

# Life Under the Nazis



*United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*

The entrance to the Lodz ghetto. The sign reads "Jewish residential area—entry forbidden."

In newly released photographs by Henryk Ross, one photo shows a group of smiling children at a banquet table. In another, a couple looks happily at a newborn infant. In a third photograph, a young boy holds a furry teddy bear. Everyone looks content.

Esther Brunstein knows better. With a magnifying glass, the 76-year-old native of Poland searches other photos, hoping to spot a friend or a relative.

Finally, she stops at the face of a young child. A shadow of sadness creeps over her.

"You see, when I see the face of a child like this ... you know he did not survive," Brunstein told *The New York Times*.

Brunstein is not looking at a family photo album but at dozens of photographs taken during the **Holocaust**. The Holocaust refers to the killing of 6 million European Jews and others considered "undesirable" by the German Nazis, who were led by dictator Adolf Hitler during World War II (1939-1945).

## Life in Lodz



*Leigh Haeger*

Lodz is located in central Poland.

Brunstein was lucky. She survived the Holocaust living in the notorious ghetto in the Polish city of Lodz. Brunstein and other survivors were in London recently to view for the first time photographs of the ghetto taken by photographer Henryk Ross.

Located in central Poland, Lodz was home to one of the largest Jewish communities in Europe. The city fell to the Nazis soon after the Germans invaded Poland on Sept. 1, 1939.

Almost immediately, the Nazis began rounding up Jews and forcing them to live in a small section of Lodz. Ultimately, more than 200,000 would crowd into the walled ghetto. Entire families were packed into a single room.

## Pictures of Daily Life

Not all the Jews lived that way. The Nazis selected a handful of Jews to run and police the ghetto. Those Jews were considered privileged by many. They generally had more to eat, worked at the best jobs, and lived more comfortably than the others.

Ross was one Jew who was among the "privileged." The Germans wanted Ross to photograph a favorable side of the ghetto. Many of Ross's photos show well-fed families, tailors, and doctors at work. One photo shows a man and a woman kissing in a park. One picture shows a chunky boy in a mini police officer's uniform marching behind his friends.

Dig deeper into Ross's photo archive and a vastly different portrait of Lodz emerges. Ross also photographed the daily atrocities of the ghetto.



*Image courtesy of The Wiener Library, London*  
A soup kitchen in the Lodz ghetto.

He took pictures of the starving people spooning soup into their mouths. He photographed others being loaded into cattle cars for the trip to the death camps, where millions of Jews were murdered. Many of those photos have never been seen by the public until now. Ross buried them during the war and retrieved them years later.

Today, those photos still evoke painful memories. "All of these images are very much stuck in my mind," Aron Zylberszac, who lived in Lodz, told the *Times*. "I still have dreams every night, and photographs make it worse, which is why I don't like looking at them."

### **Chronicle of Evil Crimes**

Like Zylberszac and Brunstein, Ross survived the Holocaust. He released only a few of his photographs to the public before his death in 1991. His son gave the collection to the Archive of Modern Conflict in London.

Thomas Weber, who authored the book *Lodz Ghetto Album: Photographs by Henryk Ross*, said the photos serve "to illustrate a particular interpretation of ghetto life ... [adding] to our understanding of the diabolical crimes of Nazi Germany."

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. According to the passage, how many people lived in the ghetto in Lodz?
  - A 120,000
  - B 200,000
  - C 1,939
  - D 200
  
2. The writer of this passage describes some of Ross's photographs. According to the passage, which of the following is a description of a photograph that is in Ross's archives?
  - A the German army marching
  - B a family in the park
  - C starving German families eating dinner
  - D starving Jewish people eating soup
  
3. It can be inferred from the passage that
  - A life in the ghetto was easy for all Jewish people
  - B there often was not enough food for people in the ghetto
  - C everyone survived the Holocaust
  - D survivors have good memories of living in the ghetto
  
4. Read the following sentence: "Today, those photos still evoke painful memories."

As used in the passage, **evoke** means

  - A ignore
  - B bring to mind
  - C forget
  - D get rid of
  
5. Which of the following best describes what this passage is mostly about?
  - A Esther Brunstein's life
  - B Henryk's photographs of life in a Polish ghetto during the Holocaust
  - C how to take photographs in a Polish ghetto during the Holocaust
  - D the life of Henryk Ross

6. According to the passage, how many European Jews were killed by the German Nazis during World War II?

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7. Based on the passage, why did Ross most likely bury some of the photos he took during the war?

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8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Henryk Ross's son gave the collection of photographs to the Archive of Modern Conflict \_\_\_\_\_ his father's death in 1991.

- A but
- B because
- C so
- D after

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

The public has not seen many of Ross's photos because Ross buried them during the war and retrieved them years later.

What? the public

(has not) What? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Read the vocabulary word and definition below and complete questions 10a, 10b, and 11.

**Vocabulary Word:** privileged (priv· i · leged): having special opportunities or advantages.

10a. Read the sentences below and underline the word **privileged**.

1. Some Jewish people were privileged in the ghetto, which meant that they had better jobs and were given better food by the German army.
2. She lived a privileged life and was able to travel to many places around the world.
3. Many of the people living in the ghetto during World War II did not live a privileged life because they often did not have enough food to eat.
4. Her dog Fluffy lived a privileged life with hundreds of toys.
5. Sally felt privileged in her role as the teacher’s helper, which allowed her to feed the class pet.

10b. Which image shows a man who lives a privileged life?



11. Who had a more privileged life in the Lodz ghetto: Esther Brunstein or Henryk Ross? Why?

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## Teacher Guide &amp; Answers

**Passage Reading Level:** Lexile 880

**Featured Text Structure:** Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic

**Passage Summary:** This passage describes the work of photographer Henryk Ross, who survived the Holocaust and took pictures of daily life in a Polish ghetto for Jewish people during World War II. The passage also describes Esther Brunstein's experience in the same ghetto in Lodz.

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- A Esther Brunstein's life
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- D the life of Henryk Ross

6. According to the passage, how many European Jews were killed by the German Nazis during World War II?

**Suggested answer:** During World War II, German Nazis killed 6 million European Jews. [see paragraph 5]

7. Based on the passage, why did Ross most likely bury some of the photos he took during the war?

**Suggested answer:** Ross most likely buried some of the photos he took because he would have gotten in trouble with the German army. The photos he buried showed images of the terrible conditions in the ghetto. The Germans wanted Ross to photograph the favorable side of the ghetto, so they probably did not want Ross to take photos of the negative things that were happening. [see paragraphs 10-12]

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Henryk Ross's son gave the collection of photographs to the Archive of Modern Conflict \_\_\_\_\_ his father's death in 1991.

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- C so
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9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

The public has not seen many of Ross's photos because Ross buried them during the war and retrieved them years later.

What? the public

(has not) What? **seen many of Ross's photos**

Why? **because Ross buried them during the war and retrieved them years later.**

10. ReadWorks recommends that you teach this vocabulary word to the whole class out loud using the four steps listed below.

**Vocabulary Word:** privileged

**Step 1:** Introduce the word

- a. Teacher writes the word on the board and divides it into syllables: (priv·i·leged)
- b. Teacher says: "This word is privileged. What is the word?" [All students reply together out loud: "privileged."]

**Step 2:** Provide a child-friendly definition

- a. Teacher says: "Privileged means having special opportunities or advantages. For example, privileged can describe people who have special advantages because of their job, how much money they have, or their status in a society."
- b. Teacher says: "In the passage, the writer describes a small group of Jewish people who ran and policed the ghetto, who were privileged. This meant that they had the special right to more food, had the best jobs, and were able to live more comfortably than the other people in the ghetto."
- c. Teacher says: "What is the word?" [All students reply together out loud: "privileged."]

**Step 3:** Practice the word

Teacher provides examples and additional opportunities to repeat the word. Read the 1<sup>st</sup> sentence out loud to your students. Begin reading it again and when you come to the vocabulary word prompt students to say the vocabulary word out loud. Then, finish reading the sentence out loud to your students.



- 10a.**
1. Some Jewish people were privileged in the ghetto, which meant that they had better jobs and were given better food by the German army.
  2. She lived a privileged life and was able to travel to many places around the world.
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  4. Her dog Fluffy lived a privileged life with hundreds of toys.
  5. Sally felt privileged in her role as the teacher's helper, which allowed her to feed the class pet.
- 10b.** Which image shows a man who lives a privileged life?



- 11.** Who had a more privileged life in the Lodz ghetto: Esther Brunstein or Henryk Ross? Why?

**Suggested answer:** Henryk Ross had a more privileged life in the ghetto because he was a photographer for the German army. He was able to get more food and live more comfortably than Esther.

*Suggested Additional Vocabulary:* notorious, privileged, vastly, archive, starving, evoke, survive, atrocities, favorable