

ART AS A TOOL FOR SURVIVAL



Exploring
art
during the
Holocaust.



Art as a Tool for Survival

The following curriculum has been compiled to assist educators faced with the challenge of teaching the Holocaust and genocide in their classrooms. Lessons of this nature can fall into various aspects of a school's curriculum. The lessons presented at this workshop are designed with the flexibility to complement a History, English, Social Studies, Music or Art class. This lesson is not to be used as a standalone unit. The class must have had at least a few days of general Holocaust education prior to the use of this lesson.

Art as a Tool for Survival has been created with the intention of introducing visual and oral mediums of the Holocaust. This curriculum might supplement or provide additional engagement tools to your current Holocaust curriculum. *Art as a Tool for Survival* strives to exercise the imagination and teach empathy to your students.

The JFCS Holocaust Center designs lessons targeted for high school students. The Holocaust is a very sensitive and emotional subject and exposing children to the horrors of Nazi Europe too young could be devastating. As teachers ourselves, we recommend to take caution when working with children younger than high school age.

The following curriculum includes sources from the current exhibit at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco which adds a unique and exciting resource for your classroom. Each lesson has complementary resources, which can be checked out by appointment from the JFCS Holocaust Center. Included with the curriculum is a glossary and chronology for the events presented.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with questions or comments.

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Charlotte Salomon's "Life? Or Theatre?" ART and art-making as a tool for survival.

*"The war raged on and I sat by the sea and saw deep into the heart of humankind."
Charlotte Salomon, 1942*

Goals of the Lesson:

1. To show how the process of creating art can serve as a tool of psychological sustenance.
2. To use art as a window into Jewish life before and during World War II.
3. To learn features of German-Jewish life in the 30's and 40's including the Kulturbund, places of exile and specifically how the enactment of the Nuremberg laws affected individual lives such as Charlotte Salomon.

Segment #1: Getting to know artist Charlotte Salomon.

"She passed the last year painting her life in more than seven hundred scenes. Day after day as the war raged on, she kept painting the life she'd rescued from Nazi Germany. She had built her skills at age nineteen in the Berlin Art Academy, where she was almost the sole Jewish student allowed under Nazi rule. Before that, she had seemed so lacking in promise, so indistinct, that one friend of hers said she had no qualities at all. As early as age eight, when her mother died, solitude had taken hold of her. Still alone in 1941, she took up her paintbrush and worked her way back to the dark of an earlier was – to 1917 when she was born.

What came out of her memory was a line of ordeals. She'd gone through girlhood in a house of suicides. She'd done her schooling in a fascist state. She'd spent her fruitful years in exile. All this pressed so hard on her that these words came out in paint, 'If I can't find any joy in my life and in my work I am going to kill myself.'¹

Activity #1: The Art of Charlotte Salomon

Create a gallery (using color copies) of 5 – 15 of Charlotte's paintings. (You can find 7 of them in the back of this curriculum.) Hang them up in your classroom. Give students 10-20 minutes to just wander the room, looking at the paintings. Use the images as the starting point for the activities above or to start a larger lesson about the Holocaust. Read the quote above with your students to flesh out the picture of Charlotte's life. (More images can also be found in: Salomon, Charlotte. "Life? Or Theatre?" Publisher: B.V. Waanders Uitgeverij. Copyright: May 1999.)

Discussion Questions:

1. What historical events did Charlotte choose to paint? Why do you think she made those choices?
2. What personal events did Charlotte choose to paint? Why?
3. What themes emerge as important to Charlotte?
4. What can you learn about German-Jewish life before World War II by looking at her paintings? What about life during the war?

¹ Mary Lowenthal Felstiner, *To Paint Her Life : Charlotte Salomon in the Nazi Era* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1997), prologue ix.

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Segment #2:

KULTURBUND - Influences on Charlotte Salomon & Jewish Life in 1930's Berlin

Overall learning question: How did the existence of the Kulturbund help the lives of Jews living in Berlin in the 1930's?

1. Have students read over the following readings – either individually or in groups.
2. Do the writing exercise below.
3. Discuss the overall learning question for this section as a class. Could follow-up with another writing exercise.

Reading 1:

Kulturbund: “The Judischer Kulturbund or Jewish Culture Association began in January, 1933 in the wake of the Nazis coming to power. Jews were kicked out of German artistic ensembles, out of opera companies, orchestras, and theater companies. Some of those Jews came together in the spring of 1933 to form their own organization-- Jews making art for the increasingly disenfranchised Jews of Germany. Hans Hinkel was their official Nazi liaison. For the next eight years, the Kulturbund put on plays, operas, orchestra concerts, and chamber concerts. They showed films, they sponsored lectures, published a newspaper-- all, again, Jews making art for their fellow Jews. It became the only outlet for Jewish expression... it was the only possibility that Jews had to experience art, to have any kind of cultural enrichment during these very difficult years.”²

Under the charge of Kurt Singer, former director of the Berlin City Opera (prior to 1933), seventy thousand Jews joined thirty-six Kulturbund branches in forty-nine locales, with twenty thousand members and a spacious theater in Berlin alone. By 1938 seventeen hundred employees around the country were staging up to fifty events each week including nineteen different operas.³

The Kulturbund was a “cultural island of relief from the pressure and misery of life”⁴

Kulturbund gives to Lotte, “access to the only art and music a Jew could take at ease.” Musical themes, operas. “Above all, the Kulturbund taught her to use art as a source of morale, a proof of viability, a means of self-expression where no other is allowed.”⁵

Exercise out of this information: Share with the students that Charlotte’s stepmother, Paula Lindberg-Salomon was an opera singer who often participated in the Kulturbund productions. Have students write a journal entry (as Charlotte) describing a night at the opera where her stepmother performed. What did people wear? What did the sets look like? Was there a full orchestra? How many people attended?

² http://www.pbs.org/newshour/conversation/july-dec00/goldsmith_11-21.html

³ Felstiner, *To Paint Her Life : Charlotte Salomon in the Nazi Era*, 67.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 72.

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Segment #3: The Micro into the Macro - How did Nazi laws and practices affect the lives of its Jewish citizens?

Timeline exercise. Use the timeline below to answer the following questions:

1. When did Charlotte leave school? What reasons do you think she might have had for leaving school? What reasons might have existed that came from governmental changes?
2. Charlotte was virtually the only Jewish person in her Art School. The allowed ratio of Jews for the entire school was only 1.5%. Use the timeline to determine what kind of rules might have been created to make this rule.
3. According to the timeline, what other artistic influences might have made an impact (positive or negative) on her during her time at art school?
4. From the timeline, what do you think was the biggest influence on Charlotte deciding to start creating “Life? Or Theater?”

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Charlotte Salomon's Life – a brief timeline.	Germany & German-Jewish life
*1913: Franziska's sister, Charlotte Grunwald, commits suicide by drowning.	
April 16, 1917: Charlotte is born to Dr. Albert & Franziska Salomon in Berlin, Germany	1917: End of World War I
Feb., 1926: Charlotte's mother commits suicide	
1930: Charlotte's father, Dr. Albert Salomon, marries Paula Lindberg, an opera singer.	
Sept. 1933: Charlotte leaves Furstin Bismarck School	Jan. 1933: Nazis power in Germany Formation of Jewish Kulturbund
Winter 1936: Charlotte granted admission to State Art Academy of Berlin (Note: Jewish admission ratio=1.5%)	1935: Nuremberg Laws
Summer 1938: Charlotte's enrollment at Art School is annulled	Spring 1938: Nazi exhibit of "Degenerate Art" in Berlin, displaying over 650 confiscated works of Expressionist art. Fall 1938: Kristallnacht
January 1939: Charlotte moves to French Riviera, joining her maternal grandparents there.	WWII begins.
March 1940: Charlotte's grandmother commits suicide May – July, 1940 (estimate): Charlotte and her grandfather interred at Gurs concentration camp	1940: Nazis invade France, Vichy government established (see France, 1940 on the next page.)
Summer 1941 – summer 1942: Charlotte creates "Life? Or Theater?"	
June 17, 1943: Charlotte marries Alexandre Nagler Sept. 1943: Charlotte and Alexandre are transported to Drancy concentration camp October 10, 1943: Transport #60 arrives at Auschwitz from Drancy, where Charlotte dies in the gas chambers.	Summer 1942: Round-up of Jews in Nice, France (See notes on next page about DRANCY and "Jews of Nice.")
1948: Charlotte's parents, retrieve "Life? Or Theater?" from Otilie Moore (Mrs. Moore housed Charlotte and her grandparents at her home, L'Ermitage in France.)	

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▪ **FRANCE, 1940**

“On June 5 the Germans launched their final assault against France. Paris fell on June 14. An armistice was signed on June 22. The armistice resulted in a two-zone division of the country. The Nazis occupied the northern two-thirds of the country, including Paris. Southern France, with governmental headquarters at the resort town of Vichy, remained unoccupied until early 1942. Under these arrangements, the Germans allowed a collaborationist French government to remain in place in exchange for its cooperation which included financial exploitation that benefited Germany, labor brigades sent to work in German industry, and punitive measures against Jews.”⁶

▪ **DRANCY**

“An unfinished apartment complex in the Paris suburb of Drancy was a transit camp for most Jews shipped from France to Auschwitz. From 1942 to 1944, more than 60 of the 79 trains that left for the East from France left from Drancy. About 67,000 of 75,000 Jews deported from French soil spent time at Drancy.

When Drancy opened on August 21, 1941, living conditions were abysmal. There were 1200 wooden bunk-bed frames for the first 4000 inmates. Forty 50 internees crammed each room, and their diet consisted exclusively of cabbage soup. As a result, the mortality rate at Drancy was very high.

Ironically, material conditions improved when German officials took over camp administration from Vichy France officials in July 1943. The last deportation transport left Drancy on July 31, 1944.”⁷

▪ **JEWS OF NICE**

“By 1942 many French Jews were reduced to poverty. The anti-Semitic policies of the Vichy government deprived many Jews of their livelihoods. When the deportation of Jews began in July 1942, the administrator of Nice was anxious to get rid of the nearly 8000 Jews who lived under his authority. In France, most Jews who were deported were foreign Jews.”⁸

Going deeper: Quotes from Charlotte about creating art:

“In a letter.... In May 1940 Lotte answered for herself, ‘I will create a story so as not to lose my mind.’”⁹
“CS wrote, ‘the world disintegrated more and more’ and her spirit ‘kept collapsing more and more.’ But ‘desperately unhappy,’ in summer 1941, ‘at this time, I began to work on the drawings in hand.’ ‘I had to go deeper into solitude, then maybe I could find – what I had to find! It is my *self*: a name for myself. And so I began *Life & Theater*.’”¹⁰

Discussion Questions:

1. What was the original question, as we read in quote #1? (from quote #1)
2. What happened in Lotte’s world “the world disintegrated more and more” that made her think she might “lose her mind?”
3. Why do you think she chose creating **art**?

⁶ *The Holocaust Chronicle : A History in Words and Pictures*, 1st. ed. (Lincolnwood, IL: Publications International, Ltd., 2000), 186.

⁷ Ibid., 333.

⁸ Ibid., 347.

⁹ ———, *To Paint Her Life : Charlotte Salomon in the Nazi Era*, 112.

¹⁰ Ibid., 130.

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Segment #4: USING THE IMAGES of CHARLOTTE SALOMON:

Activity #1: Use the Kristallnacht (image number 3) and Jan. 30, 1933 (Image 1) pieces to understand the historical impact of the Nazis on the people. (Note: This is a great exercise to do if you are already teaching one of these events in your classroom.) Project one of the images onto a screen in the classroom.

- a. Option #1: Writing or Speaking Activity: Ask each student to pick a character out of the image and describe what's happening to them, as if they are witnessing the event. This can be a writing exercise or a spontaneous speaking exercise.
- b. Option #2: Group Drama activity – split the class into two or three groups. Have each group pick a section of the image to enact. It should freeze into the image as it appears on the screen. Have each group act out their scenes for each other.
- c. Option #3: Graphic option – Have students paint, draw or sketch the scene that Charlotte didn't paint. What's missing? Is there a more close-up detail they could paint? Or instead of looking in Charlotte's direction, what's happening behind her?

Activity #2: The overlay technique. Charlotte Salomon's unique method was a two-step process. First, she created a graphic image. Then she would lay a transparent sheet of paper over the graphic image and write in conversation or personal reflections about the image. Use blank sheets of paper to have students write the conversation or personal reflections that they think was happening in the graphic image (select one or two images without text). You may also wish to use images with text as well (either option can be successful).

Share with the class the version that Charlotte wrote (select one with text) and ask students if they would like to share. This technique can be done with many of her images as a way to enter into the world that Charlotte inhabited, of Nazi occupation. Towards the end of her project, Charlotte stopped drawing pictures and only wrote.

Activity #3 (going deeper): The beauty of Charlotte's work, "Life? Or Theater?" lies in its scope, 147: "By the end 'Life or Theater?' had outgrown its origins as a private account. To become a presentation piece in words and images, it needed a final shape. Salomon chose about 760 paintings, 360 overlays, 8 final pages of text and six playbill pages, putting aside around 200 unnumbered variants and overlays."

A larger class project could be to have each of one of your students create their life story using Charlotte's technique – sketching then writing the dialogue – or creating a timeline first and then creating the images which go along with it.

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A note to the teacher: The history demonstrated in this lesson is unique specific to Terezín, no other camp or ghetto in Nazi-occupied Europe maintained the conditions and way of life which existed in Terezín.

“Music! Music was life!”¹¹

Terezín

Display on the board or overheard the following definitions and choose a student to read them aloud:

- **Concentration Camp:** Camps established by the Nazi regime, which eventually became a major instrument of terror, control, punishment, and killing performed through both deliberate means as well as attrition by hunger and/or disease.
- **Ghetto:** A quarter in a city, especially a thickly populated slum area, inhabited by a minority group or groups, as a result of economic or social pressures; an area occupied by an isolated group; an isolated or segregated group, community or area.¹²

Display Map 1

A map of Terezín.

Background

Terezín, also known as Theresienstadt (There was a German name for many towns and cities in Nazi-occupied Europe) was a fortified city built in 1780. The fortress was not used during wartime, but utilized as a prison in the second half of the 19th Century. During World War I the fortress was used as a prisoner-of-war camp, and Gavrillo Princip, who assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand (what officially started the war) was imprisoned there.

On March 5, 1939 the German army entered Prague and occupied the Czech lands. The following year in June 1940 the Gestapo took control of Terezín, and in November of 1941 Terezín was converted into a walled ghetto for the Jews.

Terezín was established as a place of deportation for the Czech Jews (amongst others), but also functioned as a facade for the German plan to exterminate the Europe’s Jewish population. Superficially Terezín was presented as a “model Jewish settlement”, but in reality it was a ghetto and concentration camp environment which served as a transit camp for deportation to the extermination camps in the East. (see Map 2)

Terezín was initially established to hold the “privileged” Jews from Czechoslovakia, Germany, and Austria (those who were high ranking officials in the German army during World War I, famous

¹¹ Greta Hoffmeister, Terezín Survivor in Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust : Confronting Life in the Nazi Ghettos and Camps*, 7.

¹² Entry from Oxford English Dictionary Online (Second edition 1989)

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musicians, artists, scholars, and scientists). This select community was able under these special conditions to create an environment of education and art for the children in Terezín. Although, for most children their time in Terezín was short and estimated numbers show that of 15,000 children about 90% perished¹³, they lived a unique existence compared to the other Jews throughout Nazi-occupied Europe.

Art lived on...

“Thus the child is free in its self-expression” (Friedl Dicker-Brandeis)

Friedl Dicker-Brandeis was an artist and teacher who worked with children through art. She was transported to Terezín in December 1942. While in Terezín she helped children refocus from a desperate situation: to art, poetry and storytelling.

A large collection of children’s artwork from Terezín can be viewed on the CD “children’s drawings Terezín” (found in the resource box available for loan from the JFCS Holocaust Center).

- A published collection of the children’s artwork and poetry is in: “... I never saw another butterfly...”¹⁴
Refer to **Readings 1 & 2**
- For this lesson provide the students with white paper and watercolors (if not available pens, crayons, or pencils will work)

Activity 1

Read the poems on Readings 1 & 2 to the class and tell the students (children in Terezín were told to draw what they see. After being introduced to Terezín, hearing some of the children’s poetry ... draw what you see.

¹³ www.ushmm.org

¹⁴ Hana Volavková and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum., *I Never Saw Another Butterfly : Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezín Concentration Camp, 1942-1944*, Expanded 2nd ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1993).

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The Survival of Nazi Film and Photography

Case One: Hitler gives a city to the Jews

In 1943 500 Jews from Denmark (those who did not escape to Sweden) were deported to Terezín. The Danish government was quite particular and unusual (compared to the other occupied countries of Europe) as they insisted on knowing what the conditions were of the camp their citizens had been sent to. Per the Danish request the Red Cross scheduled a visit to see this so called “Jewish settlement”.

In preparation of the Red Cross visit, Terezín went through an extensive beautification process. The sick and emaciated were immediately deported east. To display that a “normal” lifestyle was in place the Nazis erected fake shops, cafes, a post office, and even a bank, which distributed fake currency.

- SS Captain Karl Rahm was commissioned to beautify Terezin. Streets were cleaned spotless, hospitals and children’s quarters painted, ill prisoners were shipped east, crisp new currency was circulated, and a deceptive ghetto bank greeted possible customers.

The SS greeted the International Red Cross in civilian clothing and gave them the tour of the sham of the camp.

- The Tales of Hoffman—performed in the gym of the camp. Leading men like Rabbi Baeck, Field Marshal von Sommer, the Mayor of Lyons and several Czech ministers were offered to participate in a garden party, offering food. Children from Holland arrived on the transport train. Rahm himself welcomed them, helping them of the train wagons. All this sham was recorded, and shortly thereafter the filming ended. The camp reverted to the old format, starvation and cruelty.
- The Red Cross was entertained by an opera, Brundibar was composed and performed by the children of Terezín.

Music from Brundibar can be heard on the CD “Hans Krasa” (found in the resource box available for loan from the JFCS Holocaust Center).

- The facade presented to the Red Cross went so well that the Nazis developed this “Jewish settlement” story even more by creating a propaganda film. “Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt” (Hitler gives a city to the Jews).
- The bank was filmed as was the post office. Jack boots and side arms were forbidden.
 - Filming began in February 1944, the filmmaker, Kurt Gerron and the entire cast were deported to Auschwitz after the filming.

Note to the teacher: *Hitler Gives a City to the Jews* can be viewed at the JFCS Holocaust Center.

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Case Two: Photography of the Lodz Ghetto

Refer to image gallery in the appendix

This photograph of young boys in the Lodz Ghetto contradicts the black and white Holocaust imagery the world is familiar with. The photography was taken in the Lodz Ghetto, Poland (1940-1945).

400 of the earliest color slides, snapped, on Agfa film using a confiscated camera, were taken by the Austrian-born Walter Genewein. Genewein rose through the ranks of the Nazi hierarchy to become the chief accountant for the Lodz Ghetto.

After Genewein's death of old age, the slides, which are now part of the collection of the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt, were sold to a used book store, where they were recovered in 1987.¹⁵



Discussion Questions:

1. What are your first impressions of these primary resources?
2. How are they different to the film and photography about the Holocaust you have seen before?
3. Do they portray an accurate representation of the Holocaust? Why or why not?
4. Should these resources be used to teach the lessons of the Holocaust? Why or why not?
5. Film and Photography are often mediums considered art. Are these two examples art as well? Where is the line drawn between propaganda and art?

¹⁵ *The Holocaust Chronicle : A History in Words and Pictures.*

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Additional Resources

Plays:

“Who Will Carry the Word?” By Charlotte Delbo.

“See Under: LOVE.” Adapted for the stage by Corey Fischer. Based on the novel by David Grossman.

“The Deputy.” By Rolf Hochhuth.

“A Bright Room Called Day.” By Tony Kushner.

“The Model Apartment” by Donald Margulies.

“Playing for Time.” By Arthur Miller.

“Times Like These.” By John O’ Keefe

“The Holocaust Trilogy.” By Julia Pascal.

“Bent.” By Martin Sherman.

“Rose.” By Martin Sherman.

“Ghetto.” By Joshua Sobol.

Films:

The Pianist

The Harmonists

Rape of Europa

Playing for Time

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Sources

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Charlotte Solomon Images: Charlotte Salomon, Gouaches from "Life? or Theatre?," 1940-1942, Villefranche, France. Collection Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam. Copyright Charlotte Salomon Foundation."

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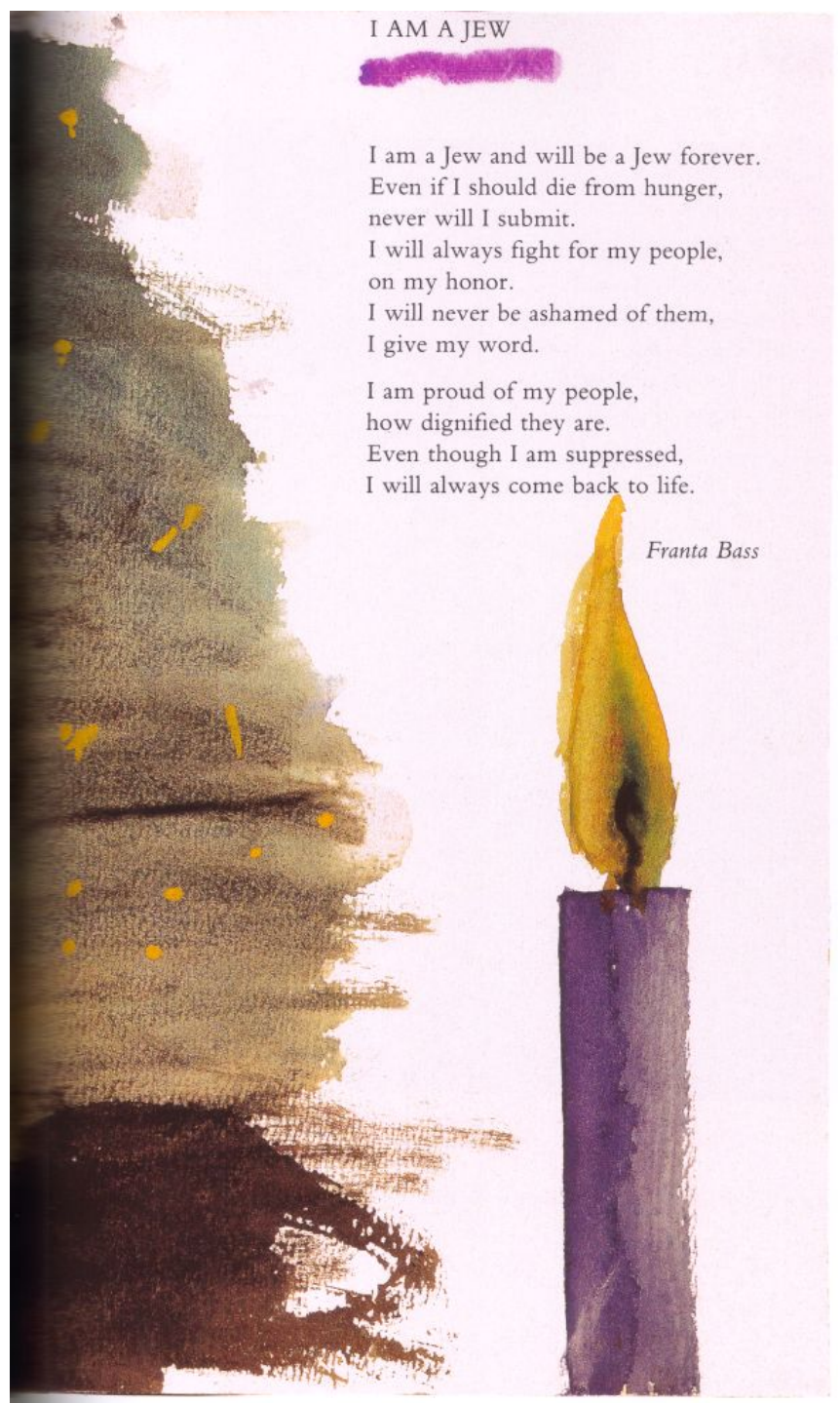
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¹ "... I never saw another butterfly ..."

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TEREZIN

The heaviest wheel rolls across our foreheads
To bury itself deep somewhere inside our memories.

We've suffered here more than enough,
Here in this clot of grief and shame,
Wanting a badge of blindness
To be a proof for their own children.

A fourth year of waiting, like standing above a swamp
From which any moment might gush forth a spring.

Meanwhile, the rivers flow another way,
Another way,
Not letting you die, not letting you live.

And the cannons don't scream and the guns don't bark
And you don't see blood here.
Nothing, only silent hunger.
Children steal the bread here and ask and ask
and ask

And all would wish to sleep, keep silent, and
just to go to sleep again . . .

The heaviest wheel rolls across our foreheads
To bury itself deep somewhere inside our memories.

Mif 1944

2

² "... I never saw another butterfly ..."

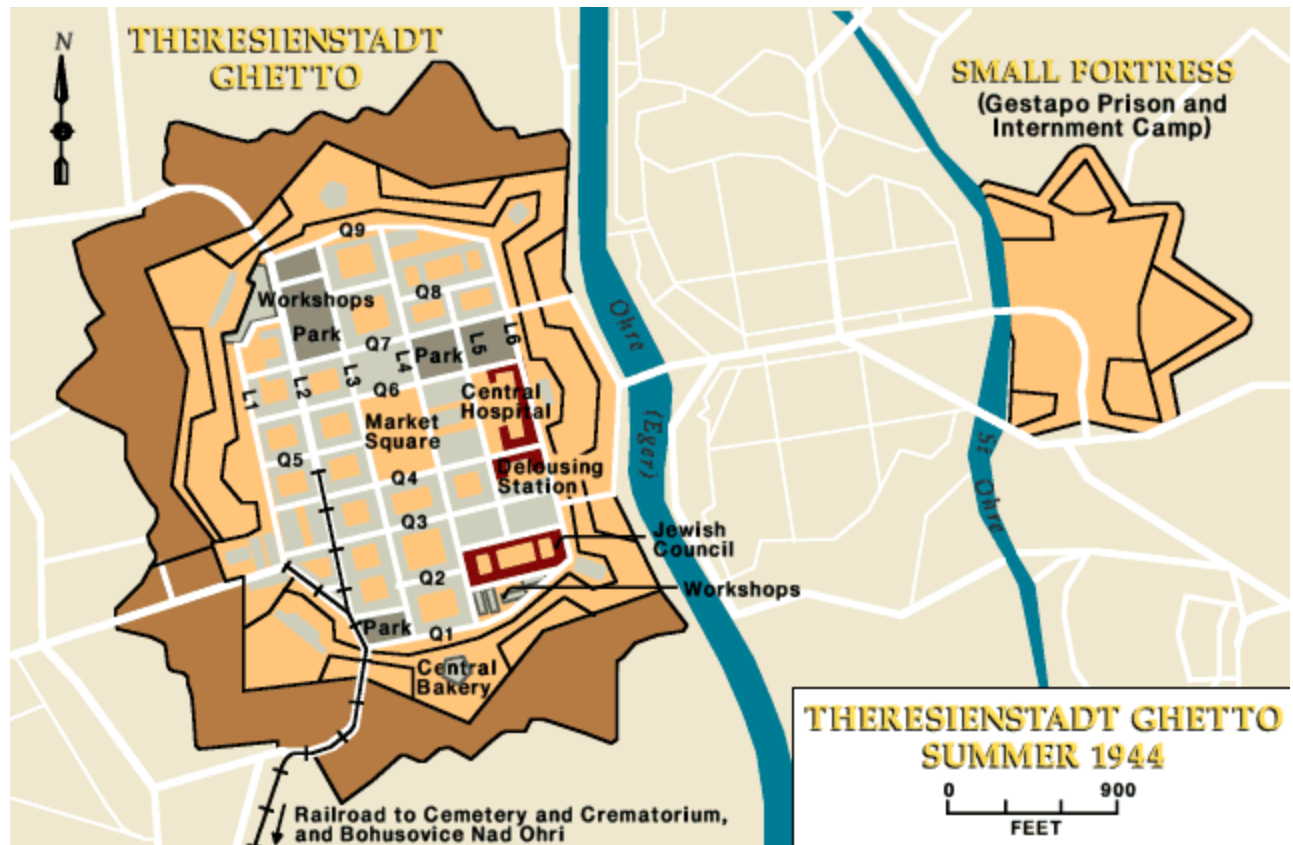
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³ www.ushmm.org

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⁴ www.ushmm.org

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Photography from the Łódź Ghetto

Source: United States Holocaust Memorial