



# The Warsaw Ghetto

From Persecution to Resistance



*April 2023 marked eighty years since the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.*

## INTRODUCTION TO LEARNING ABOUT THE WARSAW GHETTO

Of the over one thousand ghettos created by the Nazis to segregate and persecute Jews in Eastern Europe, the largest was located in the Polish capital city, Warsaw. Starting in the fall of 1940, more than 400,000 Jews would eventually be forced into the Warsaw ghetto, where they faced extreme overcrowding, violence, starvation and disease. In 1942, deportations to the Treblinka killing centre began. In one of the most significant acts of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust, Jewish ghetto fighters launched an uprising in 1943 that lasted for almost four weeks before being crushed by Nazi forces.

In this activity, students will learn about Jewish life in Poland, the Warsaw ghetto and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising using [Re:Collection](#), our digital resource. Re:Collection allows students to explore the history of the Holocaust using “recollections,” which are pieces of survivors’ stories told through video interview clips, memoir excerpts, photographs and artifacts. Students will also explore [Four Stories from the Warsaw Ghetto](#), a digital exhibit featuring four Holocaust survivors. There are additional recommended resources for further learning.

The pedagogical goals of this activity are to gain knowledge of the Holocaust and reflect upon the persecution experienced by those in the Warsaw ghetto during this period. In addition, students will gain an understanding of the various forms of resistance that occurred in the Warsaw ghetto.

Survivor accounts of the Warsaw ghetto include discussion of immense suffering and death, so we ask teachers to take into consideration the maturity of their students. We recommend this activity for students ages 14 and up.

Learning through first-hand accounts helps students approach the history of the Holocaust in the most meaningful way. Personal accounts, when carefully grounded in their specific contexts, enable students to recognize the multiplicity of stories that make up this historical event. Read more about our [educational philosophy](#).

# PRE-WAR JEWISH LIFE IN POLAND

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Jewish life in pre-war Europe varied greatly in terms of religious practice, socioeconomic status, family size and level of acculturation into European society. Some Jews lived as minorities in cities and others lived in shtetls — small market towns with large Jewish populations. Many Jews, especially in Eastern Europe, were observant and organized their daily lives around Judaism, while others were secular and defined themselves as Jews based on shared history, ancestry and customs. Despite the variation across and within Jewish communities in Europe, there were many commonalities among European Jews who shared religious and linguistic history, cultural traditions and family bonds.

In 1939, Warsaw was home to approximately 375,000 Jews, who accounted for 30 per cent of the city's population. Jews had lived in Warsaw for more than five centuries. There was a vibrant Jewish cultural life, with many synagogues, Jewish newspapers, theatre, art and schools. Antisemitism existed, and there were moments when anti-Jewish sentiment turned violent, but in twentieth-century Warsaw, most Jews — whether acculturated or not — went about their daily lives in peace.

Learning about the rich, diverse history of Jewish life in Europe is an important way for students to acknowledge the millions of ordinary lives disrupted by war and genocide.

## THE WARSAW GHETTO

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The term “ghetto” originated in Venice, Italy, in 1516 with a law requiring all Jews to live on a segregated, gated island known as Ghetto Nuovo. Throughout the Middle Ages in Europe, Jews were often forcibly confined to gated Jewish neighbourhoods. Beginning in 1939, the Nazis forced Jews to live in crowded and unsanitary conditions in designated areas — usually the poorest ones — of cities and towns in Eastern Europe. Ghettos were often enclosed by walls and gates, and entry and exit from the ghettos were strictly controlled. Family and community life continued to some degree, but starvation and disease were rampant due to the miserable living conditions. Starting in 1941, the ghettos were emptied, and Jews were deported to camps and killing centres.

The Warsaw ghetto was a small area in the city of Warsaw where approximately 400,000 Jews were forced to live beginning in October 1940. It was the largest ghetto in Nazi-occupied Europe. Enclosed by a ten-foot wall, the ghetto's horrific conditions led to the death of 83,000 people from starvation and disease. Mass deportations from the ghetto to the Treblinka killing centre were carried out between July and September 1942.

# THE WARSAW GHETTO UPRISING

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising stands as one of the most significant acts of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. After the devastating wave of deportations from the ghetto in the summer of 1942, Jewish resistance groups began preparing for future Nazi operations. When the Nazis entered the ghetto to deport the remaining inhabitants in April 1943, about 750 organized ghetto fighters launched an insurrection, while the other inhabitants took shelter in hiding places and underground bunkers. After several weeks of battle, the resistance fighters were defeated, resulting in the destruction of the ghetto. Many Jews were killed, and the surviving population of the ghetto was captured and deported.



Pinchas Gutter at the Warsaw Ghetto Wall, Poland, 2016.  
Courtesy of Pinchas Gutter and the Azrieli Foundation.

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*Even if this world exists for a thousand, million, trillion light-years, no one could ever be able to tell all the stories of the Warsaw ghetto.*

”

**Pinchas Gutter**

# CLASSROOM INSTRUCTIONS



## LENGTH

1–2 lessons (90–120 minutes)



## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students learn *about* the Holocaust as they gain an understanding of pre-war Jewish life in Poland, life within the Warsaw ghetto and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Using excerpts from survivor memoirs and digital resources, students will develop their knowledge of these aspects of the Holocaust directly through first-hand accounts.

Students learn *from* the Holocaust by acknowledging how anti-Jewish attitudes and discrimination dramatically changed Jewish life in Europe. They will develop a greater understanding of how persecution occurred in many forms, as well as the importance of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. Students will engage in historical empathy and develop their critical thinking skills and their capacity to better understand contemporary global issues.



## MATERIAL NEEDED

- An internet-enabled computer or tablet
- Research organizer (Page 9)

Before you begin teaching about the Holocaust, it is important to reflect on your knowledge, goals and methods. To prepare educators and build their confidence in teaching this topic, we have created a guide titled [The First Step: A Guide for Educators Preparing to Teach about the Holocaust](#). As you move through the material and short activities in *The First Step*, you will gain familiarity with the [core content](#) of the Holocaust, reflect on your teaching rationales and consider best practices in how to bring this topic into your classroom. We encourage you to explore this guide before beginning any Holocaust education activity with your students.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### STEP 1

Introduce your students to the Warsaw ghetto with this [article](#) from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's online encyclopedia.

### STEP 2

Divide the students into three groups and assign each group a research topic from the list below. Students will complete their research using the guiding questions, the related list of Re:Collections and the selections from the *Four Stories from the Warsaw Ghetto* digital exhibit. There may be some overlap between the exhibit and the linked recollections. Students must also find one additional *credible* research source to add to their notes. Recommended institutions include the [Montreal Holocaust Museum](#), [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#), [Yad Vashem](#) and [Facing History and Ourselves](#). See Additional Related Resources (Appendix A) for more specific suggestions that you can provide to your students.

Research Groups:

1. Pre-War Jewish Life in Poland
2. The Warsaw Ghetto
3. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

#### Re:Collection

<https://memoirs.azrielifoundation.org/introduction-to-recollection/>

Watch the short instructional video on how to use Re:Collection. Then click "Enter Re:Collection" to access the digital resource. On the left, click "Special Collections," followed by "The Warsaw Ghetto" to find the featured Re:Collections below.

#### Four Stories from the Warsaw Ghetto Digital Exhibit

<https://spark.adobe.com/page/GLGm5FHRqzb4M/>

### STEP 3

Allow students to explore Re:Collection and the digital exhibit *Four Stories from the Warsaw Ghetto*. Students can use the provided research organizer to take notes on their assigned topic. Have each group create a slide deck, display board or visual representation of the gathered information to share with the rest of the class. They will also provide their peers with their additional research source.

### STEP 4

Have each group present their information to the rest of the class. As the groups are presenting, have students fill in the remaining sections of their research organizer. Be sure to fill in any important information students may have left out of their presentations.

# RESEARCH GROUP #1

## PRE-WAR JEWISH LIFE IN POLAND



### GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are some features or elements of Jewish life in pre-war Poland?
- What forms of antisemitism did Jews experience in Poland in the early twentieth century?

#### **Re:Collection**

**Arthur Ney** (Warsaw)  
["Cowboys and Indians"](#)  
["Family"](#)  
["Pre-War Family Life"](#)  
["Before the War"](#)

**Pinchas Gutter** (Lodz)  
["Pre-War Photographs"](#)  
["Growing Up in Lodz"](#)

**Elsa Thon** (Pruszków)  
["Childhood"](#)  
["Pruszków"](#)  
["Photography"](#)

**Amek Adler** (Lublin)  
["Amek's Family"](#)  
["Family Photos"](#)

**Four Stories from the Warsaw Ghetto Exhibit**  
["Jewish Warsaw"](#)



Arthur Ney (in back) and his family. Warsaw, Poland, 1932.  
Courtesy of Arthur Ney and the Azrieli Foundation.

# RESEARCH GROUP #2

## THE WARSAW GHETTO



### GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What was the Warsaw ghetto? When, how, where, why and by whom was it created?
- What were the conditions like in the Warsaw ghetto?
- What was daily life for Jews like in the Warsaw ghetto?

#### **Re:Collection**

##### **Arthur Ney**

["Persecution of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto"](#)

["The Warsaw Ghetto"](#)

["Smuggling"](#)

##### **Pinchas Gutter**

["Into the Ghetto"](#)

["An Apocalyptic Hell"](#)

##### **Elsa Thon**

["Moving to the Warsaw Ghetto"](#)

##### **Amek Adler**

["Death and Violence in Warsaw"](#)

#### **Four Stories from the Warsaw Ghetto Exhibit**

["Conditions in the Ghetto"](#)



Inside the Warsaw Ghetto, Poland, 1941.  
Imperial War Museums, HU 60662.

# RESEARCH GROUP #3

## THE WARSAW GHETTO UPRISING



### GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What examples of resistance were documented in the Warsaw ghetto?
- What was the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, when did it take place, and why?
- What were some of the outcomes of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising?

#### **Re:Collection**

**Arthur Ney**

["April 19, 1943"](#)

["The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising"](#)

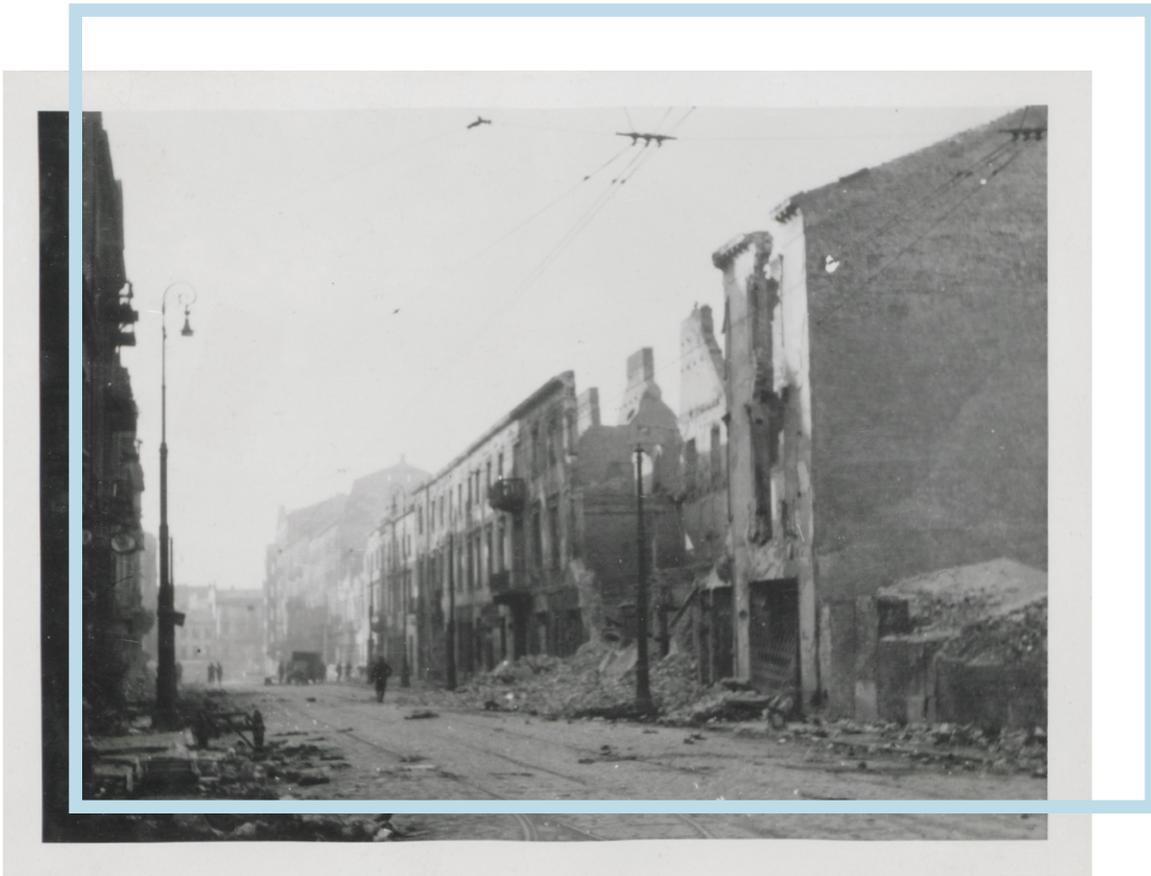
**Pinchas Gutter**

["The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising"](#)

["Getting Caught"](#)

#### **Four Stories from the Warsaw Ghetto Exhibit**

["Resistance in the Ghetto"](#)



Ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto, Poland, May 1943.  
*National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.*

# RESEARCH ORGANIZER

## PRE-WAR JEWISH LIFE IN POLAND

What are some features or elements of Jewish life in pre-war Poland?

What forms of antisemitism did Jews experience in Poland in the early twentieth century?

**Additional Research Source:**

## THE WARSAW GHETTO

What was the Warsaw ghetto? When, how, where, why and by whom was it created?

What were conditions like in the Warsaw ghetto?

What was daily life for Jews like in the Warsaw ghetto?

**Additional Research Source:** .....

## THE WARSAW GHETTO UPRISING

What examples of resistance were documented in the Warsaw ghetto?

What was the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, when did it take place, and why?

What were some of the outcomes of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising?

**Additional Research Source:**

## ADDITIONAL RELATED RESOURCES

### Azrieli Foundation's Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Vimeo page

[Stefan Carter – Childhood in Warsaw](#)

[Stefan Carter – The Creation of the Warsaw Ghetto](#)

[Stefan Carter – Life in the Warsaw Ghetto](#)

### Montreal Holocaust Museum

[Bozena Matis – Survivor Story](#)

[Jack Klajman – Survivor Story](#)

### United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

[Series: Warsaw](#)

[Film: Daily Life in the Warsaw Ghetto](#)

[Film: Conditions in the Warsaw Ghetto](#)

[Warsaw Ghetto Uprising](#)

[Warsaw Maps \(Media Essay\)](#)

[The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising – Photograph \(Media Essay\)](#)

[Emanuel Ringelblum and the Creation of the "Oneg Shabbat" Archive](#)

### Yad Vashem

[Warsaw Ghetto](#)

[Warsaw Ghetto Uprising](#)

### Facing History and Ourselves

[Video: A Day in Warsaw](#)

[Video: Rachel Auerbach and Jewish Life in Warsaw Between the Wars](#)

[The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising](#)



Amek Adler's Red Cross passport, 1947.

Courtesy of Amek Adler and the Azrieli Foundation.