

Lesson
Duration:
One 50-minute class period

Read and Reflect: Hunger in an Anonymous Girl's Diary

Learning Objectives

In this lesson students will do a close reading of one diary entry from the diary of an Anonymous Girl to contemplate the effects of hunger and deprivation on the body, mind, and spirit, and the moral dilemmas that her circumstances caused her to face.

Educators and students are encouraged to read the introduction to the Anonymous Girl's diary in *Salvaged Pages*, pages 226–30, before beginning the lesson. It provides valuable information about the writer's life and historical context for a reading of the diary.

Overview

Core diary entries from *Salvaged Pages* used in this lesson: [Anonymous Girl, March 11, 1942](#)

This lesson was initially drafted by Holocaust educator Lisa Bauman.

The German authorities in the ghetto deliberately deprived Jewish inhabitants of basic necessities in order to dehumanize and terrorize them. In the Łódź ghetto, where there was no black market, Jews suffered enormously from hunger and illness. They died at extremely high rates. The extreme deprivation in the ghetto gave rise to moral dilemmas, as individuals were forced to choose between self-preservation and moral codes of conduct. The Anonymous Girl from Łódź Ghetto grapples with these issues and their cascading consequences in her diary.

Focus Questions

When human beings are deprived of basic needs such as food and shelter, they often face difficult moral choices in the quest for survival. In her diary, the Anonymous Girl vividly captures her own struggle to adhere to the codes of conduct inside her family, namely the equal sharing of food, with her desperate need to satisfy her hunger.

- How does the Anonymous Girl's diary add to what we know about the experiences of victims of the Holocaust?
- What can you learn from this diary about the physical, emotional, and social impact of deprivation on human beings?
- What are the dilemmas presented by those suffering from deprivation and hunger in these entries? What are different ways in which people respond?
- Holocaust Scholar Lawrence Langer has described situations faced by victims of the Holocaust as "choiceless choices." These are situations in which the decisions "did not reflect options between life and death, but between one form of 'abnormal' response and another, both imposed by a situation that was in no way of the victim's own choosing." To what extent do the dilemmas faced by the Anonymous Girl in the entries below reflect Langer's observation?

Activities

Opener: Read Two Entries from the Anonymous Girl

Begin by reading the following excerpts from the diary of the Anonymous Girl.

Friday, February 24 [actually February 27], 1942

- 1 ½ kilograms of pickled beets
- ½ kilogram of sauerkraut
- 10 decagrams of vegetable salad
- 60 decagrams of rye flour
- 20 “ of zacierki [egg noodles]
- 50 “ sugar
- 15 “ of margarine
- 10 “ of coffee

How can you survive on this for two weeks? We cook once a day, only in the evening, but it's not enough because the beets are frozen, and when they thaw what's left is only water.

Our family consists of five people. My mom and my brother are working in the leather and saddlery workshop. Mom works on a machine (she's a senior machine operator) and my brother (sixteen years old) is a leather worker. My sister, who is seventeen, works in the same workshop. At work they get fifteen decagrams of bread and five decagrams of meat. They take twenty decagrams of bread from home. This is their meal for an entire day, and they work so hard. . . .

Starvation is terrifying. People die like poisoned flies. Today I got one kilogram of parsley. My father, brother and I ate it raw. O fate! O irony! Will it ever end?¹

Monday, March 10, 1942

The hunger is getting worse. In the morning I want my father to leave as soon as possible. Then I jump up from the bed and consume all the bread my mom has left for me for the entire day. My God, what has happened to me? I [don't] know how to restrain myself. Then I starve all day. I wish I were different. God, take pity on me. During the day I drink tap water and vinegar left from the pickled beets. Eating only this I wait until seven o'clock. I have a stomachache frequently.²

What is the Anonymous Girl describing? What are your reactions? How do these entries make you feel? What are the moral dilemmas that she is struggling with? What are the physical, emotional, and social consequences of these conditions?

The Łódź ghetto was one of the largest and longest standing ghettos that existed during the Holocaust. It was also sealed off entirely from the surrounding city and thus had very little access to provisions or to a black market to acquire food and other staples. If students are already familiar with the history and conditions of the Łódź ghetto, how do these entries reflect what they already know? If the Łódź ghetto is unfamiliar, you may want to read with your students the following summary from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on [Łódź and the deportations that occurred](#).

Main Activity: Close Reading—Hunger

During the Holocaust the Nazis deprived Jews, and other targeted groups, of basic human provisions and needs in order to carry out the Final Solution. The policy of food rations within the ghettos led to widespread starvation. Diaries such as the Anonymous Girl's allow students to read and discuss the physical, emotional, and social effects of Nazi policy through one girl's experience.

Doing a close reading is one way to help students of all abilities engage with diary entries. This helps students 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 can also 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 in order to draw meaningful conclusions and find significant 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 steps can be used (and adapted) to facilitate the close reading:

First Read: Read aloud the assigned entry. Either the teacher or a fluent student reader can read the text aloud. Ask students to circle unfamiliar words as they listen. After this first reading, have students share their circled words with the class. Decide which words are important to define for immediate understanding and which terms you would like students to look up later.

Second Read: Individual read. Have students silently read the entry. They can underline words or phrases that stand out to them as they read. Have students share these selected sections.

Third Read: Text-dependent questions. Either in small groups or through a facilitated discussion, have students answer the text-dependent questions.

This lesson will focus exclusively on the [Anonymous Girl's Diary Entry on Hunger in the Łódź Ghetto, March 11, 1942](#). As you will see, the close reading is intentionally divided into two segments to allow time and space for student reflection and discussion.

Part I:

Begin with a first read of Part I of this entry. Remind students to circle words or sentences that they don't understand or are confusing to them as you read aloud. Have students share what they circled.

Show students the photographs in the gallery below. Allow time for clarifying questions.

Then have students do their individual read of Part I of this entry. Allow time for students to share their thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the first portion of this entry.

Part II:

Repeat the same process as above: first read aloud and then have students do their individual read of Part II of the entry. Remind students to circle words or sentences they don't understand or are confusing to them as you read aloud and as they read to themselves.

Again allow time for student discussion before moving to a more focused analysis of the text. Discuss how viewing the photographs and documents prior to their individual read affected their experience with the text.

Discuss the following text-dependent questions:

- What can you learn from this diary about the physical, emotional, and social impact of deprivation on human beings? What passages from this entry support your conclusions?
- What words would you use to describe the Anonymous Girl's experience within her family? Give specific examples from the text.
- What are the moral dilemmas that deprivation and hunger cause? Where in the text does the Anonymous Girl struggle with these moral issues?
- What are different ways that people in her family responded to the conditions in the ghetto? Where in the text does she specifically record these differences?

Citations

1 Alexandra Zapruder, ed., *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust*, 2nd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015) 231.

2 Alexandra Zapruder, ed., *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust*, 2nd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015) 236.