

Read and Reflect: Why Write? From an Anonymous Boy's Diary

Lesson

Duration:

Two 50-minute class periods

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, students will engage in a close reading of one entry from the diary of an Anonymous Boy writing in the Łódź ghetto. They will analyze his stated reasons for writing and then examine a page of the original diary to consider how it reflects that purpose. By examining this diary, students can explore reasons for writing diaries. They will also consider questions of privacy and discretion, and the historical value of personal writing.

Educators and students are encouraged to read the introduction to the Anonymous Boy's diary in *Salvaged Pages*, pages 361–68, before beginning the lesson. It provides valuable information about the writer's life and a historical context for a reading of the diary.

Overview

This lesson was initially drafted by Holocaust educator Lisa Bauman.

Core diary entry from *Salvaged Pages* used in this lesson: [Anonymous Boy, June 11, 1944](#)

Like any creative endeavor, the writing of a diary is an act of self-expression. Diarists observe the world around them, record their impressions, and reflect on what they see and feel. In this sense, it is an act of agency and self-determination—a personal decision that reflects the will of the writer. Regardless of its content, the diary reflects that person's efforts to put pen to paper, organize his or her thoughts, and find the words to communicate with a loved one, or the world at large.

Writers during the Holocaust kept diaries for varying reasons. Some wrote for themselves, to capture their thoughts or feelings, and to preserve them for the future. Others wrote to feel close to loved ones or distant relatives. Some, like the Anonymous Boy in Łódź ghetto, wrote his diary to publicly testify to the unprecedented suffering he and others experienced. Still others never said why they were writing a diary, but their words remain as an invaluable historical and literary record of the Holocaust.

Focus Questions

While diaries are typically considered private and personal records, some people in history have written diaries for other reasons. The purpose of the diary can be shaped by the personality and vision of the writer, as well as the context in which the diary was written.

- Why do people write diaries? Are they always personal, or can they be public? What might make a writer choose to use a diary as a public testimony?
- How do diaries written in moments of historical crisis differ from those written in less turbulent times? Are some diaries more important than others? More useful? More valuable?
- Are diaries private by definition? Is reading a diary a violation of privacy? Are there circumstances in which the historical value of the diary outweighs the writer's potential wish for privacy?
- How would you feel about a future historian reading your diary? What would you want someone to understand about you or your time from your writing?

Activities

Opener: Focus Discussion

The Focus Questions for this activity offer students the opportunity to reflect upon the purpose of writing a diary and the intention of a writer to keep a diary. Ask students to form groups of four, count off, and choose the question corresponding to their number from the list below. (The first bullet being #1 et cetera.) Ask them to respond in writing to their assigned Focus Question. Once completed, students will share their responses within small groups. Ask the groups to choose reporters who can present some of the highlights from the group discussion to the class.

Main Activity: June 11, 1944

Begin by passing out or projecting images of the Anonymous Boy's diary, in the gallery below.

Either in pairs or small groups, have students analyze the images using the following questions:

- What do you see and notice about the diary entries?
- What inferences can you make about life in the Łódź ghetto based upon what you noticed?
- The Anonymous Boy wrote entries in four languages: Hebrew, English, Yiddish, and Polish. What might be some of the possible reasons he used multiple languages? What does this reveal about the diarist and the moment in time?
- What are some possible reasons this writer never used his name or referenced names in his family?
- What questions surface from these images and the diary itself?

Then have students do a close reading of [Diary Entry on Life in the Łódź Ghetto, June 11, 1941](#).

A close reading process is one way to help students of all abilities engage with diary entries. This helps the reader understand the complexity of the content and its emotional weight. As the term is used in many state standards, close reading allows students to purposefully and slowly

reread text to deepen their comprehension. They can focus their attention on the meaning of the individual words and sentences. They also can pay attention to the overall development of events and ideas.

Close reading usually includes text-dependent questions that call on students to analyze the text to draw meaningful conclusions and extract real evidence. This sort of careful attention to the text allows students to synthesize their learning. They also gain important content knowledge. Then they can communicate their understanding to their peers or an outside audience.

The following [Close Reading Protocol](#) can be used (and adapted) to facilitate this lesson.

First read aloud [Diary Entry on Life in the Łódź Ghetto, June 11, 1941](#). Ask students to circle words or ideas of interest and then share them with the class.

Have students complete their individual read underlining the passages that directly expresses the Anonymous Boy's intention and purpose for writing his diary. Have them share their selections with the class.

Then, discuss the following text-dependent questions:

- Why does the Anonymous Boy write a diary?
- What reasons does he specifically state for wanting to gain fame? Are these different than his purpose for writing?
- What is your interpretation of the last three questions he asks in this entry? "I dream about telling to humanity but should I be able? Should Shakespeare be able? And what yet I who am only a little proud of understanding Shakespeare?!"
- What can be inferred about his reference to Shakespeare?
- What literary and historical value does this diary entry offer? What examples in this entry support students' claims?

Assessment

Other diarists alongside the Anonymous Boy declared a variety of reasons for writing in a diary, including Peter Feigl, whose diary and family are shown below.

Diarists featured in *Salvaged Pages* also gave their reasons for maintaining a diary in the following entries:

- Peter Feigl (August 27, 1942)
- Moshe Flinker (November 24, 1942)
- Petr Ginz (February 8, 1944)
- Yitskhok Rudashevski (November 5, 1942)
- Miriam Korber (July 15, 1942)
- Elsa Binder (June 9, 1942)
- Alice Ehrmann (November 1, 1944)

Have students use the Anonymous Boy's [Diary Entry on Life in the Łódź Ghetto, June 11, 1941](#) and at least one other of the entries listed above to write an essay exploring two of the Focus Questions:

- Why do people write diaries?
- How do diaries written in moments of historical crisis differ from those written in less turbulent times?