

Lesson

Duration:

One 50-minute class period

The Holocaust in Romania in Miriam Korber's Diary

Learning Objectives

In this lesson students will consider the experiences of Romanian Jews—especially the trauma of deportation—during World War II by reading Miriam Korber's diary entries on that subject.

Educators and students are encouraged to read the introduction to Miriam Korber's diary in *Salvaged Pages*, pages 243–48. It provides valuable information about the writer's life and a historical context for reading the diary.

Overview

This lesson was initially drafted by Holocaust educator Colleen Tambuscio.

Core diary entries from *Salvaged Pages* used in this lesson: [Miriam Korber, November 4th–November 8th, 1942](#), [Yitskhok Rudashevski, September 6, 1941](#)

The persecution and murder of Europe's Jews unfolded differently in each occupied or allied nation. In Romania, which was the only independent ally of Nazi Germany, the administration initiated and undertook a program of large-scale massacre. It rounded up, deported, and killed Jews under its own administration and on its own territory.

Under the leadership of Fascist General Ion Antonescu, and with the collaboration of paramilitary organizations such as the Iron Guard, Romania was directly responsible for the murder of more Jews than any other country aside from Nazi Germany during World War II.

Miriam Korber and her family were expelled from their home in Câmpulung (in Bukovina, Northern Romania) and deported to a region in Ukraine called Transnistria. She describes the family's journey from home to a ghetto in the wasteland of Transnistria. Her diary offers a vivid perspective on the physical and emotional trials of being forced from home.

Focus Questions

Life under military occupation is filled with exploitation, desperation, fear, and uncertainty. Learning of these different experiences from first-person records offers us the opportunity to understand the lives of people who lived under occupation.

- How did Miriam experience and understand her family's deportation from Romania?
- What is the emotional toll she suffers as a result of her family's deportation?

- How did the experiences of Romanian Jews of deportation and ghettoization in Transnistria compare with those of Jews under German occupation? How were the experiences similar? How were they different?

Activities

Opener: Reading a Diary Entry from Miriam Korber

Begin by introducing the [map below](#) in order for students to understand where Miriam and her family lived. Miriam writes about the geography in her first diary entry.

Tuesday, November 4, 1941

Who could have imagined that I would start this notebook, meant to be poetry album, under these circumstances. . . . Four weeks ago this Thursday, at nine-thirty in the evening, Dad came home with the terrible news of the evacuation. But nothing was for certain. On Friday people heard that we would be evacuated on Sunday. And so, the fever of evacuation set in. Crying, gloom, packing, boiling, everything in great disarray. We did not realize what the future had in store for us. On Saturday, the shops were closed and so people started to sell their things clandestinely and give them away. Just like scavengers, peasants, city dwellers, neighbors, and strangers pounced upon us and in one morning we emptied the house of the most beautiful things.

At three in the afternoon rumors spread that everything was postponed for six months. Uncertainty; anxiety; are we leaving or not? Mother and Father were feeling sorry for the things we sold and gave away; even I was seized with grief. But in our hearts we wavered; we were not certain of the rumor. We had finished packing but we packed as if we were going on a trip. We could not imagine that they could have uprooted us entirely from our homes. In the evening we went to bed and until tonight this would be the last time we went to sleep in a bed.

On Sunday, at six in the morning, we found out that we were leaving. We started to realize the atrocity that had been inflicted upon us....At eleven in the morning, the wagons started to roll toward the train station located at the edge of the village. It was the first sight of our exile.¹

Ask students to describe the series of events that Miriam recounts. What has occurred? What emotions does she describe? What words and phrases stand out from her entry? This entry is written almost a month after the events occurred. Does the passage of time impact what was recorded?

Compare this entry from Miriam Korber with that of Yitskhok Rudashevski who writes about his experience of leaving home and being deported in [Yitskhok Rudashevski's Diary Entry on Deportation to the Vilna Ghetto, September 6, 1941](#).

Discuss:

- Are there similarities between the two entries? What is particular to each experience?
- What do we learn about deportation by comparing the entry from Miriam Korber with the September 1941 entry of Yitskhok Rudashevski? What do we learn about the first days of life in each ghetto?

Main Activity: The Holocaust in Romania

The history of the Holocaust in Romania may be less familiar to students. For this reason, it is particularly important to establish a strong historical context prior to reading Miriam Korber's diary so that students can fully grasp the gravity of conditions at the time.

1. The persecution of the Jewish community in Romania was quite different than in other nations during World War II. With this in mind, read aloud with students the summary on [the Holocaust in Romania](#) from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, or return to the introduction to Miriam's diary from *Salvaged Pages*, pages 243–49. Discuss what is different about the persecution of Jews in Romania from the persecution of Jews in German-occupied areas.
2. Show students [Miriam Korber's Extended Family](#) and [Korber Family and Their Shop](#). These family photographs are from the Korber family. What do students notice? What information can students infer about Miriam Korber and her family from these images? What further historical information do these images provide?
3. Listen to an audio testimony by Miriam Korber describing aspects of her years during and after the war. What other details do you learn as she describes her life as a refugee?
4. Read [Miriam Korber's Diary Entries on Life in Atachi, Romania](#). Have students select significant historical details that they believe may be particular to the Romanian experience. Explain that these examples will be used in the Assessment for this lesson. Invite students to discuss their selections as a class or in pairs.

Citations

1 : Alexandra Zapruder, ed., *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust*, 2nd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 249.

Assessment

Assessment: Comparing Life in the Ghetto

Have students write an essay describing the ghetto experiences of Miriam Korber, in the Romanian-administered ghetto of Djurin in Transnistria. Ask students to compare her experiences to those of diarists whose diary entries are found in *Salvaged Pages* and who were held in German-administered ghettos in Eastern Europe. These could include Petr and Eva Ginz or Alice Ehrmann (Theresienstadt), Yitskhok Rudashevski (Vilna), the Anonymous Girl or the Anonymous Boy (Łódź), Ilya Gerber (Kovno), or Elsa Binder (Stanisławów) Students should address the following questions:

- What were some similarities between Miriam's experience in the Djurin ghetto and those of other writers in German-occupied areas?
- What were some ways in which Miriam's experience in the Djurin ghetto was different than other diarists who wrote in ghettos?
- Unlike the other writers in *Salvaged Pages*, Miriam was deported and forced into a ghetto by the government of her native country. Other writers suffered at the hands of the Germans, who had occupied their countries. Think about how this fundamental difference in Miriam's circumstances shaped her experience of deportation and ghettoization.