



Through Our Eyes/Return to Life

For Grades 6-8

This lesson plan was developed for Congregation Kol Ami by Deborah and Michael Fripp.

➤ **Overview**

Objective: Understand Jewish life before, during, and after the Holocaust.

Estimated time: 55 minutes per week, for 4 weeks

Essential questions:

- What was life like before and how did it change over the course of the war and after?
- How was it possible for the Jews to go from tightly integrated into society to so isolated that they could be forced into ghettos and camps?
- How much of their culture were Jews able to maintain in the ghettos and camps?
- How were they able to rebuild after what they had experienced?

Essential lessons:

- The Jews in the Holocaust were regular people, much like us.
- Some were able to maintain their culture, humanity, and hope in the ghettos and camps.
- Isolating people takes specific effort and can lead to bad outcomes.
- After the war, the Jews rebuilt their lives, although it was difficult.

Materials:

- *Through Our Eyes: Children Witness the Holocaust* by Itzhak Tatelbaum
- *Return to Life* educational kit
- Whiteboard and markers (or equivalent method for whole-class writing)

Lessons (one per week):

1. How life changed (*comparing life before the Nazi rise to power to life in the ghetto*)
2. How did we get from there to here? (*how the Nazis were able to isolate the Jews*)
3. Life changes again (*life in the camps*)
4. What do we do now? (*how the survivors were able to move on after the war ended*)

Notes on staying age-appropriate:

- Never ask the students to think about what they would do in if they were confronted with these dilemmas. Ask instead what they think the people in the book did.
- While this unit discusses labor camps, try to avoid mentioning gas chambers, death camps, or other aspects of mass murder.



➤ **Lesson 1: How Life Changed**

Objective: Compare life before the Nazi rise to power to life in the ghetto.

Questions this lesson addresses:

- What was life like before and how did it change?
- How did they survive physically?
- How were they able to maintain their culture?

Essential lessons:

- These were regular people.
- They were able to maintain their culture, humanity, and hope.

Plan:

- Select pictures and testimonials from chapters 1 and 7 of *Through Our Eyes*.
(Do not use all of them – there are too many. See below for recommendations.)
- Have them look at the pictures and read the statements aloud and tell what they see/hear.
- Make charts of these on the board, comparing life before vs. in the ghetto. Note what is similar, what could not be continued, and what was continued in a different form.
(Potential topics: school, housing, food, leisure time, religious life, etc.)

Recommended selections:

- Chapter 1
 - P15: School: pictures, Dora
 - P17: Music: guitar picture, Hanna S. & Anna H.
 - P19: Recreation: pictures, Liliana & Kitty
 - P23: Synagogue: pictures, Alicia
 - Ask: What kind of houses did they live in? What did they eat?
- Chapter 7
 - P77: Ghetto: pictures of the wall, Sima
 - P78: Housing: Miriam + homelessness picture on p80
 - P79: Life: Yitskhok
 - P80: Life: Eva & Charlotte
 - P82-83: Physical Survival: all 3 testimonials and Reflection at bottom
 - P85: School: Sara S. & Warner
 - P87: Synagogue: pictures, Judith
 - P89: Helping each other: Pictures, Motele's poem



➤ **Lesson 2: How Did We Get from There to Here?**

Objective: Explore how the Nazis were able to isolate the Jews from the rest of society.

Question this lesson addresses:

- How was it possible for the Jews to go from tightly integrated into society to so isolated that they could be forced into a ghetto?

Essential lessons:

- Isolating people takes specific effort.
- Once a population is isolated, bad things can happen.

Plan:

- Select pictures and testimonials from chapters 2 to 6 of *Through Our Eyes*.
(Do not use all of them – there are too many. See below for recommendations.)
- Have them look at the pictures and read the statements aloud and tell what they see/hear.
- Draw a stair-step on the board. Label the stairs with each step of the process of isolation (loss of rights, being forbidden from school, destruction of property, humiliation, isolation through the yellow star).

Possible supplements:

- Is it possible to prevent the isolation and subsequent bad things by objecting?
 - Denmark refused to let their Jews be marked and when the Germans came to round up the Jews, the Danes rescued them. The Germans allowed the rescue in order to prevent the spread of opposition to the occupation.¹
- Should we speak up when people talk about isolating a population?
 - During the 2016 election, suggestions were made about banning or isolating the Muslim population. Should we speak up? At what point? Should we speak up when people are only talking about it or wait until laws are being proposed?

Recommended selections:

- Chapter 2
 - P30: white section, Susan, Boycott picture – why is there a soldier standing there?
Answer: to keep Germans out – the boycott was a failure because the Jews hadn't yet been isolated from the rest of the population.
 - P31: white section, Liliana and Chava
 - P32-33: pick one testimonial
 - P36/37: Discuss "For Reflection" questions 1 & 4
 - *Note: if you want to discuss propaganda, use pages 34-37, but this needs a separate class.*

¹ For additional information on Denmark, see the Supplemental Information at the end of this plan.



- Chapter 3
 - P41: Bernhard Rust, Erica
 - P43: white section, lithograph
 - P44: quote in white section
- Chapter 4
 - P49-50: pick from both the white and tan sections, consider "For Reflection" question 1
- Chapter 5
 - P56: timeline
 - P59: white section, Hanna D
 - P60: pictures, white section, Jacku
 - P61: Eva, For Reflection
 - P62-63: pick some
- Chapter 6
 - P68: Rosemarie & Macha, also Livia on P69 and Agnes on P70
 - P73: For Reflection question 1, *and 6 if you think they would be able to answer it.*

➤ **Lesson 3: Life Changes Again**

Objective: Understand life in the camps.

Questions this lesson addresses:

- How did life change when they got to the camps?
- How did they survive physically?
- Were they still able to maintain their culture?

Essential lessons:

- Essential aspects of life were broken – family, home, freedom, identity, feelings of safety.
- Some were able to survive and to maintain their culture, humanity, and hope, although barely.

Plan:

- Select pictures and testimonials from chapters 8 to 10 of *Through Our Eyes*.
(*Do not use all of them – there are too many. See below for recommendations*)
- Have them look at the pictures and read the statements aloud and tell what they see/hear.
- If you still have the chart of life before vs. life in the ghetto, add life in the camps to that chart.
- Ask: *What are the questions the kids in the book are asking?* Write them on the board. Remember, avoid asking the students to place themselves in the position of the kids in the book.



Recommended selections:

- Chapter 8
 - P93: History/Timeline
- Chapter 9
 - P99: Vladka
 - P101: Livia, packing list
 - P107: David B
 - P108: Sara S
- Chapter 10
 - P110: Sara S
 - P113: Barry
 - P115: Mel
 - P117: Miriam
 - P120: Jacob
 - P121: pick some or read all
 - P122: pick some or read all
 - P125: Simcha & David B (*these are essential for the 2nd Essential Lesson*)
 - P127: Simcha, discuss the For Reflection question

➤ ***Lesson 4: What Do We Do Now?***

Objective: Learn how the survivors were able to move on after the war ended.

Questions this lesson addresses:

- How do you go on and rebuild after something like this? Do you get revenge? Or do you find a way to rebuild life?
- Survivors say: "Grandchildren are the best revenge." What do they mean by that?
- Why Israel?²

Essential lessons:

- It is difficult to move on from a trauma of this nature.
- "They did not get revenge, they got married" – they rebuilt their lives.
- Israel was the only place that they could count on.²

Plan:

- Have the posters laid out around the room when the students arrive. Allow the students to walk around and consider the posters before class starts.
- *Discuss as many of these sections as desired. Discussing all of these may require two classes. Spend around 10 minutes on each.*
- *Liberation:*
 - Consider posters 2 to 4; read testimony from Yitzhak Zukerman on p13
 - Discuss: Why was liberation not joyous for everyone?

² The 6th grade class at Congregation Kol Ami has a strong focus on modern Israel and this lesson connects to that. If your class does not have such a focus, you may want to concentrate on other aspects of this lesson.



- *Jewish Brigade:*
 - Consider poster 5; read testimony from Hanna H on p14
 - Discuss: What did the existence of Jewish soldiers from Palestine mean to survivors?
 - *If necessary, spend a few minutes discussing the status of Palestine at the time.*
- *Trying to return home (and the Kielce Pogrom):*
 - Consider poster 8; read testimony from Sara Palger-Susskind on p 16
 - *Have read the testimony regarding the Kielce pogrom on p17 before class. Use this to inform an age-appropriate discussion of the pogrom.*
 - Discuss: What did the Jews find when they returned home?
 - *Discuss the views of the non-Jews, including their continued antisemitism.*
 - *Many found their homes were destroyed or occupied by someone else.*
 - *Extension for older or more mature students:* Read Primo Levi's testimony on p16. Discuss the difficulty many survivors had letting go of their experiences.
- *Escape to the DP camps (Bricha):*
 - Consider posters 9 and 10 and the escape route map on p26
 - *Have read the section "The Flight from Poland" on p 37-40 to inform your description of this to the students.*
 - Discuss: Why would people flee back to the very camps they had just escaped?
- *In the DP camps:*
 - Consider posters 6, 7, and 11 to 14 (the translation of poster 14 is on p29)
 - Read testimony from Pinhas Varshavsky on p19
 - *Have read the sections "In the Displaced Persons Camps" and "To Live Normal Lives" on p 40-42 to inform your description of this to the students. Note that the final DP camp did not close until 1956.*
 - Discuss this question: What was life like in the DP camps?
- *Homes Abroad (Israel and the US):*
 - Consider posters 17 to 20; read testimony from Malina Grav on p 20 (regarding the US) and from Irit Kruper on p 24 (regarding Israel)
 - Discuss: Why did they want to leave Europe? What did they find when they arrived in their new homes?
 - *Optional: if you have time or class interest, discuss Cyprus and the illegal immigration to Palestine with the testimonies from Yitzhak Ganoz on p21 and Yitzhak Yalon on p 23.*
- *Optional/Alternative: view and discuss the film*
 - *We recommend you watch the film first to decide which section to use and how to discuss it with the class.*



Supplemental Information for Lesson 2

from *Yad Vashem* (www.yadvashem.org)

Denmark

The southernmost country in Scandinavia. Approximately 7,800 Jews lived in Denmark before World War II. Of those, some 6,000 were native Danes, and the rest were refugees, many of whom were children from the Youth Aliya and Zionist Youth Movements. Other refugees had fled to Denmark in the years preceding the war. However, between 1934 and 1938 the rules regarding foreign refugees were tightened, thus the majority of the 4,500 Jews who had sought shelter in Denmark, left the country.

The German army occupied Denmark on April 9, 1940. The Danes did not challenge German control, so the Germans agreed to let them continue running their government and army independently. Included in the agreement was a clause calling for the protection of the Danish Jews, a point that the Danes stubbornly insisted upon. Thus, for the next few years, the status of the Jews did not change.

However, by the spring of 1943, the situation deteriorated. Encouraged by the victories of the Allied forces against the Germans, Danish resistance groups increased their activities. This caused tension between the Danes and the Germans, leading the Germans to rethink the status of the Danish Jews. When the Zionist youth discovered what was happening, many tried to escape the country. Some tried to flee to southern Europe by hiding under train cars, but their attempt failed. Others succeeded in escaping to Sweden from Bornholm Island by boat.

In late August 1943, after refusing to comply with the Germans' new demands regarding the Jews, the Danish government resigned in late August 1943. Werner Best, the German minister in the Danish capital of Copenhagen, decided conditions had ripened for a proposal to the Nazi leadership in Berlin that Danish Jews be deported. He subsequently developed second thoughts, for fear that his own relationship with the Danes be harmed. Despite this, on the eve of October 1-2, 1943, German police commenced arresting Jews. However, several German sources, chief among them the German legation's attaché for shipping affairs, Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz, leaked this information to Danish groups, who immediately warned the Jews. The Danes – reacting spontaneously and humanely – helped Jews reach the beach, and Danish fishermen took them to Sweden aboard their boats. The Swedish government announced that it would accept all refugees from Denmark, and the Danish resistance organized the escape of the remaining Jews. The king of Denmark, Christian X, in conjunction with the heads of the Danish churches, objected to the deportation. Within 3 weeks, 7,200 Jews and about 700 of their non-Jewish relatives were taken to Sweden.

Even though Rolf Guenther, Adolf Eichmann's assistant, failed in his general mission to deport Danish Jewry, approximately 500 Jews were still arrested. Of these, some Zionist Youth and Youth Aliya children were sent to Theresienstadt. The Danish government strongly protested the deportations, demanding a group of Danish representatives be allowed to visit Theresienstadt. In the summer of 1944, the Nazis set up a fake "model ghetto" for the visit of the Danes and an International Red Cross group. Even so, no Danish Jews were sent to Auschwitz. Most were moved to Sweden just before the war ended.

The manner in which the Danes looked after and saved their Jewish community is considered one of the most heroic and humane aspects of World War II, and is still admired today. Legend has it that King Christian X himself donned a Jewish badge, in solidarity with the Jews of Denmark. The story is fictional (as Danish Jews were never forced to wear badges), but it powerfully depicts the Danish king as a model of courage and a symbol of commitment to his country's Jews.