

Lesson

Duration:

One 50-minute class period

Read and Reflect: Fear in Dawid Rubinowicz's Diary

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, students will read and compare several diary entries written by Dawid Rubinowicz in which he shares his thoughts and fears while living under German occupation in Poland. Students will consider the complexity of daily life under German occupation. They will also see how terror and intimidation shaped the experience of Jews at the time.

We encourage educators and students to read the introduction to Dawid Rubinowicz's diary in *Salvaged Pages*, pages 271–76 before beginning the lesson. It provides valuable information about the writer's life and a historical context for a reading of the diary.

Overview

Core diary entries from *Salvaged Pages* used in this lesson: Dawid Rubinowicz, [November 1, 1941](#); [December 12, 1941](#); [December 26, 1941](#); [December 28, 1941](#).

The Germans cultivated a climate of fear and terror among all Jews under occupation, regardless of their nationality, geography, religious observance or economic circumstances. In all the occupied areas, the German authority intimidated and controlled the local Jewish population through the use of wanton violence and ongoing lawlessness. Their use of power undermined family and communal ties. It also created a sense of constant instability and insecurity among Jews. This pervasive climate of terror is vividly captured in the diary of twelve-year-old Dawid Rubinowicz.

Focus Questions

Diaries recorded during wartime can enable us to understand how those in power use intimidation to control and dominate local populations.

- How are fear and intimidation used as weapons of war?
- What is the effect on victims of ongoing helplessness and fear? How does Dawid's diary help us understand what other people might experience in such circumstances?

Activities

Opener: Read Two Entries from Dawid Rubinowicz

August 12, [1940]

All through the war I've been studying at home by myself. When I think of how I used to go to school I feel like bursting into tears, and today I must stay at home and can't go anywhere. And when I think of how many wars there are going on in the world, how many men are daily dying of bullets, by gassing, by bombs, by epidemics and other enemies of man, then I feel fit for nothing.

September 1, [1940]

Today's the first anniversary of the outbreak of war. I remember what we've already gone through in this short time, how much suffering we've already experienced. Before the war everyone had some kind of occupation, hardly anyone was out of work. But in present-day wars 90 percent are unemployed, and only 10 percent have a job. Take us, we used to have a dairy and now we're utterly unemployed. There's only very little stock left from before the war; we're still using it up, but it's already running out, and then we don't know what we'll do.¹

Interpret and discuss the following excerpts from Dawid Rubinowicz's diary. Encourage students to think about the larger context of the entry and Dawid's emotions.

- "When I think of how I used to go to school I feel like bursting into tears"
- "I feel fit for nothing."
- "Today's the first anniversary of the outbreak of war."
- "Before the war everyone had some kind of occupation, hardly anyone was out of work."

Main Activity: Close Reading—Fear During the Holocaust

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. They are able to deepen their comprehension and 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 to draw meaningful conclusions and extract important 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 [Close Reading Protocol](#) can be used and adapted to facilitate a close reading.

1. Read aloud [Dawid Rubinowicz's Diary Entries on Fear of Nazi Occupation](#) as a first read. Have students underline any unfamiliar words and discuss them as a class.
2. Have students complete their individual reads. Given the theme of "fear," have students underline or circle passages that reveal Dawid's fear.
3. Have the class share their reactions.
4. Have students discuss Text-Dependent Questions below.

- What words does Dawid use to express his fear(s)?
- How does Dawid write about the fears that others may be experiencing?
- How did Dawid and his community receive information about the war? Why may this be important?
- What evidence in Dawid's diary illustrates that force and intimidation were used in his community? What was its purpose?

5. Have students [view the images in the gallery](#) below. What specific connections can they make between these images and the diary entries? Do these images affect their reading the diary of Dawid Rubinowicz? Why or why not?

Citations

1 Alexandra Zapruder, ed., *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust*, 2nd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015) 277.

Assessment

Have students compose a [found poem](#) using the diary of Dawid Rubinowicz and share it with their classmates.