustrate that children felt they could not afford to be children?
- How do excerpts in Dawid Sierakowiak’s diary substantiate what you heard in the testimonies?
- What does Dawid mean when he says “Oh, my dear school! Damn the times when I complained about getting up in the morning and about tests. If only I could have them back!” Have you ever had a similar feeling about something?
- What did school mean in the ghetto?
- What does going to school represent for Dawid?
- What are some things that young people you know might take for granted that young people in the ghetto learned to cherish?

² If time is limited, the following excerpts are recommended: September 3, 1939; September 10, 1939; October 24, 1939; April 27, 1941; May 2, 1941; May 16, 1941; April 4, 1943; April 15, 1943.

- What do you think Dawid means when he writes, “Humiliation inflicted by force does not humiliate”? Do you agree with him? Explain your thinking or give an example to illustrate why you do or do not agree with Dawid’s statement.
- Dawid writes, “long live humor.” How does he show in his diary that he had a sense of humor? How do you think it is possible for people to keep a sense of humor during unthinkably difficult times?
- There are also examples of hope and optimism in Dawid’s diary entries. Point out an example. Explain where Dawid began to lose hope.
- In his testimony, Ellis Lewin says he believes that the children who were physically able to survive did so because “they didn’t know any better.” What do you think Ellis means by this? Do you agree or disagree with him? Why or why not?



End this lesson by having students complete an “Exit Slip”, whereby they reflect on the information they have learned in this lesson and express their thoughts about this new information. In a paragraph, have students respond to the prompt below and submit prior to the next class period. If the “Exit Slips” are submitted electronically, the teacher may wish to post on the class website, blog, or wiki for others to see. PROMPT: In his testimony, Ellis Lewin states that arriving in the Lodz ghetto was “the beginning of the end.” After learning about the Lodz ghetto through both primary and secondary sources, explain what Ellis meant by this statement not only for him and his family but more broadly for the Jews of Europe. Provide specific examples to support your response.³

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 90-120 MINUTES

³To learn more about cultural and spiritual resistance in the ghettos, see the Jewish Resistance unit.