Voices from the Ghetto

Educational material about the Jewish ghettos in the Second World War, belonging to the exhibition ‘Mail from the oblivion’.

Countymuseum ‘Het land van Axel’, The Netherlands

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The Netherlands

Information for teachers
The inspiration for this subject I got during a lecture of Jules Schelvis, survivor of the Sobibor death camp in Eastern Poland last year at my school, the Zeldenrust-Steelant College at Terneuzen. Jules Schelvis is the founder of the Sobibor Foundation. The direct cause of this project is the exhibition ‘Mail from the oblivion’, put together by Bennie Vlaskamp also of the Sobibor Foundation.

In our country, the Netherlands and in these times there is a lot of media attention for the Second World War and in particular for the Holocaust. But about one specific part of the Holocaust we don’t hear that much in the Netherlands. Most people have heard about the transports to the concentration camps and the death camps, but only very few know something factual about the ghettos and moreover the ghettos in Poland.

In the introduction there is factual information about the ghettos, shortly summed up. Next to this by using ego-documents like letters, diary fragments, inscriptions, poems, but also through official documents an outline of ghettolife during the Second World War is being given.

Special attention has been given to the children in the ghettos and this is the reasons why many text fragments have been selected from diaries of children. For children in the Netherlands and the world it can be enlightening to read and learn about people in the past. Would young people of today be able to identify themselves with children as ghet todwellers? The textfragments are concrete and explicit, but never meant to shock anyone. The real meaning is to sketch as clear and honest possible ghetto life of people living in inhuman circumstances in the crowded ghettos of Eastern Europe.

Ghettos are only a small part of the Holocaust. Understanding of and compassion for the victims is the first step for pupils to be able to put oneself in the place of people in the past. The historical background is for younger children later of more importance. It is an option to write about hungry people in the ghetto, but it is much more profound to give the words of an eyewitness who saw a bunch of potato peels been thrown out of a kitchen and see ten people jump onto these peels and fight over this ‘treasure’.

In this way pupils, in my humble opinion, get a deeper understanding of the past, they learn to put themselves in the place of other people of flesh and blood, who made good and bad decisions with all their consequences.

One of my goals is to give a balanced interpretation of ghetto life. There is a geographical notion in the text: these fragments came all from different cities and ghettos in Poland. Another goal is a balance in the character of the words, some are hopeful, some are filled with despair. There are stories of great personal or communal courage, of perseverance and unyieldingness. The world of the ghettos is a world that is lost, but should not be forgotten….

The introduction is as a foundation as the texts are like a house built on top of it: about eating and drinking, resistance, religion, smuggling, etc. The text fragments serve as in depth knowledge of what has been addressed in the introduction. Pupils will be interested in and moved by these text fragments. Of course it is up to the teacher to make a choice in the material he or she wants to use in class. All in all this small booklet aims to be an asset to the exhibition.
If you may have any questions or remarks, I'm interested in your opinion. There is always something to improve and this will make it better historical material for pupils to learn of. Also if there are reactions and/or reflections of pupils, I appreciate all their input at any time!

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2. Introduction. The ghettos in Eastern Europe during the Second World War

The Jews in Eastern Europe had been living for centuries in separate neighbourhoods of villages and cities. Such a neighbourhood was called a sjtetl (plural: sjtetlech/sjetls). These neighbourhood you might see as a kind of ghetto. Officially the ghettos were abolished in the 19th century, but in Russia they remained until the Russian Revolution in 1917. Most Jews remained in the sjtetl because it was a hidingplace against a hostile outer world: anti-Semitism was common. Within the sjtetl the Jews could keep their own religious traditions, their own language: Yiddish, and their culture. The ghetto also gave the Jews the opportunity of economic chances to entrepreneurs. The anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe was forceful and tried to keep the dividing lines between Jews and non-Jews. They wanted to keep the Jews in the margins of society, oppose their development and prevent the spreading of their ‘contagious’ way of living.

Already in 1935, so in fact some years before the outbreak of World War Two, Adolf Hitler said that the Jews “should be locked inside a ghetto, an area where they can behave according their nature and where the German people can observe them, like observing wild animals”. After the victory over Poland in September 1939, at the beginning of World war Two, the leaders of the Third Reich were responsible for the largest Jewish community in Europe, three million Polish Jews. The Germans had absolutely no idea how to handle this group. The construction of the ghettosin the occupied lands is an example of the random and disorderly way in which the German Nazi party conducted her anti-Semitic policy after the conquest of Poland. Reinhard Heydrich, the one responsible, gave on the 21st September 1939 that all Polish Jews within the so-called Government-General, an area in Poland with Cracow as its capital, should be concentrated in town-ghettos. The occupied land of western Poland should be made ‘Judenfrei’ as soon as possible.

New plans to deport the Jews further to the East. Hitler wanted to deport all ‘Jews, Polacks and riff-raff’ in October 1939 to the Government-General. Furthermore Hitler wanted the emigration of the estimated one million and a half so-called ‘Volksdeutschen’, German speaking people outside of Germany, to get the highest priority: from Galicia and Volhynia these ‘Volksdeutschen’ should be brought within the borders of the Grossdeutches Reich. Other proposals were the foundation of a Reichsghetto in the area around Lublin or the forced migration to Madagaskar. So we can conclude that the leaders of Nazi-Germany were fervently anti-Semitic, but didn’t have a pre-occupied plan to kill all the Jews, to plan a genocide, when World War Two started.

Of importance to the Nazis was, as party ideologue Alfred Rosenberg said: “The Polish Jews should be kept under control and (we should)exploit them economically”. Finally it were local initiatives, not the central orders from Berlin, which lead to the emergence of the many ghettos in Poland. This would eventually prove to be the first step to the concentration of Jews in large cities or villages as a part of the Endlösung. Shortly after the establishment of the first ghettos according to German standards, in October 1939 like in Piotrkow Tribunalski, followed in the spring of 1940 all large cities like lodz, warsaw, Cracow, Radom and Lublin. On November 23rd 1939 General -Governor Hans Frank gave the order in which every Jew was obliged to wear a white armband of at least 10 cm wide with the star of David on it.
Moreover, the Jews were openly criticized by German soldiers and officials as ‘the waste (Auswurf) of the ghettos’, ‘the Jewish danger’, ‘Colony of filth’ (Dreckenkolonie), ‘loathsome characters’, ‘mean and dirty Jews’ and ‘a pile of vermin’.

Earlier Heydrich had made it clear in a Schnellbrief (‘fast letter’) to the leaders of the Einsatzgruppen to pay attention to the Jewish Council (Judenrat) or the Council of the Elder (Jüdischen Altestenräte). The Jewish council consisted of at least 12 and at the most 24 persons who had been appointed by the Germans, mostly respectable people like entrepreneurs, doctors and rabbis. The Jewish Councils had to obey all orders of the Germans and often they got, like in Łódź, divisions or departments for Food, Healthcare, Finance, Security, Housing and Registration. A Jewish Council had a real problem as it was used as a means of power by the Germans against her own population of the ghetto and sometimes was, unwillingly, pushed into the role of accomplice in the crimes of the Nazi’s, as for example with the ‘supply of workforce’, ‘noticing of deported people’, etc. On the other hand working for the Jewish Council was attractive to people because of the profits: more food, wages, purchase of scarce goods like cigarettes, expensive clothes, alcohol, etc.

In the ghetto’s there soon was an acute shortage of food. Thousands, especially the elderly people and vulnerable children, died of hunger. Hunger was like a black cloud always hanging above every ghetto, although there were differences between the ghettos. Even when some food had been gathered, then there was still the danger of theft or the battle over the little food that was left within the families. Because of the shortage of food people got weakened, which was often the cause that people lost their job. This in itself made that these people were more likely to be deported to one of the death camps of Aktion Reinhard: Treblinka, Sobibor and Belzec than others. Within work you didn’t make a contribution to the German Reich, so you were ‘surplus’. There were big differences within the ghettos. In Warsaw for example, there were restaurants where women with fancy dresses and men in suits went for dinner, while on the other side of the street there were two bodies, waiting to be collected. Many children were begging, day in, day out. The Germans knew about the hunger of course and allowed a little smuggling. But one of the targets of the Germans remained: the starving of the Jews in the ghettos. The distribution of the existing food supplies was a continuous and not to be solved problem: who got little bit of food that was left and who had most right to this food? Almost every day people died in the ghettos of hunger and exhaustion. Did the Jewish inhabitants of the ghetto have an answer to this catastrophe? The Jewish Council tried with soup kitchens and distribution to share the little food as fair as possible, but here also corruption sneaked in through the back door: members of the institutions and their family, among who the members of the Jewish Council, got more ration cards than ‘ordinary’ Jewish citizens in the ghettos. Therefore constantly a call for solidarity among the people, rightly or not, rang around the ghetto.

Besides the smuggling there was furthermore the passive resistance: not cooperating with the Germans, although every resistance, every disobedience, could be punished by death sentence. An another setback for resistance like organising a revolt were the reprisals. If someone offers an act of resistance, however small it might be, this always had consequences for the other Jews in the ghetto. They were caught by the multitudes, and tortured and murdered. Concluding: individual acts always lead to collective reprisals. The Germans supported this by suggesting that that obedience would be rewarded, so no punishment, no deportation, etc, as a consequence. Resistance often came from an unexpected source: from Polish or Jewish people and organisations who tried to help the
people in the ghetto with food, medicines, cigarettes, tools, blankets and sometimes even weapons. The Aryan side of the city was a shelter of importance when the ghettos were being liquidated like in Warsaw, Bialystok, Cracow and Vilna. Some of the leaders of the Jewish resistance, like Yitzak Zuckerman and Zivia Lubetkin, ‘disappeared on the Aryan side’ of Warsaw after the Jewish revolt of the Jewish ghetto in 1943.

Some Jews fled the ghettos and made use of the landscape in Eastern Poland, Lithuania and the Soviet Union in the extensive forests and woods. This was an act of resistance in itself. Others organised groups and organisations, which presented themselves to the world as partisans who fought against the German occupiers. In some cases they cooperated with Polish, Lithuanian or Russian partisans. They resisted out of an ideological (socialist/communist) background against the Nazis. The most famous of the Jewish resistance groups is the one of the Bielski brothers, who managed to save 1100 people, among which men, women, children and the elderly, from the claws of the Germans. Moreover they made raids and sabotaged German targets. Their life was the subject of a motion picture film, which appeared in 2009: ‘Defiance’.

Resistance had many manifestations, with different actors. The Jews of Theresienstadt had the insolence to conduct the piece of music of Verdi the ‘Requiem’ and play it in front of the German leadership of the ghetto. The courageous members of the musical society sang at the end of the Requiem of Verdi: ‘Libera me’, which means liberate us. The notorious Adolf Eichmann, one of the architects of the Holocaust, and present in the hall with other SS members, was clapping hands at the end! Another kind of passive resistance was for example not turning up during repeating calls for ‘work supply’ or for ‘transportation to the East’ to go and ‘work’ there.

In every ghetto what existed for a longer period of time, some only exited for two weeks, resistance groups emerged. As stated, some ghettos were short-lived, and resistance without organisation was resistance was absolutely without any chance against the well trained opponent. In the cities where the ghettos exited for some years, the ghetto of Łódz was one of them, resistance organisations could become a reality. In these cities the open revolts against the Germans took place. Most known of course the Jewish ghetto revolt in Warsaw in 1943, but also in Vilna, Bialystok, Lvov, Pinsk, Cracow, Slonim, Plonsk, Riga, Kovno, etc., inhabitants of the ghettos resisted their fate against a powerful enemy. Indeed, there was resistance by the Jewish population, but it was the battle of an unarmed (or poorly armed) David against a heavily armed Goliath.

In some instances Jews saw just staying human as an act of resistance, against all brutality and inhumanity. To be tenacious to their own Jewish traditions, so to honour the Sabbath, Rosh Hashanah, Shuvot and Purim, which were all officially banned. To behave dignified against all mockeries, maltreatments, tortures and massacres. We are not in a position to pass an easy judgement on impotent people in an inhuman situation. Moreover, we are in the luxurious position of judging with all the knowledge of today about the past…

The Jewish policemen had a bad reputation as accomplices of the Germans. Yet, the ghetto dwellers were happy with them when they appeared on the scene. As Chaim Kaplan from Warsaw ghetto wrote on the 21st of December 1940 in his diary: “The residents of the ghetto are beginning to think they are in Tel Aviv. Strong, bonafide policemen from among our brothers, to whom you can speak in Yiddish!(…) The other citizens of the ghetto are relieved
too, because a Jewish shout is not the same as a gentile one. The latter is coarse, crude, nasty; the former, while it may be threatening, contains a certain gentility, as if to say: “Don’t you understand?” The Jewish police or Judischer Ordnungsdienst had the responsibility and the obligation to solve all thefts, to stop all black marketeers and to check all street traders and beggars. Later they got more tasks, like control of the ghetto gates, help with the razzias, run in individuals and the selections of forced labour men. Finally the Jewish police even helped liquidating the ghetto, to be put on the train to the death camps themselves. The image of the Jewish police was getting worse and worse as time got on. The trust in the organisation got to an all-time high.

Most inhabitants of the ghetto were scared of running into ‘strangers’ or ‘vagabonds’ and ‘tramps’, because it meant a bigger chance of catching a disease. Because of the appalling housing conditions in the ghetto, the lack of medicines and the constant overpopulation of the ghetto the number of diseases increased steadily. Fever, diarrhoea, but also cholera and typhoid appeared regularly. The most common cause of death was ‘naturally’ famine.

**Diseases** were almost impossible to prevent. Disinfection was a possibility. But how could you isolate patients with a contagious disease? The ghetto was crowded, six persons to every window, so no empty spots to be found, not even in the hospital. Doctors did all that was humanly possible, but without medicines or medical instruments or equipment no treatment is possible, against any disease. Working ‘sterile’ was a utopia within the ‘filthy’ ghetto. The frustration of the doctors was huge: by force they had ‘to be like God’, because who had a right to the small amount of medicines, if they were available at all. Or who got the last injection? For the ordinary ghetto dweller it was sheer impossible to stay clean: who had water? Who had a tap? Who had a shower? Moreover, who had at their disposal luxurious products like shaving-tackle, shampoo, or even a bar of soap? This was invaluable, especially on the black market, where anything could be bought, but only at exorbitant prices.

**Jewish faith** was something to go by for the Jewish population in the overpopulated ghettos in the East. Rabbis tried as they could to keep the community together, by sticking to the pattern of Jewish feasts and traditions which had survived the centuries. It proved to be a beacon in the rough sea of Nazibrutalities. Many Jews nowadays still think of their time in the ghetto with pain in their hearts, but the lighting of the candles, how scarce they might have been, on Friday night at the beginning of the Sabbath, always was a sign of hope.

Nevertheless, people started doubting the existence of God (Jahweh, Adonai, Elohiem or Hashem) because of the constant nightmare of persecutions, deportations and mass murders. How could God allow this and not save his own people? Difficult questions, which are even more difficult to answer. References to the Torah or Talmud are quite common in the text fragments. Especially the references to the Purim story with the threat of the powerful Haman or the reference to the Jews in Egypt and the exodus under the protective leadership of Moses.

Despite everything, most inhabitants of the ghettos will have hoped till the last whistle, the last razzia, the last Aktion, till the last train left for a death camp or places of execution. Till the last moment the hope for life, while everywhere death lurking….. Hope against hope, hope till the last breath……

From the moment of the German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22nd 1941, named Operation Barbarossa, the Germans started rounding up the Jews into the ghettos. The
liquidation of the ghettos started in the fall of 1941. Some ghettos were very short-lived, some only for a couple of days. In 1942 this all happened even faster. Till mid 1942 most Jews were killed outside villages and cities on special places of execution like Ponar (close to Vilna), Slonim, Pinsk, Baranowice, Bialystok and Lublin in Poland, Zhitomir and Babi Yar in the Ukraine. During 1942, after the decision to kill all Jews within the German territories, the Germans started to take inhabitants of the ghettos to the Death camps of Operation Reinhard, namely Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka, all of them in half a circle round the city of Lublin. The inhabitants of the region of Lublin were transported to the nearby death camp of Belzec, strategically positioned between Lublin and Lvov along a railway, and gassed. In all these death camps Jews were killed in gas chambers with carbon monoxide from a motor, after they had been robbed of all their earthly belongings. From 1942 on in rapid building projects, these three camps appeared (just like Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek and Chelmno), where 1.6 million people were killed systematically.

The ghettos were emptied. (liquidated) Of the utmost importance in this story is the fact that also one million people died in the ghettos because of the unbearable conditions in these ghettos. They died because of the hunger, the cold, but also because of executions within the ghetto, because of tortures, diseases and sometimes even because of committing suicide, as a last stand, as self-protection.

Hopefully will the following texts in the chapters 3 till 12, about the different subjects we discussed in short above, give you an image of life in the ghettos during the Second World War. So you will be able to answer some of these questions: What was daily life like in a ghetto? What was it like for a child to grow up in such an environment? Did people think about the future? The texts are meant as a large mosaic, in which all the little stories will add to the larger picture. And maybe by looking at human beings in the past, at the people of the ghettos, we can become better people in the future....
Appendix 1: Population statistics of the Jewish ghetto’s in Poland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Jewish population</th>
<th>% of the cities population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warsaw</td>
<td>352,659</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Łódz</td>
<td>202,497</td>
<td>33.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lvov</td>
<td>99,595</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracow</td>
<td>56,515</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vilnius (Vilna/Wilno)</td>
<td>55,006</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ternivsi</td>
<td>52,592</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riga</td>
<td>43,672</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chisnău</td>
<td>41,066</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bialystok</td>
<td>39,165</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lublin</td>
<td>38,537</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czetochowa</td>
<td>25,588</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaunas (Kovno)</td>
<td>25,044</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grodno</td>
<td>21,159</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinsk</td>
<td>20,220</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 2: Well-known leaders of ghettos in Poland

They were the leaders of the Jewish Council in their place of residence

Adam Czerniakow in Warsaw
Mordechai Rumkowski in Łódz
Elchanan Elkes in Kaunas (Kovno)
Marek Alten in Lublin
David Gutter in Cracow
Efraim Barash in Bialystok
Yosef Diamant in Radom
Avraham Yaakov Ramek in Plonsk
Mikhael Eliashev in Riga
Benjamin Bokstanski in Pinsk
Jacob Gens in Wilnius (Vilna/Wilno)
Henryk Landsberg in Lvov
Michael Lam in Stanislawow
Paul Eppstein in Theresienstadt (in Czecho-Slovakia)
Yitshok Rudashevsky from Vilna with his mother and sisters
Chapter 3 The beginning of the ghetto
First text:

Yitshok Rudashevsky in the ghetto of Vilna

“The street streamed with Jews carrying bundles. The first great tragedy. People are harnessed to bundles which they drag across the pavement. People fall, bundles scatter. Before me a woman bends under her bundle. From the bundle a thin string of rice keeps pouring over the street. I walk burdened and irritated. The Lithuanians drive us on, do not let us rest. I think of nothing: not what I am losing, not what I have just lost, not what is in store for me. I do not see the streets before me, the people passing by. I only feel that I am terribly weary. I feel that an insult, a hurt is burning inside me. Here is the ghetto gate. I feel that I have been robbed, my freedom is being robbed from me, my home, and the familiar Vilna streets I love so much. I have been cut off from all that is dear and precious to me. People crowd at the gate. Finally I am on the other side of the gate. (…..)

I find my parents and here we are in the ghetto house. It is dusk, rather dark and rainy. The little streets, Rudnitski, Shavler, Yatkever, Shpitaine, and Disner which constitute the ghetto look like anthills. It swarms with people. The newcomers begin to settle down, each in his tiny bit of space, on his bundles. Additional Jews keep streaming in constantly. We settle down in our place. Besides the four of us there are eleven persons in the room. The room is a dirty and stuffy one. It is crowded. The first ghetto night. We lie three together on two doors. I do not sleep. In my ears resounds the lamentation of this day. I hear the restless breathing of people with whom I have been suddenly thrown together, people who just like me have been uprooted from their homes.”

Second text:

Tamara Rabinowicz in the ghetto of Vilna

“We packed four valises, and two knapsacks. We took a bundle of pillows and a cover and tied it to the valises and dragged it behind us. The bundle fell apart. I bent down to tie it together. Suddenly I felt that my back was burning, as if it was on fire. I raised my head and saw a German standing in front of me with a whip at the end of which were iron balls. He hit my back with it. That is why my back was burning. I did not understand what it was. I looked at him and he looked at me with cold laughing eyes and said in German: “You dirty Jew, go to the ghetto”. I told him: I am a Jewess, but not dirty because I wash”. For an answer he gave me three whips over my face. Blood started pouring out of my mouth. My husband gave me a handkerchief and told me quietly to leave the bundle on the street.

As I wiped my face I noticed in front of me a young woman with a baby in her arms. I saw a German come close to her with outstretched hands and he took the baby from her. I thought to myself, “By chance I met a bad German, this one is trying to help this woman”. She had no packages, nothing, only the child. A beautiful baby, blue-eyed, laughing. I thought what a good German that wants to help. Before I finished my thought I saw that he took the baby, threw it into the air and caught it with thin part of his weapon. Blood poured out of the little body. The mother jumped at the man and pushed her nails into his eyes. He had time to take
out his gun. He shot her. She remained on the pavement on top of her baby. The German stood there laughing."

Map of the ghetto of Łódź

*Third text:*
Mary Berg (Miriam Wittenberg) in the ghetto of Warsaw

November 15th 1940

“Today the Jewish ghetto was officially established. Jews are forbidden to move outside the boundaries formed by certain streets. There is considerable commotion. Our people are hurrying about nervously in the streets, whispering various rumours, one more fantastic than the other. Work on the walls—which will be three yards high—has already begun. Jewish masons, supervised by Nazi soldiers, are laying bricks upon bricks. Those who do not work fast enough are lashed by the overseers. It makes me think of the Biblical description of our slavery in Egypt. But where is the Moses who will release us from our new bondage? There are German sentries at the end of those streets in which the traffic has not been stopped completely. Germans and Poles are allowed to enter the isolated quarter, but they must not carry any parcels. The spectre of starvation looms up before us all.”

Fourth text:

Chaim Kaplan in the ghetto of Warsaw

Diary, January 31st 1941

“The exiles were driven out of their beds before dawn, and the Führer’s minions did not let them take money, belongings, or food, threatening all the while to shoot them. Before they left on their exile, a search was made of their pockets and of all the hidden places in their clothes and bodies. Without a penny in their pockets or a covering for the women, children, old people, and invalids—sometimes without shoes on their feet or staffs in their hands—they were forced to leave their homes and possessions and the graves of their ancestors, and go—whither? And in terrible, fierce unbearable cold!

The Warsaw ghetto is surrounded on every side by Aryan districts. When the exiles came to the marked boundary between the ghetto and the Aryan quarters they were searched once more. If anyone had saved anything of value, it was quickly taken away. They even searched the invalids, and the sick people in wheelchairs, and if they found a bit of food, it too was stolen.”

Fifth text:

Nina Mogilalevskaya in the ghetto Kharkov

“There was a crowd on the street. In an oppressive silence, people were reading flyers in which the Germans announced that “All Jews, regardless of sex, age, confession, or state of health and required to resettle in the Losevo District behind the Kharkov Tractor Factory by December 16. All those discovered outside of that area will be shot on the spot.”
The next day I, along with my husband, went to the Tractor Factory. A huge crowd of sixteen thousand Jews was winding its way through the streets. The young, the old, teenagers, small children were all walking. The healthy were carrying the sick.

An older woman was walking alongside us carrying her palsied, aged mother. In front of us was a family - a husband and wife and two small children. The man had one leg in a cast and was walking on crutches. It was slippery, he fell several times. They shot him at the Electro-Chemical Plant.

It was very cold. Those who were freezing lagged behind, and if they caught the eye of the Germans they were killed.

Sixth text:

Rutka Laskier in the ghetto of Bedzin

Diary, February 5th 1943

“The circle becomes narrower. Coming month the ghetto should be finished, a real ghetto with walls of stone. During the summer it will be hard to endure, being locked up in a greyish cage, no fields and seeing no more flowers, last year I went often to the meadow, I always had a lot of flowers, what reminds me, that in the past you could go to the ulica (street) Mlachowskiego, without being deported, in the evenings to the movies......
I am already ‘permeated’ with the horrors of the war that the worst news doesn’t make an impression anymore. I just can’t believe that I was went outside without the Star of David, and that someday there will be an end to the war……”

Seventh text:

Hans Frank, Governor-General of occupied Poland

January 22nd, 1940

“We, who for twenty years past have been fighting beside the Führer cannot be asked to have any consideration left for Jews. If the Jews in the world ask us for today, this leaves us cold.”

Eight text:

Friedrich Übelhör about the ghetto of Łodz

“The creation of the ghetto’s is, of course, only an interim measure….. The final aim must in any case be to totally cauterize this plague spot.”

Jewish boy in the ghetto
Sources:

Text 1: Yitshok Rudashevsky, ‘The diary of the Vilna ghetto June 1941-April 1943’, Ghetto Fighters House, Israel, second printing 1979, page 32. The boy was later killed by the Germans. The diary was found on an attic.


Text 8: ‘To bear witness’, Holocaust Remembered at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, Israel, 2005, page 84.

Questions:

1. What is a ghetto? Give a definition.

2. A What was the first ghetto in history?
   B What was the first ghetto of the Nazi’s in Eastern Europe?

3. Which problems did the exiles have on their way to the ghetto? (text one and two)

4. Which problems did the Jews have to endure within the ghetto boundaries?

5. Which Biblical comparisons are being made? (text 3)

6. What did Friedrich Ūbelhör mean with his words in text eight? What was the final goal of the Nazis?
Chapter 4 The ghetto in all its complexity

First text:

Oskar Rosenfeld in the ghetto of Łódź

“Ghetto: curiosity. Every community will breathe, flourish, grow, create. It wants to grow. It’s part of the animal instinct, the law of nature. To come into being, to grow, to pass away, ever renewing lifeparallel to nature….ghetto the exception. People are locked in decaying buildings, granted just enough air to vegetate. They don’t plant crops, don’t have cattle, no poultry, no vegetables, no fish, no milk, no fat, no bread that they bake themselves. When the neighbour pulls back his hand, the slogan “Judah, croak!” is fulfilled. It is the purpose of human existence to give free rein to animal functions as much as possible and thereby slowly, gradually, wilt away…. The numbers are getting ever smaller. There is no fabric, no leather, no metal, and so on. You cannot produce. When the suit becomes worn, you have to walk in rags…when the shoes are torn, you can wrap them with rags so water, snow and dirt cannot seep in……. The bolts get rusty, the colours fade, the shirts get frayed, the garments disintegrate….there are no shops, no available goods, goods in the sense of objects from which to chose…. There are no cameras, no radios, no books, no artist’s paint, no clocks….
And without work, starving here are engineers, chemists, mathematicians, botanists, zoologists, pharmacologists, physicians, architects, teachers, writers, actors, directors, musicians, linguists, administrative officials, bankers, pharmacists, handicraftsmen like electricians, woodworkers, carpenters, mental experts, upholsterers, house painters, furriers, tailors, shoemakers, textile manufacturers, turners, watchmakers... The talent is available. Just put the means into their hands and they'll build houses, mansions, apartments, streets, canals, water pipes, railway stations, railway tracks, for you; they'll clear forests, saw boards, erect institutes, hospitals, universities, laboratories, libraries, schools, observatories, kitchens and laundries, workshops..... They will build you cities and colonies with every possibility of growth and beauty.....,

Thus, values are being wiped out, erased, which could benefit all of mankind. But what meaning does "mankind" have now? People's nerves are being destroyed, the meaning of life is lost, no philosophy is able to help here. Expelled, lost, ruined, before rescue can reach them. Every week several of them die, passing away slowly of hunger and mental anguish, and if the day of liberation should come, it would find them unable to find their way back into life, to work, and to creativity. Gone, gone......

Second text:

Helga Kinsky-Pollack in the ghetto of Theresienstadt

Diary, Thursday, May 6, 1943

"It is horrible here in Theresienstadt, a regular Babylon: Germans, Austrians, Czechs, Dutch, a few Danes, French; I even know a Finnish girl. There are baptised Jews and so-called Mischlinge (children of mixed religious heritage). A girl named Antonia, who bunked next to me, has had a very tough time. She arrived three weeks ago from Brno. Her father is Aryan, her mother Jewish. She's fourteen and was baptised in 1939, but her baptism is not recognised. She is here all alone and has few belongings. She feels uncomfortable in a Jewish environment. She longs to go home so terribly that she cries almost all day. Her father accompanied her as far as Prague, where they said their heartrending goodbyes. Now she lies in the bunk beside me."

Third text:

Oskar Rosenfeld in the ghetto of Łódź
Diary, September 6th 1942

“Ghetto in the ghetto. Closed off from the world: no mail, no newspaper, no radio, no telephone, no gramophone. Total curfew. The horror goes on. There is fear the Germans will take over the action if the Jewish police don’t do it. I have never before felt as I do this day.”

The hearse in the ghetto

Fourth text:

Emmanuel Ringelblum in the ghetto of Warsaw

“The wagon-driver from Moranovska, Mr Eiszenstadt, carried different products on his cart. He would bring textiles to Naleveki and Gensha, leather to Katchenska and tin to Gzibowska. Later, when deportations came, he brought wardrobes, beds, sofas, tables and every door belonging to the Jewish people.

Today is 23 November 1941. Mr Eizenstadt, 42, is carrying something for the first time that he never thought he would carry; his is carrying the body of his wife who died in a basement apartment from exhaustion and hunger. For three days he ran in vain between different institutions to obtain the 20 Zloty needed for her burial. Now with his only son Yosele, aged 7, he will bring his wife to the cemetery.”

Fifth text:

Mary Berg in the ghetto of Warsaw

Diary, August 1942
“Behind the Pawiak gate, we are experiencing all the terror that is abroad in the ghetto. For the last few nights we have been unable to sleep. The noise of the shooting, the cries of despair, are driving us crazy. I have to summon all my strength to write these notes. I have lost count of the days, and I do not know what day it is. But what does it matter? We are here as on a little island amidst an ocean of blood. The whole ghetto is drowning in blood. We literally see fresh human blood, we can smell it. Does the outside world know anything about it? Why does no one come to our aid? I cannot go on living; my strength is exhausted. How long are we going to be kept here to witness all this?”

Sixth text:

Jack Brauns in the ghetto of Kovno

“I could see the hospital on fire with the windows and doors nailed shut and the patients and doctor and nurses were trying to get out. I remember how their screams got weaker and finally it was quiet….

The scene of the burning building with people inside trying to get out and the Lithuanian guards who made sure that no one would escape this horrible death played through my mind.”

Seventh text:

Chaim Lazar Litai in the ghetto of Warsaw

“The Germans strive with all their power to increase want and spread death. They only wish to develop one ‘industry’ in the ghetto – the death factory.

Eight text:

Oskar Rosenfeld in the ghetto of Łódź

“Litzmannstadt death

It is different here in the ghetto. Everything is upside-down, and yet we are far removed from the war itself. (…..) For us Jews, the ghetto is a basic catastrophe.”

Ninth text:

Michel Mazor in the ghetto of Warsaw

“The twentieth century witnessed a new sort of crime, committed not by criminals or mobs of gangsters, but by the state: a state had perpetrated the most horrible of crimes - the annihilation of whole peoples - genocide. The first example of such a such a crime was the massacre of the Armenians by the Turks in 1915, in the course of the First World War.

During the terrible days of July and August 1942, we often spoke the fate of the Armenians; most of us knew Werfel’s book the Forty days of Musa-Dagh, and we often recalled an episode described in it- the arrival of French warships bringing aid to the Armenians. “But”,

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we said, “we unfortunately cannot count on any aid, we are doomed, and no one’s going to try to rescue us”.

Free humanity had not fulfilled its duty to the Armenian martyrs; it had forgotten about this unprecedented crime and, with this fact, had fatefully committed a sin against itself.

And perhaps if, at the end of the First World War, a “Nuremberg Tribunal” had convened at Istanbul, the gas chambers and crematoria of Auschwitz and Treblinka would not have come into being.”

*Tenth text:*

**Marek Edelman in the ghetto of Warsaw**

“How the events began moving at a breath taking pace. The Ghetto streets became a bloody slaughterhouse. The Germans made it a habit to shoot passers-by without the slightest provocation. People were afraid to leave their homes, but German bullets reached them through the windows. There were days when the toll of terror was 10-15 quite accidental victims. One of the more notorious sadists, a gendarme of the *Schutzpolizei* (Ukrainian guards) by the name of Frankenstein, had on his conscience over 300 murdered people, more than half of whom were children.”

*The cutting of beards of traditional Jews*

*Sources:*


Text 4: From the Oneg Shabbat archives in *To bear witness*, Yad Vashem, page 94.


Text 6: Martin Gilbert, *Never again*, page 97. The boy is seventeen years old in Kovno.


Text 8: Adelson, page 299.


Questions:

1. What was unique to the ghetto as described by Rosenfeld in text one?
2. What kind of special status did the ghetto of Theresienstadt (Terezin) have for the Nazi's?
3. Why was Theresienstadt called ‘a regular Babylon’ in text two?
4. Why did the father of Antonia in text two got permission to accompany her till Prague?
5. Look up on the internet what kind of a prison the Pawiak in Warsaw was.
6. What similarity is there between text seven and eight?
7. What was the painful message of text nine?
8. Try to make a definition of the subject ghetto according to the texts you have been reading.
9. Look up on the internet who Marek Edelman was and when he died. (text ten)
Standing in line to get water in the ghetto of Lublin

Chapter 5 Eating, drinking, hunger.

First text:

Mary Berg (Miriam Wattenberg) in the ghetto of Warsaw

Diary, December 15th 1940

“The question of obtaining food is becoming ever more pressing. The official ration cards entitle one to a quarter of a pound of bread a day, one egg a month, and two pounds of vegetable jam (sweetened with saccharine) a month. A pound of potatoes costs one Zloty (Polish money). We have forgotten even the taste of fresh fruit. Nothing can be imported from the Aryan districts, although there is an abundance of everything there. But hunger and the desire for profit are stronger than all the penalties threatening smugglers, and smuggling is now gradually becoming an important industry.”

Second text:
David Sierakowiak in the ghetto of Łódź

Diary, Tuesday June 9th 1942

“I went to see the variety show on Krawiecka Street. They are playing it now for a second time. Except for ghetto jokes, there’s nothing worth seeing. Only the dances were pretty good. But the most important thing is that for two hours I could stop thinking about food or hunger.”

Third text:

David Sierakowiak in the ghetto of Łódź

Diary, Thursday June 25th 1942

“The sun was somewhat more “human” these past two days, but today it’s cold again. Harvests will probably be awful this year. No food arrives in the ghetto: no vegetables, not even the poorest greens.

Ever greater productivity is being demanded in the workshops. Instructors, the police, and other gangs of loafers receive additional food coupons while the rest of the population is dying of hunger.”

Fourth text:

David Sierakowiak in the ghetto of Łódź

Diary, Monday July 13th 1942

“I received my food ration only today. This time I had a fierce argument with Father, who is becoming greedier and more rapacious for every little morsel; he cheats in a stupid, intricate way everywhere he can, which upsets me terribly.”

Playing girls in the ghetto
Fifth text:

**Oskar Rosenfeld in the ghetto of Łódź**

Diary, November 21st 1942

“Gigantic moon over the cemetery in Marysin. Discussed with the Eldest idea of living in the home. 85,000 people eat the same thing everyday: potatoes, cabbage and radish. A few hundred have some meat, beets, flour mixed with potatoes. Not a drop of milk or cheese has come into the ghetto for a week. Have swollen feet. What next? Despite Marysin, hungry, have sugar with me. At the next table constant discussion of the specialities of well-known restaurants in Vienna, Berlin, London, Paris, Copenhagen, etc. Sense of hunger increased.”

Sixth text:

**David Sierakowiak in the ghetto of Łódź**

Diary, November 12th 1942

“Father has already bought his allocation of potatoes, but regarding work, he hasn’t secured anything. He is tyrannizing at home like never before. I don’t protest. Let the Devil take it all.”

Diary, November 13th 1942
“With Father there is no change; he doesn’t have any work yet, except for bringing coal for Mrs Hamer. (…) Nevertheless, his mendacious and deceitful nature is already emerging again. He is cooking up a storm, and the situation is beyond my control.”

Diary, November 17th 1942

“Father is still lying in bed. The situation is becoming really irritating. When Nadzia (his sister DR) and I are out, he cooks himself a whole bunch of potatoes and uses up a lot of briquettes (which we borrowed). Nor does he have the slightest intention of finding a job. In addition, his thievish old habits (stealing food from our portions) are coming into fashion again. I am terribly upset and will probably explode.”

Diary, November 21st 1942

“At home the tension is growing, and sudden outbursts between Father and me are becoming more frequent. In spite of all his dirty tricks, father is still trying to keep peace with me, but I can’t overcome my feelings and I look at everything indifferently. The office has become a paradise for me; each time I come home from work, I am filled with fear and disgust.”

Diary, January 14th 1943

“Nadzia went to the hospital to make an inquiry. Father has had his leg put in a cast already, but he will have to stay in the hospital for a few more days. He keeps on sending requests for food. Nadzia sent him the 25 dkg of her bread she usually gives him, and that’s it. We couldn’t give him any of our watery soup. He is not the kind of father worth giving up our health for, as our unfortunate mother did. My blessed, beloved, unforgotten in any moment of the day or night mother!”

Children dying of hunger in the streets of the ghetto

Diary, March 6th 1943

“My unfortunate once-powerful Father died today at four in the afternoon. He became very weak last night, and by the morning he lay almost unable to move. Breathing was becoming increasingly difficult for him. He couldn’t pass urine at all, and spoke very little, though he was completely conscious and aware of everything. (…)"

At three o’clock Nadzia went down for salad and cheese, and I stayed alone with Father in the apartment. Suddenly, at about five to four, Father asked me to arrange the pillows more
comfortably for him. I did that. Father bowed his head and lay without any movement, breathing very shallowly. From my own bed, I kept watch on him constantly and suddenly I thought I saw him stop breathing. For a few minutes, numb with fear, I couldn’t believe it myself, and it was several minutes after four when I called one of the neighbours. The neighbour tried to move Father’s head on the pillow, but terrified, she discovered that Father was already dead.”

_Seventh text:_

**Oskar Rosenfeld in the ghetto of Łódz**

Diary, April 1943

“Where’s X? Where’s Y? Dead! Dead! And buried. We no longer feel emotion. Thieves go scrounging around the corpses, grabbing crockery, scraps of bread, shoes, pocket knives—especially when there are no bereaved relatives.

No inheritance rights: everything belongs to the ghetto. That started in the fall of 1942. The nearest relative or close friend may claim a few trifles. Life is dreadfully depressing. People are pitiless, dissociated, stone-hearted. Unresponsive.

Suddenly all the Polish Jews are hostile to me. Is there a real opposition between East and west, between Ashkenazi (Western Jews) and Sephardi (Eastern Jews)? One’s opinion about that changes according to one’s latest experience…..

Suddenly: I must get away, out of the ghetto. I think about fleeing. Off with the yellow star. I am embittered.

Voices approach. Somebody calls out to me: “Sir, you don’t have the _Mogen David_ (Yellow star of David). It’s a Jewish policeman. My blood turns cold. He takes the star and pins it on me. “Take care,” he says. “If an _Ashkenes_ sees you, you’re done for.”

I feel happier. Suddenly I belong to all of them, the so-called Polish Jews. We have the same fear of the _Ashkenes_, of the hardness of life, of the fate awaiting us. Those few words saved me.”

The food that is left is being guarded well.
Eight text:

Helga Kinsky-Pollack in the ghetto of Theresienstadt (Terezin)

Diary, March 16th 1943

“…….I went to see my uncle in the Sudeten barracks and there I have seen how potato peels were thrown outside; ten people jumped onto this little pile and fought over it…….”

Ninth text:

Janina Bauman in the ghetto Warsaw

“Getting food, if not the food that we were used to, wasn’t a problem for those that owned money. It was sheer impossible to stay alive on the allowed rations. It was the black market that flourished despite the walls en the heavy guarded gates in the ghetto- that kept us alive. Stefan and Henryk were in charge of the search for food for us and finding fuel for ‘the goat’ (the stove), at the same time the women were taking care of the housekeeping.”

Tenth text:
Charlotte Veresova in the ghetto of Theresienstadt

“This is the menu of the children’s kitchen. Until we are sixteen years of age we get just a little better food than the others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Lunch</th>
<th>Dinner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soup, millet</td>
<td>Small bread</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Soup, potatoes, turnips</td>
<td>Soup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Soup, potatoes, goulash</td>
<td>Small bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Soup, dumpling, gravy</td>
<td>Sausage, soup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>Soup, pearl barley</td>
<td>Buns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>Soup, potatoes, turnips</td>
<td>Soup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>Soup, bun with icing</td>
<td>20 grams of margarine, tea spoon of marmalade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The list of foods doesn’t look all that bad, but the food is horribly prepared and the soup is the same every single day. It tastes like washing-water. Arghh, I have never eaten any soup in my life and I’m certainly not going to eat the soup here. For breakfast we get black coffee without anything (its dish-water). “

Sources:

Text 1: Mary Berg, page 31.


Text 3: Dawid Sierakowiak, page 189.

Text 4: Dawid Sierakowiak, page 196.

Text 5: Oskar Rosenfeld, page 150.


Text 7: Oskar Rosenfeld, page 174-175.

Text 8: Voices from the dark(Stemmen uit de duisternis), page 86.


Text 10: Charlotte Veresova in Voices from the dark, page 165-166.

Questions:

1. How was the food officially distributed in the ghetto according to text 1?
2. Why did David Sierakowiak visit the play in text 2?

3. Which problem with the distribution of food is being pointed at in text 3 and text 5?

4. What did David himself think of as the worst problem in connection with food?

5. Which paradox is apparent in text 7?

6. What is the black market? Was this black market good or bad for the Jewish inhabitants of the ghetto? (text 9)

7. What strikes you most if you study the menu for children in text 10?

Standing in line at the soup kitchen

Chapter 6 Smuggling

First text:
Mary Berg in the ghetto of Warsaw

Diary, February 15th 1941

“One after another the ghetto streets have been shut off. Now only Poles are used for this work. The Nazi’s no longer trust the Jewish masons, who deliberately leave loose bricks in many places in order to smuggle food or to escape to the other side through the holes at night.

Now the walls are growing taller and taller and there are no loose bricks. The top is covered with a thick layer of clay strewn with glass splinters, intended to cut the hands of people who try to escape.

But Jews still find ways. The sewer pipes have not been cut off, and through these openings they get in small bags of flour, sugar, cereal, and other articles. During dark nights, they also take advantage of holes made in the gates to bring in foodstuffs. The removal of one brick is sufficient. Special packages are prepared to fit these holes.

There are other ways, too. Many bombed houses are situated on the border between the ghetto and the other side. The cellars of these houses often form long tunnels that extend for three, four or five houses. The greater part of the smuggling is carried on through these tunnels. The Germans know this, but are unable to control the traffic.”

The ghetto wall in Warsaw

Second text:

Henryka Lazowert in the ghetto of Warsaw

Poem: the little smuggler
“I shall not return to you again
No more a voice from afar,
The dust of the street is my grave
An infant’s fate is sealed
And on lips alone
A single care is frozen
Who, my soul’s delight,
Will bring you a crust tomorrow?”

On the border of the Aryan and the Jewish world.
Pay attention to the Jewish police and German soldiers

Third text:
Mary Berg in the ghetto of Warsaw
Diary, June 12th 1941
“True, not all children beg. Many of them earn their living, often much more easily than their elders. Whole gangs of little children are organized, made up of boys and girls from five to ten years of age. The smallest and most emaciated of them wrap burlap bags around their bony little bodies. Then they slink across to the Aryan side through the streets that are fenced off only by barbed wire. The bigger children disentangle the wire and push the smaller ones through. The others watch for German guards or Polish policemen.

A few hours later they come back laden with potatoes and flour. Usually they go to the suburbs where food is cheaper than in the centre of the city. Often peasants give them potatoes for nothing. Their terrible appearance arouses pity. In addition to bags of potatoes they often bring loaves of black country bread. With a happy smile on their little green faces, they slink back to the ghetto. On this side of the barbed wire, their older partners wait for them. Very often they stay there for hours, waiting until the Nazi guard is busy checking the passport of some foreign citizen or Polish Gentile visiting the ghetto. This gives them an opportunity to smuggle their foodstuffs.”

Fourth text:
Chaim Lazar Litai in the ghetto of Warsaw

“Anything and everything, even luxuries, were smuggled into the ghetto by well-organized groups of skilled smugglers with accomplices in the ‘Aryan’ side, heedless of the danger of being summarily executed if caught. They developed a highly-perfected technique in the course of time – over the wall, under the wall, through cracks in the wall and by other devious routes.”

Fifth text:
Emmanuel Ringelblum in the ghetto of Warsaw

“There is good reason for the proverb that three things are indomitable: the German Army, the British Isles, and Jewish smuggling.”

Sixth text:
Chronicle of the Lodz ghetto 1941-1944

“Zawadski, a fourteen-year-old boy, was the major smuggler both into and out of the ghetto. He supplied saccharine, vaccines, medicines, etc., and earned colossal sums of money.”

Smuggling over the ghetto walls
Seventh text:

Herman Kruk in the ghetto of Vilna

“How the Jewish police please Murer ¹

Yesterday Murer visited the ghetto and stood at the gate to observe what Jewish workers bring in from the city. Naturally, everything everybody had was confiscated. One kilo of bread and three kilos of potatoes per Jew were left. Because Murer was convinced that Jews are bringing “too much” food into the ghetto, proof that the Jewish gate guards aren’t following his orders, he scolded the police and announced that if this didn’t change, he would have all the police on gate duty arrested.”

Eight text:

Emmanuel Ringelblum in the ghetto of Warsaw

“But the whole affair - and the death sentence in general – has had very little deterring effect on smuggling, which continues with undiminished vigour. Jewish smugglers continue to scale the Wall, because, as they put it, if they can’t smuggle they are sentenced to death anyway. Consequently, there has been no marked rise in prices as a result of the death sentence. Smuggling flourishes, and will continue to flourish, so long as the Germans have an interest in abetting it.”

Ninth text:

Renate Yesner in the ghetto of Kovno, in Lithuania

“The trade between the inhabitants of the ghetto and the Lithuanians outside the fence flourished. There were many tradesmen coming from Lithuania, who just as the Jews inside the ghetto, were fearful and worried to finish a bartering action with success. But there were

¹ Murer was from 1941 till 1943 responsible for the Jewish Affairs as deputy of Gebietskommissar Hingst. Murer had a reputation as ‘the butcher of Vilna’and was known as a sadist.
also swindlers and sharpers, who do their dealings, in which after they received the bartering goods give bags with trash, on which a large piece of meat was covering everything.

Some people had an agreement with the guards of the ghetto, who’s task it was to stop the trade altogether. One time I saw such an action from afar. A Jew had just reached out some clothing to swap over the fence, when a trader quickly jumped away, which a friendly guard of his, who was in hiding, gave ample possibility to shoot the Jew.”

Tenth text:

Tamarah Lazerson in the ghetto of Kovno, in Lithuania

Diary, September 14th 1942

“I was lucky, I was summoned to go and work with a Jewish workforce (Kommando). To my astonishment the discussions evolved around the problem how to get ‘packages’ into the ghetto by smuggling, even though the punishments were harsh. Our people risk their lives to get food. They hide the stuff they bought in their clothes and smuggle them inside through the gate or over the fence round the ghetto. Even if they are being searched, they succeed in getting through, one way or another. We are an outstanding people, indestructible. No decrees or order will break us. I declare that our people will never be defeated, despite the sometimes inexpressible sufferings; therefore we have eternal life and shall we defeat our enemies.”

Sources:

Text 1: Mary Berg, page 40.


Text 3: Mary Berg, page 64.

Text 4: Muranowska 7, page 33.


Text 8: Ringelblum, page 237.

Questions:

1. How could the Jews keep on smuggling despite all the control of the Germans?
2. Which group was mainly responsible for the smuggling?
3. Which advantages did children when smuggling?
4. Look up on the internet who Emmanuel Ringelblum is and why he holds such a distinguished place in the history of the ghetto of Warsaw?
5. What was the purpose of the visit of Murer to the ghetto in text 7?
6. How did the Jews already bring ‘too much’ food into the ghetto? (text 7)
7. Why did the Jewish police keep Murer satisfied?
8. Why didn’t the death penalty influence the smuggling in a deterring way?
9. Which difference is there between text 9 and 10 about the ghetto of Kovno in Lithuania in comparison to the other ghetto’s you have been reading about?
10. Why did Tamarah Lazerson say in the last text that she was lucky? What kind of luck was this?
First text:

**Mary Berg in the ghetto of Warsaw**

Diary, June 5th 1941

“Meanwhile, the ghetto walls are growing higher and higher. Barbed-wire fences are gradually giving place to red-brick walls. At the spots where the Jewish quarter is separated from the Aryan side only by barbed wire, there are signs reading Seuchensperrgebiet- Nur Durchfahr Gestattet (Closed disease area- only traffic for throughway allowed) This is to warn the German soldiers against entering the forbidden zone, which is allegedly a hotbed of infectious diseases.”

Second text:

**David Sierakowiak in the ghetto of Łódź**

Diary, Friday July 17th 1942

“The death rate keeps rising in the ghetto. Many of the teachers from the former gymnasium have died, or are dying, or are incurably sick. I keep hearing about all kinds of previously unknown diseases that put people down after a short struggle. All immunity is disappearing, and any little thing can become a cause of death. In the cemetery, graves are dug as piecework for several dozen funerals in advance. Meanwhile, winter is approaching. Who will survive it? It’s very doubtful that we will.”

Third text:

**Mary Berg in the ghetto of Warsaw**
Diary, January 4th 1941

Wherever I go, I find people wrapped up in blankets or huddling under feather beds, that is, if the Germans have not yet taken all these warm things for their own soldiers. The bitter cold makes the Nazi beasts who stand guard near the ghetto entrances even more savage than usual. Just to warm up, as they lurch back and forth in the deep snow, they open fire every so often and there are many victims among the passers-by. Other guards who are bored with their duty at the gates arrange entertainments for themselves. For instance, they choose a victim from among the people who chance to go by, order him to throw himself in the snow with his face down, and if he is a Jew who wears a beard, they tear it off, together with the skin, until the snow is red with blood. When such a Nazi is in a bad mood, his victim may be the Jewish policeman who stands guard with him.

In the neighbourhood of the ghetto wall in Cracow

Fourth text:

Janina Heshele in the ghetto of Cracow

“Winter has come, hard and unmerciful. I’m as cold as ice and can’t sleep. My benefactors give me the power to hold on and I comfort myself with the thought that I shall be safe on the Aryan side of Cracow. I can’t really bring myself to the point where I believe them. All people are egocentric. They first think of themselves and their own well-being. I haven’t got the power to keep up my spirit, to hope, to live. But in my ears the last words of my mother still echo: “Go on, do not despair, because of your mother!”. Those words keep the last sparkle of life within me burning.”
Dawid Rubinowicz in the ghetto of Bieliny

Diary, January 1942

“After breakfast I went with my brother grinding some rye with a hand mill. When we returned home we saw some Jews working in the snow nearby and the village policeman was watching them. The village policeman told us to get to work immediately with the snow. He told us, that we had to work till the village eldest from the policestation came where he had been all morning. At four o’clock he came, went into the shop and the village policeman also went there. When the village policeman came out of the shop again and gave us the order to get in a line, spades on our shoulders, and march up the hill. He told us he was following orders which the village eldest had given. He brought us to the top of the hill, where the cold and snowstorm were the worst and he told us we had to work there, after which he himself went into a house. We had to work till sunset. We cried because of the cold, but everyone had to stay till sunset and then he came back. We had to get in line again and then we went down. We went to the shop, where the eldest still was. Although it was evening, he didn’t tell us we could leave. Only much later we were allowed to go, but he told us the next day we had to come back to work again in the snow.”
Sixth text:

Janina Bauman in the ghetto of Warsaw

Physical contact with strangers was the thing we tried to avoid at all cost. Many people were already down and out. They lived side by side with the more fortunate. The ‘professional’ Jewish beggars of the time before the war were now only a drop of water in an ocean of new poverty. More and more needy refugees from the small provincial towns were robbed by the Nazi’s of their houses and possessions and put in the Warsaw ghetto with use of violence. The homeless, shabby, underfed people who we happened to bump into on the streets were full of lice and carried diseases with them.”

Winter in the ghetto of Łódź

Seventh text:

Rutka Laskier in the ghetto of Bedzin

“The snow is falling in large white flakes and covers the mud of the streets with a white blanket. Winter. But on the street we don’t hear the cheerful sounds of children, normally so characteristic for the coming of the winter. Winter is for most inhabitants of the ghetto the ghost of poverty and the hunger. Queues everywhere, queues for potatoes, mangles, coal, bread. Poorly dressed children hold out their hands to passers-by. These children are the stigma of the greyish ghetto. Their parents are deported and children are left to their fate swarming the streets. The people have worried, dreary faces. Suddenly a cry. A policeman gives an old senile man a push, the latter falls down and batters his head against a sharp stone. The white snow sucks up the purple blood. Here a woman is crying, her husband has been arrested, who knows if she will see him ever again…… the clock tower strikes five o’clock.”
“The first enemy to enter our house and who disturbed the imaginary peacefulness of our daily life, didn't wear a Nazi-uniform. At the end of the winter, when the snow had melted and the narrow never cleaned pavements flooded with a mixture of mud and garbage, Stefan came, who worked now as a volunteer nurse in the hospital, home from work with heavy headaches, fever and shivers. We thought it was the flu, but when on the fourth day his fever ran till 41 degrees and his whole body was covered with red spots, we realised that it might be typhus. The doctor we called for confirmed our suspicion. He prescribed medicines against the pain and the fever and he called the service for disinfection. The few hospitals in the ghetto were already crowded with ill people, medicines were scarce; the only thing a doctor could do for a Jewish patient was to tell him to stay in bed, if indeed a bed was available. The service for disinfection sprayed the whole flat with carbol and bolted the our residence with the six of us in it. A gigantic yellow placard saying 'TYPHUS EPIDEMIC-ENTRANCE FORBIDDEN!', was hanged on the front door. Every day a friendly neighbour put some food in front of our closed door, knocked twice and ran away quickly. Confined to our dwelling we waited to see who would be next to show the symptoms of this mortal disease.”
Helga Kinsky-Pollack in the ghetto of Theresienstadt

Thursday, August 16th 1943

“It is horrible here right now. The older, more sensitive children are very tense. They are going to organise transports to a new ghetto- destination unknown. And something else, tonight 1500 children from Poland arrive. We make toys for them and little bags and nets and so on.

I’ve got diarrhoea. Out of 27 children 19 have diarrhoea and 16 are sick in bed. Two toilets for a hundred children is not enough if in each ‘Heim’ contagious diarrhoea is prevailing. What those toilets look like!!!!”

Tenth text:

Helga Weissova-Hoskova in the ghetto of Theresienstadt

“Theresienstadt is being hit by a typhoid epidemic. The hospitals are full to overflowing. They have cleaned the whole house and made it into a typhoid pavilion. Everywhere you see signs of warning saying: ‘Achtung, Typhus’. At every water-tap and pump it states: ‘Don’t forget to wash your hands’, -well, it hardly gives any water anyway.”

Sources:

Text 1: Mary Berg, page 54.
Text 2: David Sierakowiak, page 197.
Text 3: Mary Berg, page 36.
Text 4: Janina Heshele in Voices from the dark, page 70.
Text 6: Janina Bauman, page 75.
Text 7: Rutka Laskier, page 78.
Text 8: Janina Bauman, page 76.
Text 9: Helga Kinsky-Pollack in Voices from the dark, page 88.
Text 10: Helga Weissova-Hoskova in Voices from the dark, page 73.

Questions:
1. What causes were responsible for the fact that the ghetto ‘produced diseases’? (texts 1 and 2)

2. Why do the Jews endure extra coldness in the winter of 1941? (text 3)

3. Look up on the internet or in a book if there were more of these vexations (teases) against the Jewish population.

4. Why did the Eldest of the village give these harsh orders? (text 5)

5. Of which ‘honesty’ and ‘dishonesty’ does one speak of in terms of the diseases in the ghetto?

6. Why do the children mentioned in text 7 have a very difficult time?

7. Who was the enemy without uniform from line one in text 8?

8. Why did so many diseases occur in the ghetto’s? Explain your answer.

9. Text 10 shows a cause and a consequence of the diseases in the ghetto. Explain which cause and which consequence.

Chapter 8 The Jewish faith
First text:

Oskar Rosenfeld in the ghetto of Łódź

Diary, April 1st 1942

“The next day a few boys are pulling a cart with junk. A few older Jews are looking on. One of the older boys says, without moving a face muscle, so to speak, in remembrance of the reading of the Haggada (story of the exodus read at the Seder) the night before: “Not one rose against us, but in every generation they rose to destroy us, and he, the Blessed One, saved us each time with an outstretched arm.”

One of the Jews, a redhead, says: “Had he left us in Mizrayim (Egypt), we would now be sitting in a hotel in Cairo drinking Turkish coffee”. He laughs. So does the man next to him. Then that one, a gray-haired man, says: “Moshe knew what he was doing. Had we stayed in Mizrayim, we wouldn’t have been blessed with receiving the Torah…” “And what did the Torah get us? Nothing but unpleasantness. Suffering. Persecution.” “But also in pleasant time. The most beautiful time. Without Torah, no life. I never care about the fleshpoints of Egypt and so I don’t miss them as much as so many here. Hunger? So one goes hungry. Getting beaten? So one gets beaten. We are, like it or not, the am s’gulō {Hebr., chosen people}, nothing can be done about it. We are chosen.. we took the task upon ourselves. And when we are called up to fight, we will fight. For the time being, it is not possible. For the time being, we have not received the call…” “What are we to fight with? With our knapsacks? With our weak arms? And where is the strong arm, the strong hand, that leads us? I don’t see it…” “Just look at the boys, how patiently they are pulling the cart. Not one of them is willing to give up what he received at birth. Tell any of the to go and change, to merge with another people, and he will answer: No! He holds fast to the bris { Yidd./Hebr., covenant}! For the Eternal made the covenant not only with our fathers fathers, he made it with us, too, and will make it with the next generation, and so on, into all eternity. Do you want to exclude yourself? Should we want to be smarter than our ancestors? They went into the fire. For us, for us who are alive today. And our children here won’t want to be smarter than us, their fathers… This is how it will go from generation to generation…”.

Second Text:

Janina Heshele in the ghetto of Lvov

“When we returned to the dormitories, it was night. The women lighted the candles and with the usual blessings and plenty of tears they rang in Jom Kippur. I gazed at the candles, to the circles of light around the burning candle-wicks and suddenly felt deep inside that God was still with us, despite everything. He sees that we say thanks to Him for life, despite all the horrors surrounding us. I believed that eventually he would not permit the few remaining of Israel would be exterminated.

I went to my sleeping place and asked myself if I should fast. I wasn’t sure. Fasting is a Jewish religious ritual, and I am a Jewess. I didn’t want to think for too long or too deep about
it, because I was afraid I would start doubting God again. I was convinced that faith in God brings along the hope for life. I decided to start fasting.

After taking a shower the prisoners start eating. On the tables are pans with soup, but no one takes even one bite. Ten men (a religious quorum for prayer) enter. Urland (a Jewish policeman) locks the door and the Jews start prayer service. A few women are taking sheets of paper - the remains of prayer-books - and start reciting Jizkor (a prayer in remembrance of the Dead). Others repeat their words, and everyone is crying. But looking at myself, I begin to be doubtful again and these doubts overwhelm me. Why should I fast? Does God really exist? My earlier doubts return and crush my regained faith to shivers”.

Two boys from Torah school

Third text:

Tamarah Lazerson in the ghetto of Kovno
Diary, May 20th 1942

“I am very contented with myself. I had the feeling that I was lost and was wondering around aimlessly. Now I finally found something to live for. I am no longer lonely and abandoned- a human being alone, without a people I am no longer blind: God and faith have opened my eyes. Only now do I see that I have been chasing false ideals, but I have repented . My heart tells me that I have chosen the right course. I am fully convinced that I won’t be blinded again. Hurrah! Long live the fatherland, our hope and our confidence.....".

Saving of the Torah scrolls from the destroyed synagogue of Łodz
Fourth text:

Unknown boy from the ghetto of Łódź

“Ely, God, why do you allow this?
Are they to say
That you were impartially?
Are we, in your blind wrath,
The one that makes us harvest,
The sinful,
And they the righteous?
Could this be true?
Is that the truth?
You have after all enough
Wisdom to understand
That this is not the case:
It is us who has been sinned against
And they are the guilty ones”

Fifth text:

Toby Knobel Fluek in the ghetto of Brody

Beautiful memories

The lighting of the can candles for Sabbath

“On Friday afternoon the wood stove was put on and the cholent put in it to get it done for Sabbaths meal. The house was cleaned and everyone put on nice clothes and shoes that had just been polished. Before sunset mother blessed the Sabbaths candles. The brasscandlesticks she got as a wedding present from her parents. Father only said evening prayers and then the festive Friday evening meal would appear on the table.

Learning

Saturdays after lunch father teached me how to read Hebrew. There was no library in the village and books were hard to get a hold of. If I read a Polish book on Saturday, borrowed from the book-case of a girlfriend, father told me: ‘On Saturday you don’t read Polish books, on the Sabbath you read Hebrew’. He wanted to make sure That I learned enough Hebrew in order to be able to read the prayerbook on holy-days.”
**Sixth text:**

**Unknown boy in the ghetto of Łódz**

Diary, July 31

“My despite everything human heart breaks when I see how my little sister is being tormented. She literally lost everything—no stockings, no clothes……no tenderness. Ah you poor little orphan, what you have to suffer under my unrighteous treatment, caused by my shattered nerves. Poor small one, you have to make do with surrogates: some rags, instead of stockings, some wooden thing instead of boots….God seems to have turned himself away from us and left to the mercy of heartless devils. Almighty God, how can you do this? “

Diary, August 3

“When I look at my little sister, my heart melts. Did the child not have her fair share of sorrows? She fought so valiantly the last five years. When I look at our small cosy room, that has been cleaned by this young, smart, poor being, I turn sad at the thought she and I have to leave our last piece of home.

Oh God in the heavens, why did you create the Germans to destroy humanity? I don’t even know if I can stay with my little sister. I can’t write anymore. I am down and out and my mind is gloomy.”

**Seventh text:**

**Yechiel Granatstein in the ghetto of Lublin (although he is from Slonim)**

“Rabbi Shapira set out in a white silk cloak……. He walked to tashlikh (#1) with hundreds of students, other Jews who accompanied him, and more Jews standing on the balconies of their homes in the front, singing and clapping. For the Polish Jews, it was something like Eretz Yisroel (the Land of Israel) in their country. And it was etched into the hearts of the Jews of Lublin.”

#1 Literally : Hebrew meaning ‘casting off’, is a long standing Jewish practice usually performed on the afternoon of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, however it can be said up until Hoshana Rabbah. The text is from Tenach: Micah 7: 18-20. The previous year’s sins are symbolically “cast off” by reciting a section from Micah that makes allusions to the symbolic casting off of sins, into a large, natural body of flowing water (such as a river, lake or ocean). This could even appear on postcards.

Children listening during Cheder
Eight text:

Yechiel Granatstein in the ghetto of Slonim

“I remember that Purim came, and I’m walking to Reb(#2) Motke Kishingever’s. What was the Purim feast? Crumbs of bread on the table, in bowls. ….Reb Motke climbs onto the table and dances and sings (the Purim hymn) “Shoshanas Yaakov”, (including the expression) “Accursed be Haman” and all the rest. Then they ask us, “Reb Mordechai, don’t raise your voice, it’s really dangerous!” Suddenly we hear one gunshot. We found that later this “Hick” (a Nazi commander) was wandering around the ghetto. …..Then we sat down on Purim and asked Mordechai Kishingever, (but) he was in another world. We sang but the heart didn’t sing. It wasn’t that we missed having the feast, but the atmosphere was grim, the mood of the Jews in the ghetto, and what would happen tomorrow? Suddenly there’s pounding on the door. Nobody wants to open. Everyone froze, silence. Somebody shouts: “I’m Shloime from Baranowice!…….There’s been a massacre in Baranowice! Thousands of Jews are lying in the streets of baranowice. He even listed their names. This one’s gone. That’s the Purim that we spent in Slonim ghetto.”

#2 Rebbe means master, teacher or mentor. He is the leader of a Chassidic movement. Usually the eldest son will follow in the footsteps of his father as a Rebbe. Some Rebbes have tens of thousands of followers.

Ninth text:

Ephraim Oshry in the ghetto of Kovno

“I was there when we were visited by one Dr Benkers, a representative of Hitler’s notorious theoretician of anti-Semitism, Alfred Rosenberg. He came to visit the book storage unit
accompanied by the SS commandant of the ghetto, the notorious Fritz Jordan, and some members of the Jewish Council……

Jordan apparently wanted to show off for his guest. He asked me to show him the oldest book in the collection. I showed him Buxtorf’s *Concordance*, which had been printed some 300 years earlier. Then I showed him some other antique books. I understood that they had not come simply to look at the library. Every visit by prominent Germans meant, we knew, a new decree…..

As soon as the Germans left the storage area, they convinced the Jewish Council and instructed them, “The book collection must be sealed off immediately. That valuable property must be preserved…..” This, like so many German orders, contained a threat: they added that the Jewish ghetto police had been ordered to guard the books, and thus were responsible for making sure that no book was lost. We decided to protect our holy books with no less and perhaps with greater determination than we protected our lives………”

But the main raison we were able to salvage Jewish books was because of the great self-sacrifice (of so many)- even risking martyrdom to hide Torah scrolls. Workmen-shoemakers, tailors, carpenters- were elevated by this battle to the highest level of sanctity. Jewish children stood no lower. They sensed in this battle a deeper aspect—that it was a battle over Jewish eternity. The ghetto Jew was inspired and purified and elevated to the loftiest heights……”

Destroyed gravestones near the remains of the synagogue of Lodz

*Tenth text:*

**M. Dvorsky in the ghetto of Vilna**

“A few weeks before Purim, 1943, rumours suddenly spread that they were gathering the Jews from all surrounding villages in order to take them to the Vilna Ghetto… Deep in their hearts, the people knew that that was the first step toward the destruction of the Vilna Ghetto. In the evening, crowds of Jews rushed to the reading of the Megillah. (#1) The
synagogue on the street of the Butcheries was packed to the point of bursting. There was darkness and gloom everywhere; Next to the bima (platform) there was a small candle burning. The people stood crowded together and, as if from a great distance, the voice of the reader reached their ears:

‘……who didst work miracles for our fathers in days of old, at this season….’

And the ancient verses, which the people had repeated automatically for so many years, suddenly took on a living meaning in that room. It seemed as if some mysterious voice breaking through and rising up from under the ground:

‘Gather together and fight for your lives. Destroy and kill and eliminate every army, nation and country that besieges you.’

Goldenberg, the teacher, is making a speech: ‘Pull yourselves together, please. Make an effort to keep going. The months and weeks until the downfall of Haman are few.’ And he sings ‘Shoshanat Yaakov (The Lily of Jacob) with the entire congregation. ‘Thou hast ever been Israel’s salvation, and their hope in every generation…’.

Suddenly a voice rises up from the gloom of the bet Midrash:

‘Jews. let’s not allow our spirits to drop. Let’s sing Hatikva.’

And the whole congregation sang Hatikva as a prayer, verse after verse, once, twice, three times, with mysterious enthusiasm, with great intention, like the prayer of a soul before it departs….”

#1 Megillah is the biblical scroll of Esther from the Talmud, which is being read during Purim festivities.

#2 Hatikva is what would become the national anthem of the state of Israel, also called the song of hope. It has been written by Naftali Herz Imber (1856-1909) who went from Galicia (then a part of Austria-Hungary) to Palestine in 1882.

Sources:


Text 2: Voices from the dark, page 69-70.

Text 3: Voices from the dark, page 112.
Text 4: Voices from the dark, page 311.


Text 6: Voices from the dark, page 312.


Text 8: Yad Vashem Studies # 35, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2007, page 171-172.

Text 9: ‘Years wherein we have seen evil Volume II, the ghetto period’, Yad Vashem, Judaica Press, New York, 1995, page 108.

Text 10: M. Dvortsky, Jerusalem of Lithuania in revolt and in the Holocaust in Yad Vashem, Project Circles, Dialogue with the past, part III: Purim, page 5.

Questions:

1. Which difference is there between the story of Easter of the Jews and that of the Christians?

2. What covenant is mentioned in text one?

3. Why was Janina Heshele in text two doubtful of the existence of God?

4. What did the writer of the poem in text four with ‘this’? (in line one)

5. Why wouldn’t there be beautiful memories, mentioned in text five, anymore within the limits of the ghetto?

6. Who are of course the heartless devils in text six?

7. Which doubt does the boy mention in the last paragraph of text seven?

8. For whom is Haman the symbol in text eight?

9. What was the most important result of text ten for the Jewish population?

   Great anxiety, deportation from the hospital. Attempts to escape from a deportation from a hospital in Lagiewnickiej. Fotographed during Gehsperre (curfew), September 1942
Chapter 9 Fear of deportations

First text:

Janina Bauman in the ghetto of Warsaw

“The house in Leznostreet number 15 was being surrounded early in the morning and closed. From our flat on the fifth floor we heard the tumult of the soldiers who stormed to the courtyard, the deafening whistle signal and then the screaming: “Alle Jüden raus, schnell, schnell, alle Jüden herunter”, that was repeated into Polish. Then the noise of tens of feet who ran downstairs, facing disaster. Then clamour, screams, whistling, lamentations on the courtyard..... two shots.......a witches cauldron of violence and misery. (....)

Soon we heard the droning of heavy boots on the stairs, the noise of doors which were being kicked in: the hunters searched the dwellings. We heard them getting up the stairways, the third floor, then the fourth. We could hear their voices already, and recognised some Polish and Latvian words. It took them a long time to clear the fourth floor: it was obvious that they were busy looting the place. Now it was only a matter of minutes. We waited.

Then suddenly a long, sharp, whistle signal and an order in German sounded from the courtyard, that announced the end of the razzia and called back the hunters. We had survived. Paralysed we stayed in the flat for the remainder of the day.”
Second text:

Eugenia Szajn-Lewin in the ghetto of Warsaw

"Eva looked doubtful at Arthur and Tadeusz, she had lost sight of them. Finally she discovered Tadek. She took him by the arm. What had happened? He only heard something about a decree. He also wanted to go home, to his family. Then three streets further they ran into acquaintances. Yes. They already knew. They had to leave. Leave? When? Where? The Jewish policeman, who had stopped them, was also confused. He had no time. He was also heading home to his family. “Expulsion”, he said. Where to? I don’t know. Away from Warsaw. Who? Alone. Who? When? As soon as possible. I don’t know."

Third text:

David Sierakowiak in the ghetto of Łódź

Saturday, March 21, 1942

"The news that an additional 15,000 persons will be deported immediately burst like thunder in the ghetto this evening. Everybody says that now everyone will go, one by one, to the last ghetto dweller. There is a terrible frost again."

Fourth text:

Janina Bauman in the ghetto of Warsaw

"We stood still and with thumping hearts and pricked up ears we waited in the dark. Smothered by the layers of bricks and debris whistle sounds came through and we heard yelling and screaming. Time stood still, the whole world had stopped turning; there were only those raging hunters under the scorching sun and the three of us absorbed in the darkness.

Suddenly we heard footsteps just above our heads. We understood immediately: they searched the hospital area. Frozen by fear we pressed ourselves against the wall. I felt my heart tremble in my throat. The footsteps came near, then downwards. The searching dogs had gone in the underground passage. Then they halted as if they didn’t feel like going on. ‘Jemand da?’ – the loud snarl reverberated through the passage, it was like a fatal shot. A bright beam of light touched upon the moist walls….. Came still closeby, but didn’t shine on us…….not yet…….My heart was pounding in my throat…..Death came closer…….Then a loud ‘Niemand!’. The light disappeared, footsteps faded away. Silence. Darkness. Fear."

Before deportation - the sale of possessions in Łódź
Fifth text:

David Sierakowiak in the ghetto of Łódź

Thursday, July 9th 1942

“There are allusions again to deportations and to more Jews being brought in from surrounding areas. Transports of Jews from Kalisz have already arrived. Children, the elderly, and those unable to work are supposed to be deported from the ghetto soon. Meanwhile, the number of people who have the strength to work diminishes greatly. Everything’s running out. I can’t go upstairs or even stay on the street for long. Weak legs are the best indication of exhaustion from starvation.”
Sixth text:

Oskar Rosenfeld in the ghetto of Łódź

June 12th 1942

“Hunger (outsettlement). People volunteer for German outsettlement since, driven by insane hunger, they are calculating that they will receive soup and a loaf of bread before the departure; hunger hallucination drives them there…..”.

1941 deportation- registration and putting pins with numbers on ( Ordnung muss sein!)

Waiting for the deportation train
Seventh text:

Abraham Lewin in the ghetto of Warsaw

Shabbat, August 1st, 1942

‘Outside there is destruction by the sword, and inside there is terror.’ The 11th day of the ‘action’ that gets progressively more terrible and brutal. Germans are in the progress of emptying whole buildings and sides of streets. They took about 5000 people out of 20-2 and other buildings on Nowolipie Street. The turmoil and the terror is appalling. There is a general expulsion of all the occupants of Nowolipie Street between Karmelicka and Smocza streets. The awful sight: people carrying packages of pillows and bedclothes. No one thinks of moving furniture. Fajnkind says to his sister-in-law: ‘Hide yourself and your beautiful child! Into the cellar!’

The nightmare of this day surpasses that of all previous days. There is no escape and no refuge. The round-ups never cease, Sagan and Chilinowicz, Sztajn, Zołotow, Karczewicz, Prync, Opoczynski have been seized. Mothers lose their children. A weak old woman is carried on to the bus. The tragedies cannot be captured in words.”

Eight text:
Doi Levin in the ghetto of Kovno

“As I passed my house, I was shocked to see Jewish policemen and Germans forcibly evicting my family. Seeing my sister bitterly crying and father looking desperate. I thought that I should join them. But at that same moment, my mother made a sign that I never will forget for my entire life. She gave me a firm glance whose meaning was clear: ‘Get away from here immediately!’ and that is what I did without ever looking back. I never saw them alive again.”

Ninth text:

David Rubinowicz in the ghetto of Bieliny

Diary, May 8th 1942

“They say that there is going to be another razzia, because they are still 120 people short (…). Aunt came around and that they might as well take me. In the beginning I didn’t know what to do, but then I understood, that I had to go in hiding. I went to a Polish woman, where I stayed. The smallest rumour made me scared, that they would come in. The neighbour said, that the police went to the forest and just when she said this a couple of shots were heard, I said to myself, that somebody must have been shot. I didn’t stay too long and the lorries left soon. Two were full and the third was empty. For the rest of the day I didn’t go outside. In the evening I left for the synagogue to pray, because it is Friday, actually. In the past we used to go with father and if it was tiresome or when it was joyful, we went with father, but now…. Then we came back from the synagogue I felt very sorrowful, how could it be different, dinner was scraped together, table is being set, it’s Sabbath evening, but when I see the empty spot of father’s place, my heart is saddened.”

Deportation march

Tenth text:
Karl Wolff, chief of staff to SS Chief Heinrich Himmler

August 13th 1942

“With particular joy I have learned from your notice that for 14 days now a train has been travelling every day to Treblinka with 5000 members of the chosen people……..”.

Sources:

Text 1: Janina Bauman, page 121-122.
Text 3: David Sierakowiak, Diary, page 147.
Text 4: Janina Bauman, page 127.
Text 5: David Sierakowiak, Diary, page 195.
Text 6: Oskar Rosenfeld, page 71.
Text 7: Abraham lewin, page 144-145.
Text 8: Martin Gilbert, ‘Never again’, page 97.
Tekst 10: To bear witness, Yad Vashem, page 164.

Questions:

1. What is a razzia? Look this up.
2. What gave the victims, the Jewish people, the most fear during these razzia’s, according to text one?
3. Was it possible for Eva, in text two, to make a different choice?
4. Which people were selected first by the Germans for deportation? (see text five)
5. Why did some inhabitants of the ghetto chose voluntarily for deportation in text six?
6. Which days did the Germans usually choose for an ‘Aktion’ or a razzia, like in text seven?

7. What is meant by the following words from text nine: ‘they still are 120 people short’? What kind of a shortage are they talking about?

8. Look up on the internet or in a book what kind of a camp Treblinka was. (see also chapter two!)

Deportation in the cold of winter in Łódz

Radogszcz station
Chapter 10 Resistance in the ghetto’s

First text:

Abba Kovner in the ghetto of Vilna

“Jewish youth, do not be led astray. Of the 80.000 Jews in the “Jerusalem of Lithuania”(#1), only 20.000 remain. Before our eyes they tore from us our parents, our brothers and sisters. Where are the hundreds of men who were taken away for labour by the Lithuanian “snatchers”(#2)? Where are the naked women and children who were taken from us in the night of terror of the “provocation”? Where are the Jews who were taken away on the Day of Atonement? Where are our brothers from the second ghetto? None of those who were taken from the ghetto has ever come back. All roads of the Gestapo lead to Ponary(#3). And Ponary is Death! You who hesitate! Cast aside all illusions. Your children, your husbands, and your wives no longer alive. Ponary is not a camp- they were all shot there. Hitler is scheming to annihilate all European Jewry. The Jews of Lithuania were tasked to be the first in line. Let us not go like sheep to the slaughter! It’s true that we are weak and defenceless, but resistance is the only response to the enemy!.... Resit! To the last breath.”

#1 Jerusalem of Lithuania is the city of Vilna, later also called Wilnius.

#2 Snatchers are the kidnappers, mostly Lithuanian auxiliaries of the Germans.

#3 Ponary, also Ponar or Ponari, was a huge place of mass executions of Jews by the Germans and Lithuanians in the forests, close to Vilna. Between 70.000 and 100.000 Jews were executed.

Second text:

Z.O.B. (Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa = Jewish Self defence Organisation) in the ghetto of Bialystok

Manifesto, a call for resistance, May 1st 1943

“They are taking us to Treblinka! Like leprous beasts they will poison us with gas, and afterwards burn us in crematoria! Let us not go like sheep to the slaughter! If we are too weak to protect our lives- we are strong enough to protect our Jewish honour and human dignity and to show the world that although they have broken our bodies, they have not broken our spirits! Do not go willingly to your deaths. As long as you are alive, fight for your lives, attack your executioners with your teeth and your nails, with axes and knives and iron rods…. If we fall as heroes, even in our death…. We shall not die!....Except for our honour, we have nothing left to lose!...... Avenge the blood of the communities that have been destroyed, and the towns that have been uprooted. When you leave your homes, set fire to them. Set fire to the factories and destroy them Let us leave no legacy for the murderers.”
Third text:

Gusta Davidson Draenger in the ghetto of Cracow

“It’s as if he (Dolek) can feel death approaching, because he talks about it at length. He no longer believes they will survive, and he doesn’t want anyone harbouring false hopes. He doesn’t want them deluding themselves. He wants those going out on assignments to realise that death is near. He hurls his hard words into the heart of the festive atmosphere.

“We’re on a journey of no return. The road we’ve chosen is the road to death. Remember that. Whoever hopes to survive must not seek survival among us or in our work. We’ve reached the road’s end, but it’s not an end that will plunge us into darkness. We’re going out to face the angel of death, but we’ll face him as bold idealists. I have a feeling this is the last time we’ll greet the Sabbath together. We have to leave the quarter, because our whereabouts and activities are too well known. This week we’ll start to liquidate this oasis we’ve established at Number 13. One more phase of our lives is about to close, but we can’t afford to second-guess ourselves, to regret anything we’ve done. It couldn’t have been any other way.”

As the Last Supper drew to a close, a gray dawn peeped in the window.
The following Sunday, Dolek took five new people out on a sortie – Tosca, Marta, Henek, Rena and Giza. (#1) Each was assigned a different spot. Dolek gave final instructions and a sort of fatherly blessing for the road. No, it wasn’t exactly a blessing he gave them, but words of encouragement, words to sustain them and serve as a reservoir of strength to draw on for a long time to come. He gave them a pep talk, though one thought kept running through his mind the whole time: “We’re going to certain death”.

#1 These are all assumed names from the resistance: Tosca= Towa Stark, Marta= Towa Fuchs, Henek= Henryk Monderer, Rena= Regina Feurstein, Giza= Gizela Stockhammer and Dolek, the leader was Aharon Liebeskind, one of the leaders of the Akiba youth organisation (Jewish resistance in Cracow)

Fourth text:

Zivia Lubetkin in the ghetto of Warsaw

May 1st 1943

“We sat in the dark, scores of Jewish fighters, still carrying our weapons, surrounded by thousands of eager and expectant Jews. Was it not May Day? The feeling of responsibility lay heavy on our hearts, on our conscience, and gave no respite.

The crowded, cowering masses of Jews around us waited for a word of hope from the fighters’ lips. We were bewildered and lost. What should we say to them? What could we say to ourselves? How terrible was this feeling of helplessness! How grave the responsibility we felt as the last desperate Hebrew warriors! We could not hold out against the Germans’ consuming fire for long without water od food or weapons.”

Headquarters of the F.P.O. in Vilna

Fifth text:
Mordechai Anielewicz in the ghetto of Warsaw

“What we have experienced cannot be described in words. We are aware of one thing only: what has happened has exceeded our dreams. The Germans ran twice from the ghetto….

Keep well, my dear. Perhaps we shall meet again. But what really matters is that the dream, of my life has come true. Jewish self-defence in the Warsaw ghetto has become a fact. Jewish armed resistance and retaliation have become a reality. I have been witness to the magnificent heroic struggle of the Jewish fighters.”

Sixth text:

S. N. Grutman in the ghetto of Kovel (then Poland, now Ukraine)

Farewell inscriptions on the walls of the synagogue in Kovel in the Volyn region.

“The Jews of Kovel were destroyed on August 19\textsuperscript{th} 1942. Many of them were herded into the great Synagogue and from there were taken in groups to their deaths. It was only then that the farewell inscriptions were scrawled on the walls.

I already knew their fate, but I wanted to find at least something to remember them by, perhaps a photograph or something else. (…..) When I approached the walls, I was filled with horror. The walls began to speak.

It turned out that the walls were covered with writing in pencil. There was not a single empty spot on the wall. These were last words of the doomed, their farewell to this world.”

Here are some of their words:

In Yiddish:

“Leyb Sosna! Know that they killed all of us. Now I’m going with my wife and children out to die. Be well. Your brother Arum. August 20 1942.”

“Dear Sister! Maybe you managed to save yourself, but if you’re ever in the synagogue, read these words. I’m in the synagogue and waiting for death. Be happy, and survive this bloody war. Remember your sister. Polya Friedman.”

“Ida Soyfer, Zelig Friedman, Friedman with wife and children. Tserun Leyzer with his daughters and Sroul Katz died at the hands of the German murderers. Avenge them!”

“Gitl Zafran from 6 (…) Street, Rina Zafran had her throat cut on Thursday, August 19\textsuperscript{th}, 1942. Take revenge!”

In Polish:

“August 20, 1942, Zelik, tama, Jela Kozen perished. Avenge us!”

In Russian:

“Liza Rayzen, wife of Leybish Rayzen. The dream of every mother, to see her only daughter Beba, living in Dubno, did not come true. With great pain she goes to her grave.”
Finally, almost in every inscription was the word revenge:

In Yiddish: Nekome!
In Polish: Pomsti!
In Russian: Otostite!"

German soldiers hanging Jews

Seventh text:

P. Zozulya in the ghetto of Chudnov (Soviet union, now Ukraine)

“From the stories of eye-witnesses, I learned that the first victim was the town rabbi, the eighty-seven-year-old Iosif Yakovlevich Mosuk, killed on September 8 1941, just before evening (on a Friday it would seem). They mocked this God-fearing old man by forcing him to put on religious garb, then arranged for two old women neighbours to lead him down the street by the hand, with candles in their hands, as if they were going to the altar. To the accompaniment of the rubber whip of the German butcher Zapevaylo, the old women were forced to sing, walking through the whole shtetl(#1) until they reached the garden, where, after these so-called “ceremonial” mockeries, they were killed and buried in the same pit there in the garden, and a cross was put over their grave. Summoning her courage, a girl
(named Chirasner, they say) discreetly removed the cross; nonetheless, she immediately paid for this with her young life. (…..)

This is not a legend about King Ahasuerus and his minister, Haman.(#2) I have described evil deeds and bestial actions of the Nazis in just one little town. This is how Hitler brought about his new order in Europe, that is, in our Chudnov."

#1 Shtetl was a religious community in Eastern Europe.

#2 This is a reference to the biblical book of Esther, which is being read on the Jewish religious day of Purim (of the Jewish word Poer, which means fate). It tells the story of how Persian Jews were saved by the intervention of Mordechai and his niece Esther, who was married to King Ahasuerus.

Eight text:

Emmanuel Ringelblum in the ghetto of Warsaw

May, 1942

"The heroic girls, Chajke and Frumke- they are a theme that calls for the pen of a great writer. Boldly they travel back and forth through the cities and towns of Poland. They carry “Aryan” papers identifying them as Poles or Ukrainians. One of them even wears a cross, which she never parts with except when in the Ghetto. They are in mortal danger every day. They rely entirely on their “Aryan” faces and on the peasant kerchiefs that cover their heads. Without a murmur, without a second’s hesitation, they accept and carry out the most dangerous missions. Is someone needed to travel to Vilna, Bialystok, Lemberg, Kowel, Lublin, Czestochowa, or Radom to smuggle in contraband such as illegal publications, goods, money? The girls volunteer as though it were the most natural thing in the world. Are there comrades who have to be rescued from Vilna, Lublin, or some other city? They undertake the mission. Nothing stands in their way. nothing deters them. Is it necessary to become friendly with engineers of German trains, so as to be able to travel beyond the frontiers of the Government General of Poland, where people can move about with special papers? They are the ones to do it, simply, without fuss, as though it was their profession. They have travelled from city to city, to places no delegate or Jewish institution had ever reached, such as Wolhynia, Lithuania. They were the first to bring back the tidings about the tragedy of Vilna. (#1) They were the first to offer words of encouragement and moral support to the surviving remnant of that city. How many times have they looked death in the eyes? How many times have they been arrested and searched? Fortune has smiled on them. They are, in the classic idiom, “emissaries of the community to whom no harm can come”. With what simplicity and modesty have they reported what they accomplished on their journeys, on the trains bearing Polish Christians who have been pressed to work in Germany! The story of the Jewish woman will be a glorious page in the history of Jewry during the present war. And the Chajkes and Frumkes (#2) will be the leading figures in this story. For these girls are indefatigable. Just back from Czestochowa, where they imported contraband, in a few hours they’ll be on the move again. And they’re off without a moment’s hesitation, without a minute of rest."
#1 There were more than 60,000 Jews in the ghetto of Vilna when Germany attacked the soviet Union on June 22nd 1941. Most of them were massacred at that time. (May 1942)

#2 Frumka Plotnicka and Chaika Grossman were both messengers of the Jewish resistance organisations (in Poland) Dror and Hashomer Hatzair. Frumka didn’t survive the war and died in 1943, Chaika did survive the war and even became member of parliament of the Israeli Knesseth.

Chaika Grossman

Brama Grodzka (gate) Lublin

Ninth text:

Harold Werner from the ghetto of Wlodowa

“Before we would try to liberate more Jews from the ghetto of Wlodowa, we first wanted to capture more weapons. In this way they could defend themselves and be an asset to the group. (…..)

Also in the villages people felt that the tide was against the Germans. No placards are being hung on the village square which showed the advance of the German army through Russia,
like in the beginning of the invasion. One wasn’t sure that the Germans would win the war. Some villagers began to sympathise openly with people of the resistance. They pointed out collaborators who had arrested Jews and handed them over to the Germans and farmers who had been hiding weapons.

So we heard that in the village of Mosciska there were two farmers who had buried weapons. Everyone of us who was armed so our original small group, with Moische Lichtenstein, Motel Rosenberg, and Chaim Tencer, were getting ready for the journey to Mosciska. Moische the butcher went with us. Although he didn’t have a gun, he was so tall that it didn’t make a difference. Around midnight we left to find the first farmer. When we had found him, we forced him to go inside his barn. We told him that he had hidden weapons and we wanted those weapons. We told him that we were fighting for his country and for his freedom against the Germans and that it would be wise to cooperate with us. He denied that he owned weapons, but we knew he lied. Moische the butcher got a hold of him and knocked him down with one blow. He kept denying that he had weapons. Moniek took a stick, ordered the farmer to lower his pants and began to hit his backside. Then all of a sudden he wanted to cooperate. He took us to the back of the barn and dug up a wooden chest with six brand new polish guns and a few hundred bullets in it, a sheer lucky find. In silence we left the area and after walking for a whole night, we returned to our base camp at daybreak.

A few days later the same small group went to find the second farmer in Mosciska who had hidden weapons. Motel Rosenberg was wearing a long army jacket with a broad belt and a revolver on his hip, just like Moische Lichtenstein. We also took Yankale, who looked very thin, but he could be very angry, when he got mad. It was already dark when we got to the house of the second farmer. He also didn’t admit having weapons. Yankale got furious and threatened to kill the farmer on the spot if he refused to cooperate. Out of fear for his own life, he admitted that he had lied. He had a gun in his barn, which he gave us.

Tenth text:

Unknown woman in the ghetto of Warsaw

April 23rd 1943

“There is a terrible lack of air. People fall down, partly unconscious, on the ground. The enemybombards us with grenades without a break, and sounds of machine-gun fire are heard without end. Constant, nearly deafening thunder in the air. Despite all the dangers, Jews are running through the streets, in order to save their bare life. Everything is enveloped by fire. It looks as if the end of the world is taking place. Save yourselves if you can. It’s terrible. Everything (=everyone) wants to save (himself) - colossal struggle. Hell has come to earth. Dante’s inferno- unbelievable and indescribable…. “.

Eleventh text:

Jürgen Stroop (SS) in the ghetto of Warsaw
“It was apparent that the Jews were hiding in sewers and specially constructed bunkers. During the first days, it was assumed that there were only scattered bunkers. However, during the grand operation, the whole Ghetto was found to be systematically equipped with cellars, bunkers, and passages. These bunkers and passages were all connected to the sewer system. Thus, the Jews were able to maintain an undisturbed subterranean traffic. They also used this sewer network to escape underground into the Aryan part of the city of Warsaw. Reports were continuously received that Jews attempted to get away through manholes. (……)Because of camouflage, the discovery of individual bunkers by the troops was extremely difficult. In many cases, discovery was possible only through betrayal by Jews.

After the first few days, it was clear that the Jews no longer considered voluntary resettlement but were determined to resist with all weapons and means at their disposal. (…..)

During the grand operation, Jews were caught who had already been transferred to Lublin or Treblinka, had escaped from there, and had returned to the ghetto, equipped with arms and ammunition. (…..)

While it was possible at the beginning to catch considerable numbers of Jews, who are inherently cowardly, it proved increasingly difficult to capture Jews and bandits in the second half of the grand operation. Repeatedly, fighting groups of 20 to 30 or more Jewish youths, aged 18 to 25, accompanied by a corresponding number of females, unleashed new resistance. These fighting groups had orders to offer armed resistance to the last person and, if necessary, to commit suicide to escape capture.

During the armed resistance, females belonging to fighting groups were armed just like the men. Some of them were members of the He-halutz movement. Not infrequently, these females fired pistols from both hands. Repeatedly, they concealed pistols or hand grenades (oval Polish hand grenades) in their underpants to use at the last minute against the men of the Waffen SS, Police or Wehrmacht.”

Chaim Lazar Litai in Vilna

Sources:


Text 3: Gusta Davidson Draenger, “Justyna’s narrative’, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1996, page 127-128. Justyna’s last sign of life was that she fought in the forest near Wisnicz against the Germans when she was arrested on November 8, 1943.


Text 5: Mordechai Anielewicz in a letter to Yitzak Zuckerman, shortly before Anielewicz was killed in a fight.


Text 8: ‘Notes’, Emmanuel Ringelblum, page 273-274.


Questions:
1. Look up on the internet who was Abba Kovner. (text 1)
2. Why does Abba Kovner address especially the Jewish youth?
3. Who was the leader of the Z.O.B. in Bialystok? (text 2)

4. What did the writer of text two mean with the sentence: ‘If we fall as heroes, even in our death…. We shall not die!...”

5. On which day does the Sabbath starts? (text 3) You might look it up in a book.

6. Explain the last sentence of text three.

7. Who was Mordechai Anielewicz and explain his words according to what you have found in your research.

8. What is the difference between the fate of the Jews in this story and the fate of many Polish Jews?

9. About which resistance is text seven speaking?

10. What did the writer of text seven mean with the following words: ‘this is not a legend’?

11. Who honoured Emmanuel Ringelblum and why? (text 8)

12. What was their task and why was it of the utmost importance? (text 8)

13. Which problems did the Jews have who escaped to the forests outside the cities? (text 9)

14. Why did Harold Werner called it a ‘lucky find’ in text nine?

15. What were according to Jürgen Stroop the problems of the ghetto of Warsaw? (text 11)

16. About what is Stroop sincerely astonished?

Chapter 11 The end of the ghetto

First text:
Dina Beitler in the ghetto of Vilna

“…We marched on foot the whole way, and it was a very long way…. And we were marching in the street and the Germans and Poles were all standing on the sidewalks, laughing and shouting, and they made fun of us, completely humiliating us…. And I went with my grandmother and another aunt. We were walking together until we arrived at Ponar…. There were several open pits. And when we got there they told us to undress….They were there with dogs, standing at the pits with machine-guns, posted right at the edge of the pit. And everybody started screaming and running from one side to the other….. there were screams to heaven- it was something terrible, that one cannot forget. And there was nothing to be done, there was no way out. And before they shot me, there were the other pits where the men stood. And I saw my brother there, and we parted. He sat there and he made a goodbye sign with his hand. And that was it. They shot and he fell too….And it was also very cold, the ground was frozen…. And when they shot me, I fell on the dead….“(#1)

#1 Dina Beitler was born in Vilna, Lithuania. She was seven years old when in the winter of 1941-2, she was taken from the ghetto with her granddaughter and brother to ponar, the killing site outside Vilna. She was only slightly wounded and managed to crawl out from among the corpses. After wandering around the countryside, a Polish woman took her in and saved her. She immigrated to Israel in 1960.

Second text:

German police in the ghetto of Minsk

War diary Battalion 322

August 31st 1941

“15.00 hours Execution of an Aktion against Jews in the Minsk ghetto. Company 9 is responsible for closing the area while company 7, the NSKK company(transport) and the SD (security service) carry out the searches. All Jews aged 15 to 60 were detained, as were all Jewesses who did not wear the Jewish stars on their clothes as ordered. A total of 913 Jews of both sexes were detained and transported to the Police Prison.

September 1st 1941

5.30 hours Execution of the Jews detained yesterday at a site about 10 km east of Minsk, north of the Minsk-Smolensk-Moscow highway. Three execution squads were formed. The commando of Company 9 shot a total of 330 Jews (including 40 Jewesses). “

German soldiers deport Jews from Lublin
Felix Landau, SS officer and member of Einsatzgruppe C, close to the ghetto of Drohobycz

July 12\textsuperscript{th} 1941

“At 6.00 in the morning I was suddenly awoken from a deep sleep. Report for an execution. Fine, so I’ll just play executioner and then gravedigger, why not? Isn’t it strange, you love battle and then have to shoot defenceless people. Twenty-three had to be shot, amongst them the two above-mentioned women. They are unbelievable. They even refused to accept a glass of water from us. I was detailed as marksman and had to shoot any runaways. We drove one kilometre along the road out of town and then turned right into a wood. There were only six of us at that point and we had to find a suitable spot to shoot and bury them. After a few minutes we found a place. The death candidates assembled with shovels to dig their own graves. Two of them were weeping. The others certainly have incredible courage. What on earth is running through their minds during those moments? I think that each of them harbours a small hope that somehow he won’t be shot. The death candidates are organised into three shifts as there are not many shovels. Strange, I am completely unmoved. No pity, nothing. That’s the way it is and then it’s all over. (…..)

Slowly the hole gets bigger and bigger; two of them are crying continuously. I keep them digging longer and longer; they don’t think so much when they’re digging. While they’re working they are in fact calmer. Valuables, watches and money, are put into a pile. (…..)

I came back dog tired but the work went on. Everything in the building had to be straightened up. And so it went on without respite. In the afternoon the car came back from Radom unexpectedly. Like a small child I couldn’t wait to get my post. That was my first question.”
Fourth text:

**Jürgen Stroop in the ghetto of Warsaw**

May 24th 1943

“Es gibt keine Jüdischen Wohnbezirk in Warschau mehr!”(#1)

“The Jewish quarter of Warsaw is no more!”

#1 First meant as a present for the birthday of Hitler on April 20th 1943.

Fifth text:

**Orders for the German police battalions at executions (of Jews from the ghetto’s)**

The order:

On July 11 1941, the following order was issued to the police battalions regarding the shooting:

1. On the orders of the Higher SS and Police Leader….attached to the Rear Army Centre all male Jews between 17-45 years of age convicted of looting are to be executed immediately.

2. The executions are to take place away from the cities, villages and traffic routes. The graves are to be levelled to prevent them becoming places of pilgrimage. I forbid photography and the admittance of spectators. Executions and places of burial are not to be made public.

3. Battalion and company leaders are to pay special attention to the pastoral care of the participants in this action. The impressions of the day are to be dispelled through evening gatherings with comrades. In addition, the men are to be instructed regularly on the necessity of this measure, which stems from the political situation.”

Sixth text:

**Karl Kretschmer, SS Obersturmführer of the Einsatzgruppen Special Squad 4A**

Letter to his wife, September 27th 1942

“The sight of the dead (including women and children) is not very cheering. But we are fighting this war for the survival or non-survival of our people. You back home, thank God, do not feel the full force of that…. One is aware of it everywhere one goes along the front. My comrades are literally fighting for the existence of our people. The enemy would do the same. I think that you understand me. As the war is in our opinion a Jewish war, the Jews are the first to feel it. Here in Russia, wherever the German soldier is, no Jew remains. You can imagine that at first I needed some time to come to grips with this. Please do not talk to Frau Kern about this.”
Seventh text:

Szymul Zygelblom, from Warsaw, during the war in London as the representative of the Bund with the Polish National Council in exile.

Last letter of Szymul Zygelblom

“I am taking the liberty of addressing to you, Sirs, these my last words, and through you to the Polish Government and the people of Poland, and to the governments and people of the Allies, and to the conscience of the whole world:

The later latest news that has reached us from Poland makes it clear beyond any doubt that the Germans are now murdering the last remnants of the Jews in Poland with unbridled cruelty. Behind the walls of the ghetto the last act of this tragedy is now being played out.

The responsibility for the crime of the murder of the whole Jewish nationality in Poland rests first of all on those who are carrying it out, but indirectly it falls also upon the whole of humanity, on the peoples of the Allied nations and on their governments, who up to this day have not taken any real steps to halt this crime. By looking on passively upon this murder of defenceless millions – tortured children, women and men – they have become partners to the responsibility.(…….)

I cannot continue to live and to be silent while the remnants of Polish Jewry, whose representative I am, are being murdered. My comrades in the Warsaw Ghetto fell with arms in their hands in the last, heroic battle. I was not permitted to fall like them, together with them, but I belong with them, to their mass grave.

By my death I wish to give expression to my most profound protest against, the inaction in which the world watches and permits the destruction of the Jewish people."

Szymul Zygelblom
Eight text:

Halina Kahn from the ghetto of Łódź

“When the last people left the ghetto, my husband and I belonged to the last seven hundred people that remained. A few months before the Russians came, the guards took the men from the factory at night to the Jewish area to dig some graves there. The men weren’t allowed to say anything about this. They had to work all night and my husband came home very quiet but very upset in the morning. I asked him: ‘What kind of work did you have to do in the dark?’ He said: ‘Don’t ask, I am here’. Later I heard that they had to dig seven graves, for the seven hundred people that were left, one grave for a hundred people.”
Ninth text:

Grigori Szur from the ghetto of Vilna

“But at the end of each selection everyone was moved to the same Rosastreet, where all were loaded on goods vans that had been waiting and they were transported to Ponar at night. One could notice by almost everything, that with the liquidation of the ghetto, the people weren’t sent to work but were being sent straight into death. The people weren’t allowed to bring any water or food, and also all their possessions were scattered on the courtyard of the monastery. Some women who managed during the ride to get forward to the little window of the van, jumped from themoving train and, if they didn’t wound themselves that much so they could walk, they would hide in the forests.

The ‘evacuation’went on during the whole of the 23rd September till late in the evening and went on the 24th of September as well. After this soldiers stormed into the ghetto and began to loot the emptied houses. German, Lithuanian and Ukrainian soldiers were dragging the stuff that was left in the houses outside; in two years the Jews had managed to gather some possessions, they had succeeded by all means necessary to get some of their possessions they had left in the city to bring this to the ghetto. The dwellings were destroyed, the windows and doors left wide open and the glass all broken. (…..)

Half drunken Ukrainian soldiers were walking through the deserted streets of the ghetto; they were playing cheerful songs on the instruments that were stolen from the demolished Jewish theatre….."
Tenth text:

Jay M. from the ghetto of Bialystok

“On August 16, 1943, it was announced that the whole population of the ghetto is going to be moved. Of course, everybody knew what it meant: it’s going to be the end. Shooting started, and all the Germans that were then in the ghetto opened fire on everybody. The house was littered with bullets. It was a four-unit structure. We ran from one house to the next, and wherever we came in we were met by a hail of gunfire. Briefly looking out through one of the windows, in the backyard I saw a great number people there that ran in and hiding in the bushes and trees. One German walked in with a submachine gun and just sprayed bullets, and everybody was falling like little wooden soldiers. We heard the steps of a German soldier walking in. In the split second, I told my sister to get under a bed and my mother into a closet, and I hid under the same bed. And again, a minute later, he walked in, with his boots perhaps inches away from my nose where I was under the bed. Fortunately, he did not see us, and we survived.”

The ruins of the ghetto of Vilna

Sources:
Text 1: ‘How was it humanly possible?’; The Holocaust Memorial Centre, Beth Shalom, 2002, page 43.

Text 2: ‘How was it humanly possible’, page 61.


Text 6: ‘The good old days’, page 163.


Breaking down of a ghetto in Poland
Questions:

1. Look up on the internet or in a book what kind of a place Ponar(y) is. (see also chapter 2)

2. Why is text two remarkable within the persecution of Jews?

3. What is the opinion of ‘ordinary Germans’, so in this case soldiers and policemen, about the executions? (see texts 2 and 3)

4. What does the sentence of text four mean in reality?

5. Why did the police battalions get instruction two in text five?

6. How did Karl Krettschmer see World War II in text six?

7. Against what was Szmul Zygelblom protesting in text seven?

8. What was the last phase of the liquidation (destruction) of the ghetto’s according to text nine?

9. “Moving” had a whole different meaning in text ten(line one)? Which one?

What remained of the ghetto’s

Chapter 12 Liberation
First text:

Janina Bauman from the ghetto of Warsaw, liberated on a farm in the neighbourhood of Cracow on January 19\textsuperscript{th} 1945.

“One day in May 1945, when I was wandering through the ruins and debris of my destroyed city, I suddenly was in front of the house where we recovered nine months before leaving Warsaw. To my astonishment the house was still there and was, like then, only half demolished. There were planks in front of the broken windows and this meant someone was living there. I climbed the ram shackled stairs and knocked on the door of the dwelling I recognised. A small girl of my age opened the door. I explained her that I had, right after the rising, buried under the debris of a half collapsed room my manuscripts. Perplexed she took me to the room which, she said, wasn’t used by her family. It looked just as I remembered. That one leg of the piano still dangling above the abyss. And there they were, all my notebooks and loose sheets of paper, full of scribbles with my pot hooks, safely hided under a few bricks in a hole in the floor.”

Second text:

Zivia Lubetkin from the ghetto of Warsaw, liberated in Grodzisk, near Warsaw on January 17\textsuperscript{th} 1945

“People rejoiced and embraced their liberators. We stood by crushed and dejected, lone remnants of our people.”

Third text:

Yitzak Zuckerman, a leader of the ghetto rising of the ghetto of Warsaw, liberated in Warsaw on January 17\textsuperscript{th} 1945

“The day the Red Army entered Warsaw, we felt like orphans; we had a sense that there was no Jewish people any more. We had no estimate, we didn’t know how many were left.”

Fourth text:

Bronka Klibanski, a courier for the Jewish Fighting Organisation in Bialystok, liberated in Poland in January 1945

“The first to come were the Soviet sappers, searching for mines. When we heard Russian being spoken, we cautiously stepped forward to meet them, but only after satisfying ourselves beyond doubts that they were indeed Soviet soldiers. Then came the tanks. We ran to kiss their grimy crew members and thank them for having liberated us from the Germans at long last.
Our joy was boundless, our smiles unlimited. We organised a small parade the next day, clutching red flags, and marching to the outskirts of the city, where we welcomed the general who led troops into the town. He was moved to receive this kind of welcome on polish soil. We were drunk with happiness that day, having witnessed our people’s murderers in flight.

But what then? How were we to go on? What followed were days of mourning and bereavement. There were no homes left, no families. I wandered through the streets looking for familiar faces. Once a Russian soldier whispered to me: “Nye platch, dyevshka; lubimiy tvoy vernyetsa” (“Don’t cry, my girl; your lover will come back”) I did not even feel the tears streaming down my face.”

Fifth text:

Aron Zylbersac from the ghetto of Łódź, liberated in Theresiensadt

“My brother died in my arms from dysentery. Hefaded away to nothing. A man who was a giant died a skeleton. I held him in my arms when he died. There was just nothing I could do. When I think about it, I sometimes blame myself. He did so much to keep me alive. I felt that had he saved some of that energy for himself he would have had a better chance to survive. I was so low physically and mentally I felt there was just nothing to live for, and I put myself on one of the carts with the dead bodies. I must have become unconscious. It was only when they were removing the dead bodies that they discovered there was still some life left in my body. They transferred me to this hospital, and that is where I found myself when I eventually regained my consciousness.”

Sixth text:

Dov Levin from the ghetto of Kovno, liberated in August 1944 by the Russians, when he fought as a partisan in Lithuania (after his flight from the ghetto)

“After the destruction and devastation, I am back in Kovno for the first time. However, I don’t expect to find anyone, because the reports I received from friends say that no one from our family is among the living.

…There was nothing left for me to do but to see with my own eyes the ruin and the horrors, the charred bodies, and the smoking embers of the ghetto.

…It was not easy to find the place where the house of our collective had stood. There used to be a whole neighbourhood here, now heaps of rubbish and burned bricks.

I look at the ruins. Perhaps I will find something from the past. The body of wretched friend, a diary, memories, pictures… The fire has consumed it all. There is nothing. Suddenly I remembered that Chaim G., who was here this morning, told me that he had found a notebook and a sign with the number seven on it. He had hidden both items beneath a large brick.

In fact, after poking around in the smoking heap I found a piece of paper in Hebrew with all kinds of calculations on it. I recognised the handwriting of Yerachmiel and I sank into deep
thought. Suddenly I also saw the sign, with a shiny white seven on it, as though attesting to the essence of the house at “7 Mildos”.

I stood there, on the mound of ruins, for a long time. The house and all its events flashed before me. It was in this house that the scales were turned. Here my best friends had remained. Here they had perished. Here we spent nights and evenings in the bunker….

I snapped out of my fantasies. A group of German prisoners led by Russians was forced to bury the sick(the dead)- something they could be proud of…. Without thinking I took the two items with me to Vilna and they remained with me until I left the city.”

Jewish gravestones used for construction work in a wall

**Seventh text:**

**Shmuel Krakowski from the ghetto of Łódz, liberated in Theresienstadt**

“A lieutenant from Vilna told us the following:

In liberated Lublin the only Jews were the soldiers in the red and Polish armies, as well as some Jewish partisans who came out of the forest. On the long march through Poland, in the hundreds of towns and villages through which they passed, there were no more Jews. Everywhere only there were extermination sites and mass graves. Theresienstadt was the first place they had met so many Jews, thousands of Jews who had survived the Nazi rule. Thus, we learned that our fate was much worse than we had expected. Although we had seen a lot and experienced the worst, we still had hoped, still had dreamed. All those days we had struggled to survive, hour after hour, day after day, there had been no time to grasp the enormity of our tragedy. Now everything became clear. No longer were our families waiting for us; no homes to go back to. For us, the victory had come too late, much too late.”
Eight text:

Levi Shalit from the ghetto of Siauliai, liberated in the Austrian Alps in May 1945

“There were many streets in that little town at the foot of the Tyrolean Alps. How lovely everything was. How quietly dreamed the little red-tiled houses with their little green gardens. There were the outlying houses.

Four days before, the inhabitants had rushed out at us with axes and blades. Now they were invisible. Now and again one of them slunk past with a band on his arm and wearing the short, greasy leather Tyrolean pants - slunk along with stealthy steps to take his turn at guard duty at the town entrance.

How quickly they had organised themselves! Not a sign of their defeat, of their world-destroying end. In only one building, in the schoolhouse, there was hubbub. Food was being distributed to refugees. Germans who had fled from their homes and had been overtaken by the Americans. I pushed my head into the open doorway. The smell of bread and milk met my nostrils. “Please, Sir, do you want something to eat?” One of them tried this approach carefully, fawning like a dog.

The main street of the town was quiet. No one was to be seen - as if they all had died out. They kept within their houses, which bore not the lightest trace of war damage. Here and there American soldiers were on patrol. One came up to me, a short fellow with a cheeky face, little more than a child.

‘A Jew?’

‘A Jew!’ I stuttered.

Our arms intertwined and we burbled crazily.

‘A Jew, a Jew’.

Ninth text:

Zvi Kopelowicz from the ghetto of Lodz, liberated in Webelin camp in Germany

“Everyone who could walk went out of the camp. They brought back all kinds of things that they took from abandoned train cars and wherever they could. They took steel helmets and used them as pots, they cooked on bricks, they brought flour and salt, they started cooking. The camp became like a huge picnic. Everyone was cooking something. Everyone shared. Someone needed salt and someone else needed lard and another needed pork. We cooked and gave to each other, no matter if it were a gentile, a Jew, a Russian. We were like wolf and lamb living together.

I stayed in the camp. There were many like me, or even in worse condition. Red Cross vehicles arrived. They took out the dead, the half-dead. I too was collected from one of the blocks by the Red Cross. I was transferred to a military hospital.... I weighed 36 kilos. I was completely bloated. I was
given treatment, and I guess it was effective…. After about a month or more I was transferred to Sweden....”

Tenth text:

Ephraim Poremba from Poland(ghetto unknown), liberated in Allach camp in Germany in May 1945

“The Americans today gave out food such as you had never eaten in your whole life. What was it? It was pork fat with noodles. From that pork fat with noodles people began to get sick, there was already typhus, and people began to get diarrhoea, our stomachs weren’t ready for fat. People began to die in large numbers....

The Americans organised a hospital, they started doing tests, they set up tents with water and showers. We washed, they gave us soap. When did I last wash? I couldn’t remember... First of all hot water; whoever saw hot water? It was a dream. As much hot water as you want, to wash with soap, with soap! You could wash your head, your body, it was heaven, it was heaven on earth!”

Sources:

Text 1: Janina Bauman, page 332.

Text 2: Martin Gilbert, page 152.

Text 3: idem, page 152.

Text 4: idem, page 152

Text 5: idem, page 154


Text 7: idem, page 16

Text 8: Martin Gilbert, page 153

Text 9: Liberation, page 57

Text 10: Liberation, page 53

Questions:
1. Look up on the internet or in a book what other important documents from the ghetto of Warsaw have been found underground. (Look for Oneg Shabbat)

2. What is the similarity between text two and three?

3. Which paradox is there in the last paragraph of text four?

4. What was the cause of the fact that many people died just before the end of World War II? (see text 5 and 10)

5. What symbol is there behind the number of seven in text six?

6. Why was the victory of the Soviets according to text seven too late?

7. Why does Levi Shalit in the first paragraph the dreamy town so extensively? (text 8)

8. Why did everybody leave the camp in text nine?

9. Which mistakes did the liberators make in text nine and ten?

10. What was heaven on earth for Ephraim Poremba in text ten? Why?

Stones marking the place of the former ghetto of Warsaw

13. Epilogue
Very few returned from the ghettos. Most of them left their old residence to be either directly executed by Einsatzgruppen or to be transported to one of the death camps. In Poland itself, three million Jews were murdered. Of the original shtetls nothing is left, it has become a forgotten world. We only know this world through the photographs of the famous photographer Roman Vishniac, for example in his book ‘A vanished world’. Here we see an innocent generation of pupils in Yeshiva, looking in the camera, and we, the generation after them, looking at them knowing that it were these children who were forced to live in the ghettos and were transported to the places of execution or to the camps. It is a painful memory of a world that is lost, but shouldn’t be forgotten....

The voice of this almost forgotten generation is the voice we hear in these fragments of text which I choose for this booklet. Written down in beautiful small diaries or notebooks, but also on empty sheets of paper, cardboard, or even on toilet paper. Some were published during the war, some long time after this. Some of the authors are aware of the awkward situation they were in. Chaim Kaplan in the ghetto of Warsaw wrote in his last entry in his diary: “If my life ends... what will become of my diary?”. Jacob Poznanski, an engineer from the ghetto of Lodz, wrote: “Any moment now, the search will begin. If they find our hiding place, I will leave these notebooks in the dungeon. They might be our last trace. “ Even more to the point was doctor Jacob Szulman while writing: “I want to be able to record for posterity what I have seen.... I’ve been in contact with first-hand sources for a long time. I know many nuances, many details not known officially. And I deem it my duty to report them, if not in a finished, systematically researched work of history, then at least as source material for the objective historians who will come later.”

As mentioned earlier, most of the ones who left the ghettos went in the direction of Ponar or Treblinka. But a portion of the men, women and children who survived the nightmare, however few they were, were able to reach the Promised Land after 1945. They were witness of the birth of a new Jewish state in 1948. From the ghettos people came, with enormous efforts, tried to put together their lives again. Started to live again, marry, get children and put them in a world where love was stronger than hate, and where trust and hope were foundations of a new future...

14. Literature on ghetto’s in the East
1. General:

- The Yad Vashem encyclopedia of the ghettos during the Holocaust, Jerusalem, 2009.
- Vergeten stemmen van de Holocaust by Lyn Smith, Uitgeverij M, Amsterdam, 2006.
- De getto’s van Hitler by Gustave Corni, Uitgeverij Verbum, Laren, 2008.
- To bear witness, Holocaust remembered by Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2005.
- Yad Vashem Studies #35, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2007.
- Yad Vashem Studies #36, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2008.
- Years wherein we have seen evil Volume I, II, III, Yad Vashem, Judaica Press, New York, 1995.
- How was it humanly possible? by Holocaust Memorial Centre, Beth Shalom, 2002.
- ‘The good old days’, The holocaust as seen by its perpetrators and bystanders by Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen and Volker Riess, Konecky & Konecky, Old Saybrook, 1991.
- The anguish of liberation, testimonies from 1945 edited by Yehudit Kleiman and Nina Springer-Aharoni, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1995.
- Judenrat, the Jewish councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi occupation by Isaiah Trunk, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1996.

2. Bialystok ghetto:

- The Jews of Bialystok, Sarah Bender, Brandeis University Press, 2008.
3. Vilna ghetto:

- The last days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania door Herman Kruk, Yale University Press, 2002.


- Ghetto in flames, Yitzak Arad, Yad Vashem, 1980.


4. Łódź ghetto:


- In those terrible days Notes from the Łódź ghetto, Jozef Zelkowicz, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2002.

- Youth writing behind walls Avraham Cytryn’s Łódź notebooks, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2005.


- Stolen years, Sara Zyskind, Lerner Publications, Minneapolis, 1981.
5. Lvov ghetto:

6. Kovno ghetto:
- *The truth and nothing but the truth* by Alex Faitelson, Geffen Publishing House, Jerusalem, 2006.

7. Warsaw ghetto:
- *Polish-Jewish relations during the second world war* by Emmanuel Ringelblum, North Western University Press, 1992.
- *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto* by Emmanuel Ringelblum, Jacob Sloan, I-books, 2006.
- To live with honor and to die with honor edited by Joseph Kermish, Yad Vashem, 1986.
- A surplus of memory by Yitzak Zuckerman (“Antek”), University of California, 1993.
- In het getto van Warschau (dagboek) by Janusz Korczak, SWP uitgeverij, 2001.
- The Warsaw ghetto (photobook), Interpress Publishers, Warschau, without date.
- Strijd en ondergang van het getto van Warschau by Bernard Mark, West Friesland uitgeverij, 1979.
- And we are not saved by David Wdowinski, Philosophical Library, New York, 1963.
- A physician inside the Warsaw Ghetto by Mordechai Lensky, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2009.
- Emmanuel Ringelblum. The man and the historian, Edited by Israel Gutman, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2010.
- On both sides of the wall by Vladka Meed, Beit Lohamei Haghettaot, Ghetto Fighters House, 1977.
- The diary of S. Sheinkinder, in Yad Vashem Studies V, Jerusalem, 1963.
8. Cracow ghetto:
- *Justina’s Narrative* by Gusta Davidson Draenger, University of Massachusetts Press, 1996.

9. Lublin area:

10. Theresienstadt ghetto:

11. Other ghetto’s:
- Expulsion and extermination. Holocaust testimonials from provincial Lithuania, by David Bankier, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2011.
A last note

For writing the introduction for this little book for highschools I 'leaned’ heavily on the work of Gustave Corni. He has been a real pioneer in his knowledge about this part of the Holocaust history. His work is almost the only work, especially in the Netherlands, which studied life in the ghetto’s in Eastern Europe during the Second World War as a separate subject, which stands apart from the camps, etc. The choice of the texts is fully my responsibility. Some of them have been translated from Dutch, German and French. So including these, all the mistakes made are mine.

My goal is to inform young people of today about the almost secret world of the ghetto’s. The sjetl are unknown to younger people, they don’t realise that the Jewish people had a life also before and during the war. This is among other reasons why I chose mainly the diaries and writings of children in the ghetto’s in this book, so their words may inspire and teach a new generation about the lost world of Roman Vishniacs pictures!
Photographs:

- *Children of a vanished world* by Roman Vishniac, University of California, Berkeley, 1999.
- *To give them light, the legacy of Roman Vishniac*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1993.

On the internet:

- *Yad Vashem*, Yad Vashem Institute, Jerusalem, Israël.

Some films about ghetto’s and camps:

- *Łódz ghetto* 1992 by Jewish Heritage Project, Alan Adelson
- The liberation of Majdanek by Wolfgang Scheffler
- Foto Amator getto van Łodz colourslides (on video)
- Sobibor 14 Octobre 1943 16 heures (Nederlandstalig ondertiteld) by Claude Lanzmann
- Un vivant qui passe (DVD)
- Images before my eyes. A history of Jewish life in Poland before the Holocaust
- Belzec by Guillaume Moscowitz 2008
- Hitlers Holocaust EO WO II documentatie DVD 2: Getto en moordfabriek (box van 4)
- Concentratiekampen: Auschwitz, Neuengamme, Bergen-Belsen en Theresienstadt
- Defiance by Edvard Zwick, 2009
- Auschwitz by Laurence Rees, BBC