

Lesson  
Duration:  
Two 50-minute class periods

## Learn the History: Life in Theresienstadt in Eva Ginzová's Diary

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### Learning Objectives

In this lesson students will gain a deeper understanding of the Theresienstadt ghetto and the experiences of its inhabitants during the final months of the Holocaust. Students will read diary entries written by Eva Ginzová at this time and consider them in the context of a range of additional primary sources from the ghetto.

Educators and students are encouraged to read the introduction to Eva Ginzová's diary in *Salvaged Pages*, pages 160–67. 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: Eva Ginzová, June 24, 1944; [September 16 and 22, 1944](#).**

This lesson was initially drafted by Holocaust educator Colleen Tambuscio.

The Nazis created ghettos to consolidate, segregate and isolate Jews. They then deprived them of their livelihoods, exploited them for labor, and stripped them of dignity and humanity. They established at least 1,000 ghettos in German-occupied Poland and the Soviet Union during World War II. With the implementation of mass killing of Jews beginning in late 1941, the Germans began emptying the ghettos, deporting the surviving Jews to killing centers or slave labor camps.

The Germans established the ghetto in Terezín (Theresienstadt in German), near Prague, in 1941.<sup>1</sup> Petr and Eva Ginz were defined as *mischlinge*, or “mixed-race” with one Jewish and one non-Jewish parent. Petr was deported to Theresienstadt in 1942, and Eva followed in 1944. She began writing her diary six weeks after she arrived at Theresienstadt, recounting her daily struggle to survive during the final months of World War II.

### Focus Questions

Ghetto diaries reflect their writers' experiences of extreme deprivation, including poor living conditions, illness, and hunger. Writers also contended with the pervasive threat of deportation.

- What can you learn about the specific character of life in Theresienstadt from Eva's diary? What are the main problems she faced?
- Based on your examination of other primary sources from Theresienstadt, what does Eva's diary add to your understanding? Does anything in it surprise you or contradict other parts of the historical record?
- How do you assess the value of Eva's diary as a personal account in the context of other historical sources? What does each one provide? Is one more valuable than the other? Why or in what way? Consider the many ways in which different primary sources contribute to an understanding of the historical past.

## Citations

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this lesson Terezín, the Czech name of the city in which the fortress was originally built, will be primarily used rather than the name assigned under German occupation, Theresienstadt. When the German name is used, it is to reference the specific time of German occupation.

## Activities

### Opener: Read an Entry from Eva Ginzová

June 24 [1944]

On Wednesday, it will have been six weeks since I first arrived here. We came here by train where we had the whole carriage to ourselves. [. . .] Our bags, large and small, were with us in one carriage and were also transported with us to Terezín by truck. As we were going through Boušovice (a large village with clean houses), people stopped and looked at us. We could already see Terezín in the distance with its church tower rising above it. I was already looking forward to seeing Petr, Uncle, Pavel, and Hanka and all those I knew . . . We actually arrived just as transports were leaving for Birkenau. Seventy-five hundred people left this time—the poor things.<sup>2</sup> They took us to the Hamburg barracks where we were held for three days. They took our bags from us and didn't give us any food. We suffered from extreme hunger. Were about able to look out the window and when Petr came there to see me and talk to me through the window, he brought me something to eat. [. . .]

I must just add a couple of lines. This writing makes me feel a lot better since I've felt all the time that I have been writing a letter to you, dear Mummy and Daddy. It seems such a long time since we saw each other last when we parted on Dlouhá Avenue. [. . .] I'm sending you a big good-night kiss, Mummy and Daddy.<sup>3</sup>

Describe Eva's journey and initial impressions of Theresienstadt. From this entry, what can we infer about world events unfolding outside the ghetto? What sentences stood out to you? What questions remain?

It is very important in this activity for students to have some familiarity with the history of the Theresienstadt ghetto. Read together a [summary of Theresienstadt](#) and the summary of the [German occupation of Czechoslovakia](#) from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website.

### **Main Activity: Life in Theresienstadt—Reading Like a Historian**

Diaries from the Holocaust are historical artifacts that offer students a unique opportunity to practice historical reading and historical analysis skills. While terms may vary, the four foundational skills are:

- **Sourcing**
  - Ask: Who is the author? What is the author’s point of view? Why was it written? When was it written? Is this source believable? Why? Why not?
- **Contextualization**
  - Ask: What else was going on at the time this was written? What can be inferred from the document? What was it like to be alive at this time? What things were different back then? What things were the same?
- **Close Reading**
  - Ask: What claims does the author make? What evidence does the author use to support those claims? How does this document make me feel? What words or phrases does the author use to convince me that he or she is right? What information does the author leave out?
- **Corroboration**
  - Ask: What do other pieces of evidence say? Do other sources support or contradict this document: Am I finding different versions of the story? Why or why not? What pieces of evidence are most believable?4

Have students practice reading and analyzing like a history with the following activity.

1. Open the lesson with Eva’s diary by reviewing Sourcing with students followed by talking about Contextualization.
2. Move to a Close Reading of [Eva Ginzová's Diary Entry on Her Jewish Identity, September 16, 1944](#) and [Eva Ginzová's Diary Entry on the Theresienstadt Ghetto, September 22, 1944](#). Read aloud while students underline and identify specific details of her life in the ghetto. For example, in the first few lines of the entry from September 22, 1944 entry Eva states, “There’s a sort of epidemic now in Terezín.” Questions from students may include: What is an epidemic? How does an epidemic begin? How does an epidemic spread? What conditions are necessary for an epidemic to erupt? Why was Petr vulnerable? These questions, and the discussion that may result, are good examples of contextualization. These details would be strong historical details to underline.
3. Have students discuss in small groups the lines they selected from these entries. Have students create a similar set of questions about those lines as those modeled with Eva’s reference to the epidemic. Share out the passages and questions with the class.
4. Corroboration: Have students research and discover corroborating evidence for the statements they selected from Eva’s diary. Using the Yad Vashem database provided below, have students select three primary sources (i.e., artifacts, diaries and letters, documents, lexicon entries, maps and charts, photographs, testimonies or art) that are similar to the diary selections they selected.

Yad Vashem: The Holocaust Resource Center has an extensive collection of materials for student research. It may be helpful to assist students in their initial research using the Search tools located on the lower right of the site.

- Sources on Central and Western Europe
- Sources on the Ghettoization Process

## Citations

**2** As stated in the FN 11, *Salvaged Pages*, p. 460: In preparation for the visit of the Red Cross to Terezin in the summer of 1944, and to avoid the appearance of overcrowding and the embarrassing presence of sick or weak people and orphaned children, ghetto commandant Karl Rahm ordered the deportation of seventy-five hundred Jews to take place over three transports in May. Although the camp inmates were told that these deportees were headed to Dresden area, they went instead to Auschwitz-Birkenau to the so-called Family Camp. Though Eva frankly acknowledged that these deportees were being sent to Birkenau (as her brother had done in his diary entry mentioning other transports in December 1943), and though she mentioned the camp in other contexts throughout the early part of the diary, there is no reason to suppose that either of them knew anything about the true nature of the camp or the mass killings there at the this time. Indeed, it was not until the spring of 1945, when twelve thousand death camp survivors came to Terezin, that the true nature of Birkenau and the other death camps became known to the population at larger. (Berkley, *Hitler's Gift*, 169-70, 200.)

**3** Alexandra Zapruder, ed., *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust*, 2nd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015) 174–75.

**4** This historical reading and analysis language was adopted from Stanford History Education Group, [Reading Like a Historian](#). Accessed June 30, 2015.

## Assessment

Have students, individually, or in small groups, present their corroborating evidence and how it supports information from the diary entries. Suggest to students they use the Focus Questions from this lesson to structure their presentation.

Share the following example as a model:

[Eva Ginzová's Diary Entry on the Theresienstadt Ghetto, September 22, 1944](#)

*I'm getting an injection to put on weight. I'm supposedly terribly thin.*

(Corroboration research: Food rations in ghettos, other examples of dehumanization)

*A transport's leaving—men aged from sixteen to fifty going to work in Germany . . . I don't know if half-Jews are protected from this.*

(Corroboration research: mischlinge policy, slave labor)