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Class # _____

INTRODUCTION TO THE HOLOCAUST

The Holocaust was the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its allies and collaborators. The Nazis came to power in Germany in January 1933. They believed that the Germans belonged to a race that was "superior" to all others. They claimed that the Jews belonged to a race that was "inferior" and a threat to the so-called German racial community.

KEY FACTS

1 By 1945, the Germans and their allies and collaborators killed nearly two out of every three European Jews as part of the "Final Solution." The "Final Solution" was the Nazi policy to murder the Jews of Europe.

2 During the era of the Holocaust, German authorities also persecuted other groups because of their perceived racial and biological inferiority. These included Roma ("Gypsies"), people with disabilities, some of the Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians, and others), Soviet prisoners of war, and blacks.

3 German authorities persecuted other groups on political, ideological, and behavioral grounds. Among them were Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals.

LEARNING TARGETS: "I WILL..."

- Learn background information on the Holocaust and the historical circumstances surrounding this true story.
- Explore the meaning of the Holocaust, both for those who lived through it, whether as victims or perpetrators, and those who live with its legacy today.
- Examine the moral choices faced by those caught up in the Holocaust and weigh our own efforts to cope with prejudice against their example.
- Bear witness to the lessons of the Holocaust through the experiences of a survivor who shared the horror and the hope of those who perished.

Introduction

The Holocaust was the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its allies and collaborators. *Holocaust* is a word of Greek origin meaning "sacrifice by fire." The Nazis, who came to power in Germany in January 1933, believed that Germans were "racially superior" and that the Jews, deemed "inferior," were an alien threat to the so-called German racial community.

During the era of the Holocaust, German authorities also targeted other groups because of their perceived racial and biological inferiority: Roma (Gypsies), people with disabilities, some of the Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians, and others), Soviet prisoners of war, and blacks. Other groups were persecuted on political, ideological, and behavioral grounds, among them Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals.

What Was the Holocaust?

Photograph of Dawid Samoszul

Close-up street portrait of Dawid Samoszul, probably taken in Piotrkow Trybunalski, Poland, between 1936 and 1938.

Dawid was killed in the Treblinka killing center at the age of 9.

- **US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Abe Samelson**
- **View Archival Details**



In 1933, the Jewish population of Europe stood at over nine million. Most European Jews lived in countries that Nazi Germany would occupy or influence during World War II. By the end of the war in 1945, the Germans and their allies and collaborators killed nearly two out of every three European Jews as part of the "Final Solution."

The Nazis considered Jews to be the inferior race that posed the deadliest menace to the German Volk. Soon after they came to power, the Nazis adopted measures to exclude Jews from German economic, social and cultural life and to pressure them to emigrate. World War II provided Nazi officials with the opportunity to pursue a comprehensive, "final solution to the Jewish question": the murder of all the Jews in Europe.

While Jews were the priority target of Nazi racism, other groups within Germany were persecuted for racial reasons, including Roma (then commonly called "Gypsies"), Afro-Germans, and people with mental or physical disabilities. By the end of the war, the Germans and their Axis partners murdered up to 250,000 Roma. And between 1939 and 1945, they murdered at least 250,000 mentally or physically disabled patients, mainly German and living in institutions, in the so-called Euthanasia Program.

As Nazi tyranny spread across Europe, the Germans and their collaborators persecuted and murdered millions of other people seen as biologically inferior or dangerous. Between two and three million Soviet prisoners of war, viewed by the Nazis as the biological "carriers" of Bolshevism, were murdered or died of starvation, disease, neglect, or brutal treatment. The Germans shot tens of thousands of non-Jewish members of the Polish intelligentsia, murdered the inhabitants of hundreds of villages in "pacification" raids in Poland and the Soviet Union, and deported millions of Polish and Soviet civilians to perform forced labor under conditions that caused many to die.

From the earliest years of the Nazi regime, German authorities persecuted homosexuals and other Germans whose behavior did not conform to prescribed social norms (such as beggars, alcoholics, and prostitutes), incarcerating thousands of them in prisons and concentration camps.

German police officials similarly persecuted thousands of Germans viewed as political opponents (including Communists, Socialists, Freemasons, and trade unionists) and religious dissidents (such as Jehovah's Witnesses). Many of these individuals died as a result of maltreatment and murder.

#1: Summarize the full text above -



Implementation of the "Final Solution"

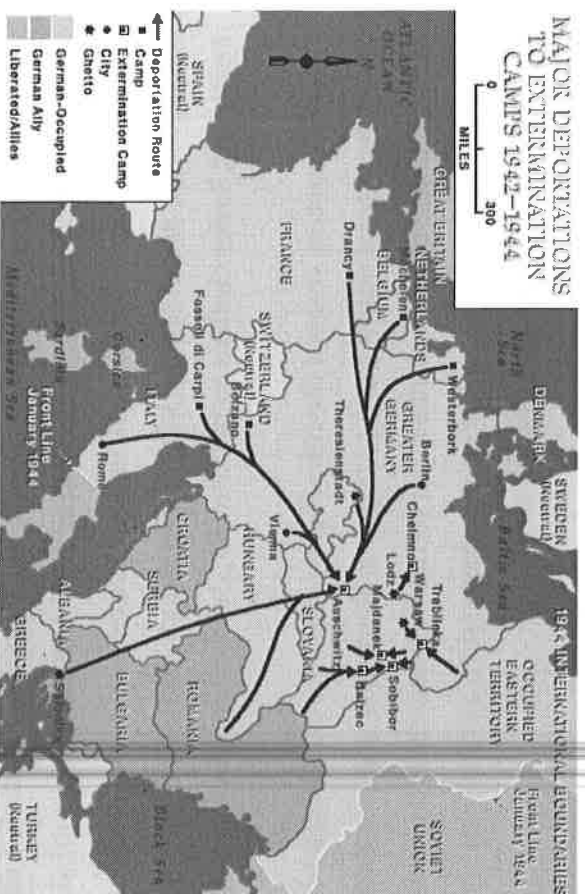
Deportation from Lublin

Scene during the deportation of Jews from Lublin. 1942.

YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York

World War II provided Nazi officials the opportunity to adopt more radical measures against the Jews under the pretext that they posed a threat to Germany. After occupying Poland, German authorities confined the Jewish population to ghettos, to which they also later deported thousands

of Jews from the Third Reich. Hundreds of thousands of Jews died from the horrendous conditions in the ghettos in Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe. Following the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Einsatzgruppen and Waffen SS units, with support from the Wehrmacht,



moved behind German lines to murder Jews, Roma, and Soviet state and Communist Party officials in mass shootings as well as in specially equipped gas vans. Mass shootings of Jews continued throughout the war, many conducted by militarized battalions of the German Order Police. These shooting operations are estimated to have claimed the lives of more than 1.5 million Jews.

In late 1941, Nazi officials opted to employ an additional method to kill Jews; one originally developed for the "Euthanasia" Program: stationary gas chambers. Between 1941 and 1944, Nazi Germany and its Allies deported nearly three million Jews from areas under their control to Nazi-occupied Poland. The vast majority were sent to killing centers, often called extermination camps, at Belzec, Chelmno, Sobibor, Treblinka, and Auschwitz-Birkenau, where they were murdered primarily by means of poison gas. Some able-bodied Jewish

Major deportations to killing centers, 1942-1944

deportees were temporarily spared to perform forced labor in ghettos, forced labor camps for Jews, or concentration camps in Nazi-occupied Poland and the Soviet Union. Most of these workers died from starvation and disease or were killed when they became too weak to work.

My mother ran over to me and grabbed me by the shoulders, and she told me "Leibele, I'm not going to see you no more. Take care of your brother."

—Leo Schneiderman describing arrival at Auschwitz, selection, and separation from his family US Holocaust Memorial Museum

At the Wannsee Conference in Berlin in January 1942, the SS (the elite guard of the Nazi state) and representatives of German government ministries estimated that the "Final Solution," the Nazi plan to kill the Jews of Europe, would involve 11 million European Jews, including those from non-occupied countries such as Ireland, Sweden, Turkey, and Great Britain. Jews from Germany and German-occupied Europe were deported by rail to the killing centers in occupied Poland, where they were killed. The Germans attempted to disguise their intentions, referring to deportations as "resettlement to the east." The victims were told they were to be taken to labor camps, but in reality, from 1942 onward, deportation for most Jews meant transit to killing centers and then death.

#2: Summarize the full text above:

The End of the Holocaust

In the final months of the war, SS guards moved camp inmates by train or on forced marches, often called "death marches," in an attempt to prevent the Allied liberation of large numbers of prisoners. As Allied forces moved across Europe in a series of offensives against Germany,

they began to encounter and liberate concentration camp prisoners, as well as prisoners en route by forced march from one camp to another. The marches continued until May 7, 1945, the day the German armed forces surrendered unconditionally to the Allies.

A child waiting to leave the Deggendorf displaced persons camp

A young child sits among luggage while waiting to depart the Deggendorf displaced persons camp.

Deggendorf, Germany, 1945-46.

US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Marion House



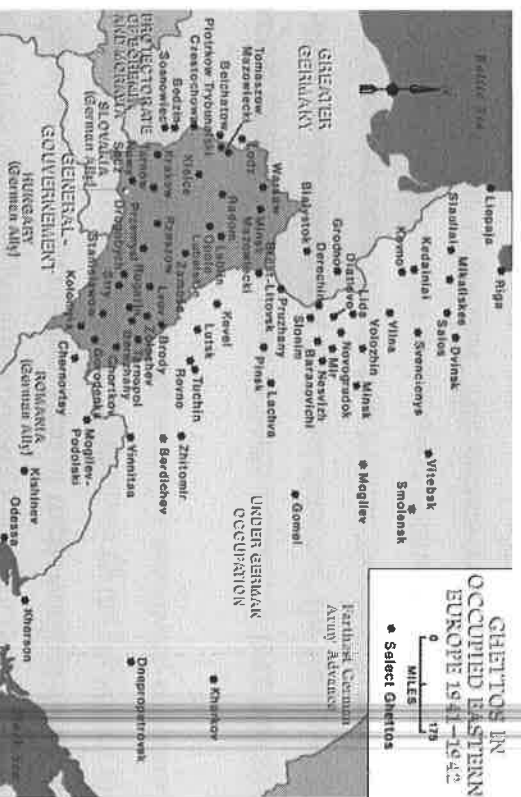
For the Western Allies, World War II officially ended in Europe on the next day, May 8 (V-E Day), while Soviet forces announced their “Victory Day” on May 9, 1945.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, more than 250,000 survivors found shelter in displaced persons camps run by the Allied powers and the United Nations Refugee and Rehabilitation Administration in Germany, Austria, and Italy. Between 1948 and 1951, 136,000 Jewish displaced persons immigrated to Israel, while others resettled in the United States and other nations outside Europe. Other Jewish displaced persons emigrated to the United States and other nations. The last camp for Jewish displaced persons closed in 1957.

The crimes committed during the Holocaust devastated most European Jewish communities and eliminated hundreds of Jewish communities in occupied eastern Europe entirely.

#3: Summarize the full text above:

Last Edited: Mar 12, 2018 Author(s): United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC



Origin of the Term “Ghetto”

The term “ghetto” originated from the name of the Jewish quarter in Venice, Italy. Venetian authorities compelled the city’s Jews to live in the quarter, which was established in 1516. In the 16th and 17th centuries, officials ranging from local authorities to the Austrian emperor ordered the creation of ghettos for Jews in Frankfurt, Rome, Prague, and other cities.

Ghettos in occupied eastern Europe, 1941-1942 – US Holocaust Memorial Museum

Ghettos during World War II

During World War II, the SS and other German occupation authorities concentrated urban and sometimes regional Jewish populations in ghettos. Living conditions were miserable. Ghettos were often enclosed districts that isolated Jews by separating Jewish communities from the non-Jewish population and from other Jewish communities.

The Germans established at least 1,143 ghettos in the occupied eastern territories.

There were three types of ghettos:

- closed ghettos
- open ghettos
- destruction ghettos

German occupation authorities established the first ghetto in Poland in Piotrków Trybunalski in October 1939. The largest ghetto in Poland was the Warsaw ghetto. In Warsaw, more than 400,000 Jews were crowded into an area of 1.3 square miles. Other major ghettos were established in the cities of Lodz, Krakow, Bialystok, Lvov, Lublin, Vilna, Kovno, Czestochowa, and Minsk. Tens of thousands of western European Jews were also deported to ghettos in the east.

The Germans ordered Jews in the ghettos to wear identifying badges or armbands. They also required many Jews to carry out forced labor for the German Reich. Nazi-appointed Jewish councils (Judenraete) administered daily life in the ghettos. A ghetto police force enforced the orders of the German authorities and the ordinances of the Jewish councils. This included facilitating deportations to killing centers. Jewish police officials, like Jewish council members, served at the whim of the German authorities. The Germans did not hesitate to kill those Jewish policemen who were perceived to have failed to carry out orders.

#4: Summarize the full text above:

Ghettos and the "Final Solution"

In many places ghettoization lasted a short time. Some ghettos existed for only a few days. Others lasted for months or years. The Germans saw the ghettos as a provisional measure to control and segregate Jews while the Nazi leadership in Berlin deliberated upon options for the removal of the Jewish population.

Moving into the Krakow ghetto

The German army occupied Krakow, Poland, in September 1939. In March 1941, the Germans ordered the establishment of a ghetto in Krakow. In this footage, Polish Jews are forced to move into the Krakow ghetto. They wear the required armbands, used to distinguish the Jewish population from the rest of the city's residents. By late 1941, there were some 18,000 Jews imprisoned in the Krakow ghetto.

With the implementation of the "Final Solution" (the plan to murder all European Jews) beginning in late 1941, the Germans systematically destroyed the ghettos. The Germans and their auxiliaries either shot ghetto residents in mass graves located nearby or deported them. Jews were deported to killing centers. German SS and police authorities also deported a small minority of Jews from ghettos to forced-labor camps and concentration camps. In August 1944, German SS and police completed the destruction of the last major ghetto, in Lodz.

Blanka Rothschild describes deportations from the Lodz ghetto

Blanka was an only child in a close-knit family in Lodz, Poland. Her father died in 1937. After the German invasion of Poland, Blanka and her mother remained in Lodz with Blanka's grandmother, who was unable to travel. Along with other relatives, they were forced into the Lodz ghetto in 1940. There, Blanka worked in a bakery. She and her mother later worked in a hospital in the Lodz ghetto, where they remained until late 1944 when they were deported to the Ravensbrueck camp in Germany. From Ravensbrueck, Blanka and her mother were sent to a subcamp of Sachsenhausen.

Blanka was forced to work in an airplane factory (Arado-Werke). Her mother was sent to another camp. Soviet forces liberated Blanka in spring 1945. Blanka, living in abandoned houses, made her way back to Lodz. She discovered that none of her relatives, including her mother, had survived. Blanka then moved westward to Berlin, eventually to a displaced persons camp. She immigrated to the United States in 1947. - US Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection

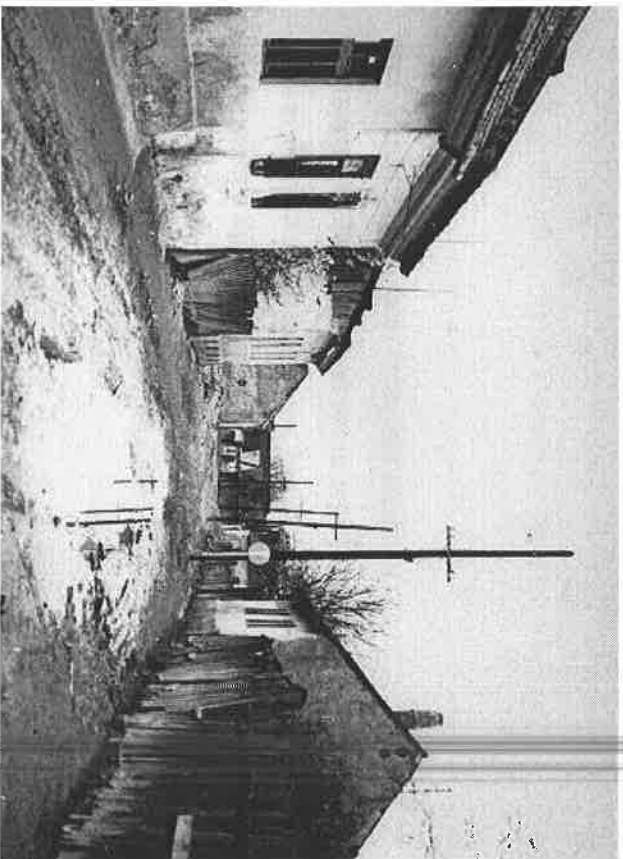
#5: Summarize the full text above:

Resistance Efforts

Jews responded with a variety of resistance efforts. Ghetto residents frequently smuggled food, medicine, weapons, or intelligence across the ghetto walls. These and other such activities often took place without the knowledge or approval of the Jewish councils. On the other hand, some Jewish councils and some individual council members tolerated or encouraged the smuggling because the goods were necessary to keep ghetto residents alive.

Charlene Schiff describes children smuggling food into the Horochow ghetto

Both of Charlene's parents were local Jewish community leaders, and the family was active in community life. Charlene's father was a professor of philosophy at the State University of Lvov. World War II began with the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. Charlene's town was in the part of eastern Poland occupied by the Soviet Union under the German-Soviet Pact of August 1939. Under the Soviet occupation, the family remained in its home and Charlene's father continued to teach. The Germans invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, and arrested Charlene's father after they occupied the town. She never saw him again. Charlene, her mother, and sister were forced into a ghetto the Germans established in Horochow. In 1942, Charlene and her mother fled from the ghetto after hearing rumors that the Germans were about to destroy it. Her sister attempted to hide separately, but was never heard from again. Charlene and her mother hid in underbrush at the river's edge, and avoided discovery by submerging themselves in the water for part of the time. They hid for several days. One day, Charlene awoke to find that her mother had disappeared. Charlene survived by herself in the forests near Horochow, and was liberated by Soviet troops. She eventually immigrated to the United States. US Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection



Deserted street in Sighet Marmatiei

A deserted street in the area of the Sighet Marmatiei ghetto. This photograph was taken after the deportation of the ghetto population. Sighet Marmatiei, Hungary, May 1944. US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Albert Rosenthal

"The Germans generally showed little concern in principle about religious worship, attendance at cultural events, or participation in youth movements inside the ghetto walls. However, they often saw a "security threat" in any social gathering and would move ruthlessly to incarcerate or kill perceived ringleaders and participants. The Germans generally forbade any form of consistent schooling or education.

In the very beginning, my mother and several other women organized a clandestine school for children who were below the age of work, and it was a wonderful thing because we had something to look forward to" —Charlene Schiff

In some ghettos, members of Jewish resistance movements staged armed uprisings. The largest of these was the Warsaw ghetto uprising in spring 1943. There were also violent revolts in Vilna, Bialystok, Czestochowa, and several smaller ghettos.

#6: Summarize the full text above:

Ghettos in Hungary

In Hungary, ghettoization did not begin until the spring of 1944 after the German invasion and occupation. In less than three months, the Hungarian gendarmerie, coordinating with German deportation experts from the Reich Main Office for Security, concentrated nearly 440,000 Jews from all over Hungary except for the capital city, Budapest. They forced the Jews into short-term "destruction ghettos" and then deported them into German custody at the Hungarian border. The Germans deported most of the Hungarian Jews to the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center.

In Budapest, Hungarian authorities required Jews to confine themselves to marked houses (so-called Star of David houses). On October 15, 1944, leaders of the fascist Arrow Cross movement seized power in a German-sponsored coup. A few weeks later, the Arrow Cross government formally established a ghetto in Budapest. About 63,000 Jews lived in this 0.1 square mile area. Approximately 25,000 Jews who carried certificates indicating they were under the protection of a neutral power were confined in an "international ghetto" in the city. In January 1945, Soviet forces liberated that part of Budapest in which the two ghettos were located and liberated the nearly 90,000 Jewish residents.

#7: Summarize the section above:

Last Edited: Dec 4, 2019

Author(s): United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC

THE PIANIST is based on the true story of **Wladyslaw Szpilman**, an acclaimed pianist and a Polish Jew, who survived the Holocaust in Warsaw through an extraordinary combination of faith, courage, luck, and the will to live. The film recreates Szpilman's experiences with meticulous historical accuracy, from the moment when his live radio performance was broken off by a Nazi air raid to his triumphant return to the airwaves and the concert stage at the war's end. Along the way we follow Szpilman and his family into the Warsaw Ghetto, and watch as he is plucked from the line that took the rest of his family to the Treblinka death camp. We see him risk death with other Jewish resistance fighters as they plan the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, then join him in the lonely hiding places where, for more than two years, with the help of non-Jewish protectors, he evaded capture while the city of Warsaw collapsed around him. And we witness his astonishing encounter with a Nazi officer who listened to the music Szpilman held within him and helped him survive the war's final days.

The Pianist Character List

Wladyslaw Szpilman is a renowned Polish pianist whose career and life gets completely interrupted and upturned by the Nazi invasion of Warsaw. He watches as the German regime takes over the city and dehumanizes his people, separating him from his family and forcing him into hiding. Throughout the film, he must endure horrible atrocities and conditions until he is finally saved by the Allied forces. He is a formidable and brave survivor, driven to make a life for himself, but often afraid for his life. Szpilman's main passion in life is playing the piano, and even when he does not have access to one, he imagines that he has the keys in front of him.

Mr. Szpilman is the patriarch of the Szpilman family. He stops the family from packing to leave the city after the initial German bombings, which leads them to lose everything. He is a brave man who meets a tragic fate when he is sent away to the death camps.

Henryk is Wladyslaw Szpilman's brother, a free-thinking and passionate radical. Unlike Wladyslaw, Henryk is not a pacifist, and intends to find ways to fight the Germans. While he and his brother do not get along, they work hard trying to protect one another from harm.

Halina is the youngest Szpilman child. She is taken away by the Nazis to the death camps. Before she gets sent away, Wladyslaw tells her that he wishes he knew her better.

Regina is the eldest sister and a lawyer in the Szpilman family. She is someone who desires order and for the family to think through things logically and realistically.

Captain Wilh Hosenfeld is a German officer who finds Szpilman hiding in a bombed-out home in the Warsaw ghetto. After hearing Szpilman play the piano he helps to hide him, brings him food, and gives the pianist his coat before leaving. He is eventually caught by the Allies and dies while a prisoner of the Soviet Army.

Dorota is a cellist with whom Szpilman becomes acquainted before he gets sent to the ghetto. They have a mutual admiration for one another and perhaps a romantic affiliation, but they are not able to pursue this, as they are separated by the Nazis. When Szpilman escapes from the ghetto, he coincidentally ends up at Dorota's house, and she and her husband (Michal) help him hide out from the Germans.

Majorek is a friend who helps Szpilman to obtain employment papers for his aging father, and then helps him escape from the ghetto.

8 STAGES OF GENOCIDE

as described by Gregory H. Stanton, President of Genocide Watch



CLASSIFICATION

Distinguishing people into "us and them" by ethnicity, race, religion, or nationality; German & Jew, Hutu & Tutsi.



SYMBOLIZATION

Giving names or symbols to the classifications. Distinguishing people by colors or dress and applying symbols to group members.



DEHUMANIZATION

Denying the humanity of the other group. Members are equated with animals, vermin, insects or diseases.



ORGANIZATION

Organizing plans for genocide—usually by the state—often using militias to provide deniability of state responsibility.



POLARIZATION

Hate groups; broadcast polarizing propaganda. Laws may forbid intermarriage or social interaction.



PREPARATION

Separating victims because of ethnic or religious identity. Death lists are drawn up; property is expropriated.



EXTERMINATION

The mass killing legally called "genocide." It is "extermination" to the killers because they do not believe their victims to be fully human.



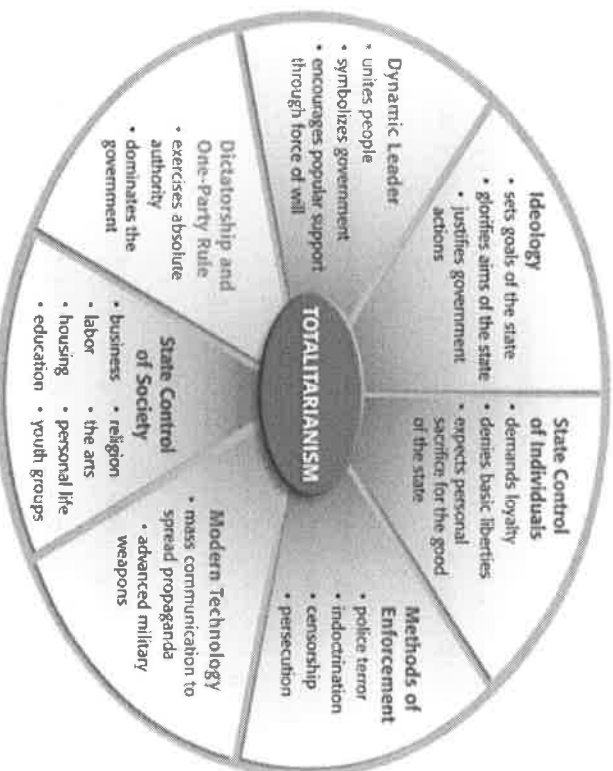
DENIAL

Deny committing any crimes, often blaming what happened on the victims, covering up evidence & intimidating witnesses.

"The process is not linear. Logically, later stages must be preceded by earlier stages. But all stages continue to operate throughout the process."

Movie Notes:

Key Traits of Totalitarianism



More notes, because I have so many deep thoughts...

CLIMAX

PLOT

TITLE: _____

AUTHOR: _____

RISING ACTION

(List examples that create complications or suspense)

FALLING ACTION

CONFLICT

EXPOSITION

Setting:

Situation/climate:

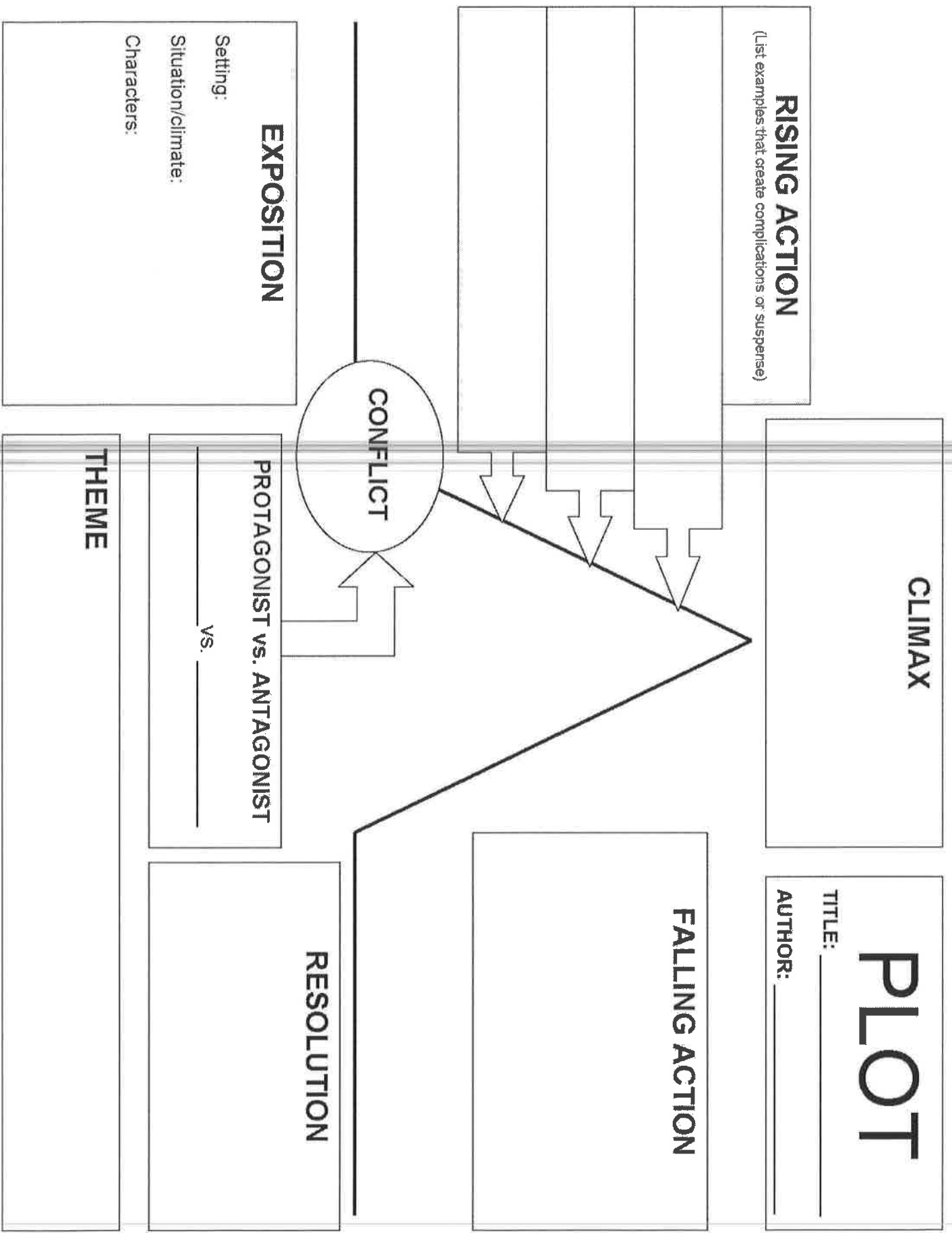
Characters:

PROTAGONIST vs. ANTAGONIST

vs. _____

RESOLUTION

THEME



Scenarios & Discussion Questions

Adapted From <http://ymiclassroom.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/ThePianist.pdf>

Part One Scenarios:

A. An Instinct for Survival - How did Szpilman survive? How did Szpilman survive? From the first moments of THE PIANIST, when he attempts to keep playing for Warsaw's radio listeners in the midst of a Nazi air raid, we see that Szpilman has an unusual capacity to withstand the shock of catastrophe. And in the months that follow, as catastrophes mount and Warsaw's Jews are eventually confined in a walled Ghetto, this survivor's instinct repeatedly sets him apart. Use the episodes described here to explore Szpilman's reactions to the destructive forces gathering around him by comparing his behavior in these situations with that of his sympathetic non-Jewish friend Dorota on the one hand, and his cynical brother Henryk on the other. What guides Szpilman's response in these moments of crisis?

1. When Szpilman finds that Jews are forbidden in the restaurant where he planned to take Dorota for a date, he apologizes for the inconvenience. She denounces the Nazis' anti-Jewish laws and suggests that they confront the restaurant manager.
2. When the Jewish policeman, Itzak Heller, offers Szpilman and his brother jobs with the police force so they can afford to feed their family Henryk mocks and reviles him, while Szpilman answers that he already has a job playing piano at a cafe in the Ghetto.
3. When Szpilman learns that his brother has been taken for deportation to a forced labor camp, he begs Itzak Heller for help, but when Henryk learns what he has done, he accuses Szpilman of groveling to the hated Nazi collaborator and warns him not to interfere in other people's business.

B. Prejudice: Few of us ever confront prejudice as vicious as that which fueled the Holocaust, but we can find ourselves in situations that challenge our belief in social equality and seem to require a response. Consider the situations described below. Discuss in class how you would respond to each situation and what impact you think your actions might have. Then imagine how a person with Szpilman's temperament might respond to each situation and how the situation might play out.

1. At a party, one of your friends is jeered for their sexual orientation.
2. You are invited to join a prestigious fraternity that has never admitted a specific racial group.
3. You see a friend arguing with a group of students, who are of a different race, say she is sitting at their table in the lunchroom.
4. While you're watching news from the Middle East, you hear a friend say that the world would be a safer place if all Muslims were eliminated.



b. Szpliman's father collects the family's last pennies to buy a piece of candy, which he carefully divides into six pieces so they all can have a share.

c. On his way to the rail car, Szpliman is pulled out of line by the Jewish policeman, Itzak Heller, who tells him, "I've saved your life! Go!" With one last anguished look back at his family, Szpliman reluctantly slips away.

II. Taking Action

Warsaw was also the site of the most effective attempt by Jews to strike back at the forces of the Holocaust, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, in which a few hundred Jewish fighters, armed mainly with pistols and homemade grenades, defended the Ghetto against Nazi tanks and artillery for nearly a month.

In THE PLANIST, Szpliman takes an active part in smuggling arms for this planned uprising, but he does not take part in the fighting itself. Instead, having glimpsed an old acquaintance on one of his work assignments outside the Ghetto, he sought shelter with non-Jewish friends and escaped into hiding. When the uprising occurs, Szpliman can only watch from his hiding place as the Nazis shell the Ghetto to rubble and execute his former comrades. Szpliman says, but then, considering the outcome, asks, "What good did it do?"

How would you answer this question? What is the good of armed resistance if it ends in failure? Share your opinions in a class discussion, then compare the good you see in the uprising with the good Szpliman achieved through his escape. To what extent could his decision to leave the Ghetto be regarded as an act of resistance too?



In Roman Polanski's THE PLANIST, when the Nazis begin emptying the Warsaw Ghetto, herding Jews to the Umschlagplatz rallyard for deportation to the death camp at Treblinka, one of the old men speaking with Szpliman's father asks:

Why don't we attack the Nazis? There's half a million of us here, we could break out of the Ghetto. At least we could die honorably, not as a stain on the face of history.

Coming nearly three years after the Nazis had seized control of Warsaw, and on the brink of annihilation, the old man's question may seem too late, but in fact it is a question that still haunts historians of the Holocaust today. Why didn't more Jews fight back? Why did so many seemingly comply with every Nazi demand, even marching dutifully to their own destruction?

I. Passive Heroism

One answer to these questions comes from the Warsaw Ghetto itself, in the writings of Emanuel Ringelblum, who chronicled events there until he was himself executed in 1944:

In no place did Jews resist the slaughter. They went passively to death...so that the remnants of the people would be left to live, because every Jew knew that lifting a hand against a German would endanger his brothers from a different town or maybe from a different country....Not to act, not to lift a hand against Germans, has...become the quiet, passive heroism of the common Jew.

Another, related answer is provided by Elie Wiesel, a survivor of the Auschwitz death camp. "In those times," he has said, "one climbed to the summit of humanity simply by remaining human." Resisting hate, resisting the impulse to attack, was to resist the inhuman forces of the Holocaust itself and preserve the bonds of human nature – hope and compassion in this light the actions of Szpliman and his family on that terrible day when they were herded to the rallyard for deportation to Treblinka. To what extent could each of the episodes described here be regarded as an act of resistance?

a. Szpliman's siblings, who had been selected to remain in the Ghetto, rejoin the family, saying they could not bear to be separated, a decision Szpliman calls "stupid."

THE HOLOCAUST

1941

June – Nazis break non-

aggression pact and invade Soviet Russia. Killing squads, called

Einatzgruppen, follow the advance, executing Jews in

Nazi control. By the end of

October, 250,000 have

been murdered.

Oct – Nazis construct death

camps in Poland at

Auschwitz, Chelmno,

Belzec, Sobibor, Majdanek,

and Treblinka for the mass

execution of Jews, Gypsies,

and other "undesirables."

Dec – Japanese attack on

Pearl Harbor draws U.S.

into the war.

1942

Jan – Wannsee Conference

launches the Nazis' "Final

Solution to the Jewish

Question" – a secret plan

to systematically extermi-

nate all European Jews.

Nazis begin transporting

Jews from all occupied

territories to the death

camps in Poland.

July – Warsaw's Jews are

transported by cattle car to

the Treblinka death camp.

By September more than

300,000 are gassed. Only

those considered still fit for

forced labor or able to find

a safe hiding place avoid

extermination.

1943

Apr – Warsaw Ghetto

Uprising begins when Nazis

arrive to deport the Jews

still living there. Jewish

fighters hold out against

shelling and fire bombs

until late May, when all but

a handful are finally

captured and executed. In

September, the Ghetto is

demonished. Similar

uprisings occur in other

Polish Ghettos and even in

some death camps, but all



II. Remembrance

This scene reminds us that THE PIANIST is itself the work of a great artist who, like Wladyslaw Szpilman, survived the Holocaust in Poland. Roman Polanski was barely seven years old when the Nazis invaded his homeland. Like Szpilman, he lived through the bombing of Warsaw, then went to the Cracow Ghetto, where he escaped the death camps by squeezing through a barbed-wire fence and hiding through the war years with a non-Jewish family.

Polanski has drawn on his own childhood memories of those terrible times, as well as historical archives, to present an authentic picture of the Holocaust in THE PIANIST – not a documentary but a work of art that brings past experience back to life.

Read the note from Roman Polanski reprinted here, and after you have seen the film, use the back of this sheet to write a note or journal entry telling him what you gained by looking through this window into an unimaginable experience. What moments brought insight into the human significance of the Holocaust? What episodes helped bring you into the community of those who carry the responsibility to never forget?

Szpilman's incredible story comes to an end when he is discovered in his final hiding place by a Nazi officer, Captain Wilam Hosenfeld, who is scouting the abandoned house as a site for his headquarters. Unlike every other Nazi Szpilman has encountered, Hosenfeld does not shout out demands. "Who are you?" he asks, "What's your work?" When Szpilman finally answers that he is a pianist, Hosenfeld leads him to a piano in a nearby room and asks him to play.

Though near starvation, dressed in rags, and more than two years out of practice, Szpilman sits at the piano and performs Chopin's Ballad No. 1 in G Minor (Op. 23), a work by Poland's most revered composer that listeners have long interpreted as an expression of Poland's unrelenting quest for freedom. The performance transforms Szpilman, who regains the posture and poise of a great musician as he plays, and transforms him in Hosenfeld's eyes. Although he recognizes Szpilman as a Jew, Hosenfeld allows him to continue hiding in the house and even brings him food.

I. Reflection

What do you imagine Hosenfeld saw in Szpilman that caused him to defy official Nazi policy and show sympathy for the desperate man before him? Even more difficult to imagine, what could Szpilman have seen in Hosenfeld that would allow him to trust his life to a representative of the forces that had sought to destroy him for more than five years? Discuss this episode in class, exploring the part music plays in bringing these two one-time enemies together as survivors of the worst that hate can do, both to those who feel it and to those who suffer its effects.

As soon as I read the first chapter of Wladyslaw Szpilman's memoirs, I instantly knew that *The Pianist* would be the subject of my next film. I knew after the war – perhaps that's why the story is so strong, so genuine, and so fresh. He describes the reality of this period with surprising – almost cool and scientific – objectivity. There are decent Poles and evil Poles in his book, decent and evil Jews, decent and evil Germans.

THE PIANIST is a testimony to the power of music, the will to live, and the courage to stand against evil.

I survived the bombing of Warsaw and the Cracow Ghetto, and I wanted to recreate those childhood visions. It was also important for me to stick as close to the truth as possible and avoid Hollywood-style make-believe. I have never done, and don't intend to do, anything autobiographical, but in making *THE PIANIST* I could use the experiences I went through.

A Note from Roman Polanski



I always knew that one day I would make a film about this painful chapter in Polish history, but I did not want it to be based on my own life.

HOLOCAUST READINGS

Roselle Charlock and Jack

Spencer, eds., *Can It*

Happen Again? Chronicles

of the Holocaust (1995).

Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War*

Against the Jews, 1933-

1945 (1975).

Helen Fein, *Accounting for*

Survivors – of the

Genocide Victims – and

Holocaust (1982).

Anne Frank, *The Diary of a*

Young Girl (1952).

Viktor Frankel, *Man's Search*

for Meaning (1959).

Martin Gilbert, *The*

Holocaust: A History of the

Jews of Europe During the

Second World War (1985).

Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah: An*

Oral History of the

Holocaust (1985).

Emanuel Ringelblum, *Notes*

from the Warsaw Ghetto

(1958).

Wladyslaw Szpilman, *The*

Pianist: The Extraordinary

True Story of One Man's

Survival in Warsaw, 1939-

1945 (2000).

Elie Wiesel, *Night* (1960).

HOLOCAUST WEB SITES

United States Holocaust

Memorial Museum

www.uslm.org

Facing History and Ourselves

www.facing.org

Simon Wiesenthal Center

www.wiesenthal.com

Yad Vashem: The Holocaust

Martyrs' and Heroes'

Remembrance Authority

www.yadvashem.org

Life in Hiding



d. From his window, Szpliman watches as Polish resistance fighters launch their attack against the Nazis, forcing them to retreat, then sees the Nazis regroup and retake the neighborhood, gunning down the resistance fighters and leaving their bodies in the street.

e. When the Nazis shell his hiding place, Szpliman barely escapes to a nearby abandoned hospital by hiding among the dead bodies still strewn on the street.

1. The Search for Meaning

Though cut off from his old life when he entered the Warsaw Ghetto, Szpliman was still surrounded by his family, and even when he lost them, he found comrades in the resistance. Once he escapes the Ghetto, however, Szpliman is almost totally alone. To survive now he must somehow endure the fear and suffering on his own.

During his more than two years in hiding, Szpliman passes the days waiting for one of his protectors to bring him food, careful not to make any noise that would betray his presence. When a protector is late in coming, he starves rather than risk going out into the street. What did Szpliman think about over those long months of isolation? What gave purpose to his existence and sustained his will to survive?

To explore these questions, imagine that Szpliman kept a diary during his life in hiding. For each of the episodes described below, write a diary entry that reflects what you think Szpliman felt at the time and what meaning the episode may have held in his life.

a. Forced to flee his first hiding place, Szpliman goes to the emergency address he was given and finds Dorota, the non-Jewish woman with whom he once hoped to develop a relationship, now married to a member of the anti-Nazi underground. She and her husband agree to find him a new hiding place.

b. Drawn to the piano in his new hiding place, Szpliman sits and moves his fingers above the keyboard so as not to make a sound.

c. Placed in the care of an irresponsible protector, Szpliman almost starves to death, but he is rescued when Dorota and her husband come to say good-bye on their way to a safe haven in the country.

On the back of this sheet, describe a present-day situation, real or imaginary, where you could be the one person who makes a real difference in someone's life. It might be a situation that involves having the courage to resist peer pressure and respect someone victimized by stereotyping. Or it could be a situation that requires only the courage to reach out to someone whom most people treat as a non-person or simply ignore. Turn your situation into a story or news report in which you, or someone like you, shows the courage to care.



THE HOLOCAUST

1944
Jan - Soviets force a Nazi retreat at Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) and begin advancing on Nazi territory.

May - Nazi's begin deporting Hungarian Jews to Poland's death camps, the last national group slated for destruction.

June - D-Day invasion at Normandy, U.S. and British forces prepare to advance on Nazi territory.

July - Soviet troops liberate Majdanek death camp.

Aug - Warsaw Uprising; Polish fighters, Jewish and non-Jewish, hoping for support from nearby Soviet troops, fail to drive Nazis from Warsaw when the Soviets hold their positions.

1945
Jan - Soviets occupy Warsaw, where it is estimated that only 20 Jews still survive.

Jan - Forced to retreat from Poland, Nazis organize death marches to evacuate Jews still held in death and work camps.

Apr - Adolf Hitler commits suicide after issuing a final directive: "Above all I charge the leaders of the nation...to merciless opposition to the universal poisoner of all peoples, international Jewry."

May - Germany surrenders.

Aug - U.S. drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Sept - Japan surrenders.