

The Fate of Jewish Children during the Holocaust as Exemplified by the Story of Elżbieta Ficowska's Rescue

Martyna Grądzka-Rejak | Piotr Trojański



Introduction for the teacher

This lesson scenario is based on an interview with Elżbieta Ficowska and the story of her rescue during the Second World War. It is intended for students aged 14 and above. The subject matter discussed allows for its use in interdisciplinary classes in history, culture, native language, ethics, media education and social sciences. The material has been divided into three parts: the lesson scenario proper, a set of source materials and a worksheet with exercises to be done during the class, in a group or individually.

Instructions

This scenario contains five pieces of source material and a worksheet with exercises. The suggested lesson structure can be modified, along with the use of the sources and exercises. Equipment to play the recorded interview video material will be needed. Additionally, ensuring Internet access and allowing the students to use mobile devices will be useful throughout the course of the lesson.

Teaching objectives

The student will:

- become familiar with the plight of European Jews, including children, under German occupation
- be able to describe different survival strategies of Jewish children during the Second World War
- become familiar with the different ways Jewish children were helped during the Holocaust and be able to demonstrate how with stories of people coming from different European countries
- understand the meaning and importance of testimonies of Holocaust survivors.

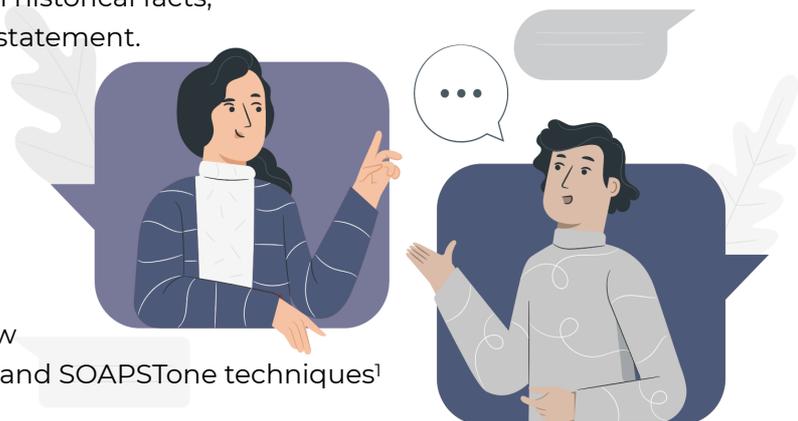
Skills developed

The student will able to:

- analyse an interview with a witness, source texts and photographs;
- point to cause-and-effect links between historical facts;
- create an independent argumentative statement.

Teaching methods

- mind mapping
- teacher-led discussion
- group work
- debate
- analysis of source materials, an interview and photographs using visual thinking and SOAPSTone techniques¹
- individual work with a set of exercises



Teaching aids

- sets of source materials
- worksheets
- educational materials for teachers:
 - an interview with Elżbieta Ficowska: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSoGHesz-l0>
 - the catalogue of the exhibition *Between Life and Death: Stories of Rescue during the Holocaust* (<https://enrs.eu/between-life-and-death>)
- boards/flipcharts, marker pens/chalk
- large paper sheets/Bristol board sheets
- a computer with Internet access and a projector/interactive multimedia board

¹ SOAPSTone is an acronym, standing for Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Subject, and Tone. The SOAPSTone questionnaire can be found in the Exercise 5.

Lesson scenario

Introduction

1. Hand out the sources and worksheets. Then ask the students to read the introductory text 'Interrupted Childhood: the Fate of Jewish Children during the Second World War' (**Source A**) on their own and then create a mind map based on it. Before they begin, explain the principles of mind mapping. Underline that it is a special way of note-taking aimed at a better understanding of the text read and a way of organising information to suit the individual needs of each student. Once the exercise has been completed, ask selected students to answer the following questions using their mind maps in front of the rest of the class:
 - What were the stages of the lives and the extermination process of Jewish children during the war?
 - What were the factors that conditioned the daily life of Jewish children in a ghetto?
 - How did the roles of children in families change during their life in a ghetto?
 - What was a Jewish child's chance of survival?

Summing up the students' work, point out that during the Second World War the German Nazis condemned the entire Jewish population to death. Particularly striking are experiences of Jewish children as they were unable to defend themselves and required care and support of adults.

If you want to find out more

'Children of the Holocaust' is an association of Holocaust survivors who were 13 years of age or younger at the outbreak of the Second World War or born during the war; because of their Jewish origins, they were targeted for extermination by the Nazi occupiers, incarcerated in ghettos, concentration camps and death camps, or had to conceal their identity.

Website: <https://dzieciholocaustu.org.pl/>

2. Present the lesson's subject matter and objectives to the students, pointing out that it focuses on the story of Elżbieta Ficowska, one of the children rescued from the Holocaust



Development

1. Show **Source B** to the students and ask them to have a close look at the photograph and then analyse it and provide individual answers to the three questions in **Exercise 1**.

These questions use the **visual thinking technique**, which differentiates between what the students see and what they think, and what they would like to learn. Based on the learners' natural curiosity, the technique encourages them to be attentive observers but also provokes them to think and reflect.

2. Once the exercise has been completed, ask the students willing to do so to present their answers in front of the rest of the class. To conclude, tell them the story of the teaspoon shown in the photo, pointing out the importance it had for Elżbieta Ficowska. For this, use the following excerpt from the survivor's statement:

'I have never seen a photograph of my mother or father. No one. Everything was lost in the ghetto. My birth certificate is a little silver spoon.'

3. Ask the students to read **Source C** and **Source D** on their own, and then list the four most important events in Elżbieta Ficowska's life (**Exercise 2**). Once that has been done, ask the students to write them on the board (or flipchart) in chronological order. Then ask them which of those events had the greatest impact on the survivor's life and why. Then let the students know that they will learn more details from the survivor's life from the excerpt of the interview to be heard soon. Before that, however, ask them to do **Exercise 3** – write what else you would like to learn about Elżbieta Ficowska's life.
4. Divide the students into two groups and ask them to read **Exercise 4** (group I) and **Exercise 5** (group II). Tell them that they can fill in the source analysis questionnaires featured in the exercises on their own while watching the interview.
5. Play the interview with Elżbieta Ficowska. During and after the screening, the students should do **Exercise 4** (group I) and **Exercise 5** (group II).
6. Ask the students to discuss their answers in groups and report on the results in front of the class. The goal is to perform a critical analysis of the primary source (the interview) using two different source analysis questionnaires developed by the USC Shoah Foundation for teaching using witness accounts as part of the IWitness project.² To conclude, ask the students which of the questionnaires seem more useful to them or which one taught them more.

² For more, see: <https://iwatch.usc.edu/educatorresources>.

7. Provide the students with quotes from the interview with Elżbieta Ficowska (**Source E**) and ask them to select one and – in pairs – discuss its meaning. Ask them to reflect on:
 - what these quotes say about the fate of Jewish children during the Holocaust;
 - the possibility of their survival and the ways of rescuing them;
 - the traits of people looking for shelter and their rescuers;
 - the dilemmas faced by them and their nearest;
 - the trauma and the retrieval of Jewish identity by the survivors after the end of the war.

Draw the students' attention to the quote from the interview with Elżbieta Ficowska:

'I think there were mostly indifferent people. There were those who ... were bad, who not only didn't help but – on the contrary – denounced others. They were pointing the finger at some telling the Germans: here is a Jew.'

Point out that despite being rescued, Elżbieta also met Polish people who had strongly negative attitude toward Jews. As a child, Elżbieta Ficowska was removed from Warsaw because her neighbours wondered if they should inform the Germans that the girl might be Jewish.

Summary

1. On the board/flipchart, write an open-ended sentence:

'The interview with Elżbieta Ficowska has made me think (about)/reflect (on)/feel/understand ...'

and ask the students willing to do so to complete it with their own reflections resulting from the lesson so far.

2. As a lesson summary, ask the students to reflect on what message the story of Elżbieta Ficowska's rescue can offer in modern times. To inspire the discussion, you can use the following quote from the interview with her:

There's a lot of light in this story of mine. It has a lot of optimism, because even in such hell, even in such inhumane conditions, people can be found, people who have a heart, who can love, who are willing and able to help. And this is very important, especially now when you tell your children about it, so that they don't get that ultimate negative message that the world is very cruel and kills itself, that people can be so entirely debased. Not entirely.

Homework

Ask the students to look for information about other Jewish children and juxtapose their biographies with the story of Elżbieta Ficowska's rescue, focusing on what they have in common and what makes them different, and how they can all help us understand the fate of Jewish children during the Holocaust. Tell them that they can find such information in, for instance, the catalogue of the exhibition *Between Life and Death: Stories of Rescue during the Holocaust*. After reading selected quotes from the catalogue (**Source F**) the students can decide which story they would like to learn more about. Additionally, suggest they try looking for stories of Jewish child survivors coming from where they live



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Sources

Source A

The introductory essay

‘Interrupted Childhood: the Fate of Jewish Children during the Second World War’

During the Second World War, the Jewish community as a whole was condemned to extermination by the German Nazis. No distinction was made either by gender, origin or age of the victims. However, among these categories, the experience of children is of particular note. For the Germans during the Second World War, as one survivor reported, a Jewish child ‘was a being who not only had no right to life, but even no right to death [...]. The Germans’ war against Jewish children began already in the womb of their mothers.’¹ It is estimated that of the approximately one million Jewish children (up to the age of 14) living in Poland (Second Polish Republic) before the war, about 5,000 survived the occupation, or about 0.5 per cent.²

Holocaust researcher Raul Hilberg, pointed to four stages in the Germans’ policy towards Jewish children during the Second World War: ‘The first was the initial restrictions. The second was life in the ghetto. Then came the selections for deportation or execution. Finally, the children were murdered.’³ The stages detailed by Hilberg can also be indicated when describing and analysing the extermination of adults. It should be noted, however, that the objectives of the policy of extermination of Jewish children set out by the Germans – to a large extent – were already implemented at the stage of life in the ghetto. First in the indirect aspect, as the group that was most exposed to the negative consequences of ghetto living conditions. The daily life of Jewish children in the ghettos of the General Government,⁴ depended on many factors, such as age, gender, family wealth, having parents or other relatives at all, etc. The fate of Jewish children in ghettos called open or semi-open, in smaller towns, and in closed ghettos, located in large urban centres, also differed. For one, the type and size of the ghetto influenced, among other things, the possibilities of obtaining food.

1 AŻIH, file ref. 301/1369, Relacja zbiorowa – do audycji „Dzieci oskarżają” [Collective report: for the ‘Children Accuse’ programme], k. 1.

2 *Dzieci żydowskie w czasach Zagłady. Wczesne świadectwa 1944-1948. Relacje dzieci ze zbiorów Centralnej Żydowskiej Komisji Historycznej*, elaborated by O. Orzeł, Warszawa 2014, p. 10.

3 R. Hilberg, *Sprawcy, ofiary, świadkowie. Zagłada Żydów 1933-1945 [orig. Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945]*, Warszawa 2007, p. 209.

4 The General Government (German: Generalgouvernement, GG) – territorial unit in Poland created by the Nazis on 26 October 1939. When the Germans invaded Poland in September 1939, they split the country into three parts: the western third was annexed to the Third Reich; the eastern third was occupied by the Soviet Union; and the central third was made into the General Government. The main goal of Nazi Germany was the total germanisation of the territory of the General Government through the direct and indirect extermination of the population and the destruction of the Polish cultural heritage. Sources: https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206246.pdf; <https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/slownik/generalne-gubernatorstwo>

Furthermore, the age of the child was important too; the older and more resourceful the child was, the easier it was for him or her to adapt to changing realities and to take on new roles forced by conditions. The fate of new-borns and infants was particularly difficult. For example, in the Warsaw Ghetto between autumn 1940 and July 1942, an average of about 230 babies were born each month.⁵ One of these was Elżbieta Ficowska, née Koppel. Under the conditions of war and ghetto life, the roles played in the family changed, hence many young Jewish men and women from the ghettos were forced to take care of the material means necessary for survival. Often it was the children – for reasons such as their small build or ‘good looks’, which made them less recognisable outside the ghetto walls – who were better able to provide their families with food.

Crucial to the fate of Jewish children in the General Government was the Germans’ commencement of Operation Reinhardt in 1942, its goal being the murder of all Jews in the General Government and Bezirk Bialystok (Bialystok District). Children were treated on an equal footing with the elderly or sick, or pregnant women, and were classified as unproductive, with the result that they were sent to die in extermination camps in the first instance. A chance of survival was given to those whose loved ones managed to guide them to the so-called Aryan side and there, under a false identity, or after being baptised, or in permanent hiding places, efforts were made to save them. Their experiences on the Aryan side also varied. The other group that could survive the selection during the deportation were older children, particularly teenagers deemed fit for work.

Author: Martyna Grądzka-Rejak

5 B. Engelking and J. Leociak, *Getto warszawskie. Przewodnik po nieistniejącym mieście*, Warsaw 2013, pp. 71–72.

Source B



A copy of a silver spoon from the Warsaw ghetto

Source: POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, photo: Mateusz Szczepaniak

Source C

The story of Elżbieta Ficowska's rescue

Henia Koppel gave birth to a daughter in the Warsaw ghetto. Although there was no guarantee that the child would survive, she used her underground contacts in an attempt to save it. Using a medicine, the six-month-old baby was made to sleep and taken out of the ghetto to the "Aryan side" in a wooden box hidden among bricks. In the box was also a silver spoon bearing the girl's name and birth date: "Elżunia, 5 I 1942". Henia Koppel died in the Poniatowa Labour camp in November 1943. Jossel, Elżunia's father, was shot dead during the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto.

The child's removal from the ghetto was organised by Stanisława Bussold, a 56-year-old midwife and member of the underground who helped Jews out of the ghetto and assisted Jewish women in giving birth in hiding. Her apartment served as temporary refuge for Jewish children.

Although it had not been planned, Elżunia (little Elżbieta) stayed with Stanisława for good. Given the time and circumstances, her childhood was spent in unusual comfort, far away from the realities of the Holocaust. During the war, she was hidden from the Germans and again after the war from Jewish organisations seeking out surviving Jewish children. She found out she was Jewish only at the age of seventeen.

Stanisława Bussold was honoured with the title of Righteous Among the Nations.

Source: the catalogue of the exhibition *Between Life and Death: Stories of Rescue during the Holocaust*

Source D

Photograph of Stanisława Bussoldowa

Source: POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, courtesy of Elżbieta Ficowska

During the German occupation, Stanisława Bussoldowa would tell her neighbours in the tenement house that Elżbieta was an out-of-wedlock child of a maid, yet they suspected what the child's origin was and threatened to denounce her. Bussoldowa rented a house near Warsaw, where the girls lived with a minder.



Photograph of Elżbieta Ficowska

Source: POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, courtesy of Elżbieta Ficowska

Elżbieta Ficowska could benefit from the motherly care of Stanisława Bussoldowa and the minder Janina Peciak. On a few occasions, her mother phoned her from the ghetto and the child minder would place the receiver close to the crowing girl's ear. The last of such conversations was held between them in October 1942 (photo: Warsaw 1942).



Photograph of Elżbieta Ficowska

Source: POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, courtesy of Elżbieta Ficowska

As a teenager, Elżbieta Ficowska was a rebel and once after a quarrel with her mother she ran away from home. She decided to look for information about her Jewish family. Discouraged by the archive director, she resumed the subject later thanks to her husband, the poet Jerzy Ficowski. A notarial deed with her father's signature is the only found document related to her family (photo: Warsaw, 1962).



Source E

Selected excerpts from an interview with Elżbieta Ficowska

1. You ask me how I managed to survive. I didn't manage to do anything. It was ... July 1942. It was on 22 July that such a great action of the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto began. And then I was there in that ghetto, I was there in the middle of that hell. I was six months old. It was just some kind of a miracle. All the more because I lost everyone. The whole family, a big family supposedly died. So there was a child left behind, who was six months old, without a mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, uncles or aunts. A six-month-old child alone.
2. I know it was a miracle. It was a miracle of love from both sides: on the part of my Jewish family, for whom I imagine it was a very traumatic experience to give away a six-month-old child not being certain about her future. And what's going to happen to this child given to people they didn't know? Well, and how much love was needed from the other side, to take in such a child and take care of her.
3. Irena Sendler¹ always said that there were not enough people who helped. She wished there had been more of them, yet they were there. And they were people who could be easily called heroes, because they risked their own lives and those of their families. No one is born a hero. Heroism is some kind of abnormality, it deviates from the norm. Not everyone is willing to risk their own life or the lives of their own children to save a stranger. But there were such people, and there were many of them even though Irena thought that there were not enough of them. She was probably right, because she herself was there.
4. Rescuing an infant was incredibly difficult, most difficult. And that's why so few such children could be saved. Well, because an infant cries just as ailing people do. There're a dozen or so people and the baby suddenly starts crying, lays down with its face on the pillow. The baby was choking, but there was no way out because it could attract the attention of the Germans.
5. The worst thing that has happened in my life was something I was not conscious of. Once I was conscious, I had only love and goodness itself around me. So I didn't have the time to get traumatised and I had nothing to pass on to my daughter.
6. Because as far as being Jewish is concerned, it didn't do anything to me. I knew nothing about Jews, I had no idea. In those days at school that wasn't taught and you wouldn't talk about it at home either. In my house it was a taboo subject because my mother was always afraid that the Jews would come and take away her beloved child. So I didn't have the slightest idea about Jews. I remember when I went to school ... and asked my Polish language teacher: Professor, who are the Jews? What is it, being Jewish? He stayed with me after class. We sat in the library for two hours and he wasn't asking me questions, he was just telling me about the Jews, about what happened, about the Second World War and so on.

¹ Irena Sendler (Sendlerowa) in Poland was a Polish humanitarian, social worker, and nurse who served in the Polish Underground Resistance during World War II in German-occupied Warsaw. In 1965, she was recognised by the State of Israel as Righteous Among the Nations.

Source E

Excerpts from accounts of Holocaust survivors and their rescuers from various European countries

Slovakia

As a child, I listened to a tale about a girl who could not be brought up by her parents so she was given to an aunt. As she was growing up, she started to call her aunt 'mummy'. After a long time, the girl's parents came back. When I was twelve, I discovered it was my own story.

Zita Kurz, Holocaust survivor

Read the story of Zita Kurz in the catalogue of the exhibition *Between Life and Death: Stories of Rescue during the Holocaust* (<https://enrs.eu/between-life-and-death>), p. 7.

France

A simple seamstress in her thirties and a mother of an eight-year-old boy, Lucienne Clément de l'Épine, was outraged by the fate of the Jews. In 1942, at the request of a Jewish neighbour, she dropped off a parcel at the camp in Compiègne where Polish Jews were interned. She was shocked by what she saw. She got in touch with a clandestine Jewish women's organisation, the WIZO¹, and began her work saving children from deportation and execution.

"Madame Clément", as she was called, took the children to farms situated west of Paris in the department of Sarthe. In two years, she saved more than 150 children. She travelled with several of them and recruited nurses whom she paid for their help. Most of the time, the families hosting children on the farms did not know their Jewish identity. Madame Clément went from village to village to visit the hidden children to make sure they were being properly cared for.

Arrested twice and questioned by the Germans, she succeeded in convincing them that she was a teacher giving private lessons to "pupils". She kept an up-to-date teacher's logbook and a list of children to go through. After the war, she continued her mission by collecting the children and bringing them back to the WIZO.

Lucienne Clément de l'Épine is one of almost 4,000 French people honoured with the title of Righteous Among the Nations.

¹ Women's International Zionist Organization

Croatia

I was Jewish, which is why I lived as if under house arrest. I did not go out, I did not meet other children, no one. When in the street, I always walked holding Djina's hand. And so it lasted for nearly three years.

Dina Kahn, born Büchler, Holocaust survivor

Read the story of Dina Büchler – the catalogue of the exhibition *Between Life and Death: Stories of Rescue during the Holocaust* (<https://enrs.eu/between-life-and-death>), p. 17.

Lithuania

I am the only one to survive of all my Jewish school classmates. During the war, I lived an illegal life and hid in 15 places. It was all possible thanks to the extraordinary help and courageous dedication of Domicèlè and other Lithuanians.

Jehoshua Shochot, Holocaust survivor

Read the story of the Shochot family in the catalogue of the exhibition *Between Life and Death: Stories of Rescue during the Holocaust* (<https://enrs.eu/between-life-and-death>), p. 19.

Ukraine

We were roaming around hungry, weak and freezing, yet had to press on. No one knows whether we would have survived, had Oxana not taken us to her place. She washed us, gave us clothes and dressed our wounds.

Mikhail Smolenskiy, Holocaust survivor

Read the story of the Smolenskiy brothers in the catalogue of the exhibition *Between Life and Death: Stories of Rescue during the Holocaust* (<https://enrs.eu/between-life-and-death>), p. 21.

Worksheet

Exercise 1

Have a close look at the photograph: what can you see? What thoughts and associations come to your mind and what questions arise when you are looking at it? Complete the sentences below:

1. I can see

2. I think that

3. I consider

Exercise 2

After reading Sources C and D, list four key events in Elżbieta Ficowska's life.

Your answer:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Exercise 3

Write down what more you would like to know about Elżbieta Ficowska's life.

Your answer:

1.

Exercise 4

Complete the table below by entering the facts and emotions expressed by Elżbieta Ficowska during the interview in the relevant boxes. Then answer the questions under the table.

<p style="text-align: center;">Facts</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Make a list of the topics, dates, event details, locations (town, region, country), names and groups.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Emotions</p> <p style="text-align: center;">What emotions have you noticed?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pay attention to the facial expressions and body language, reactions, voice, intonation, pauses and word selection.</p>

1. Can the emotions aroused by Elżbieta Ficowska's story have an impact on the assessment of the events described?

Your answer:

2. Why is it worthwhile using Holocaust survivors' accounts and what are the challenges related to it?

Your answer:

Exercise 5

Complete the critical source analysis questionnaire below,¹ and then answer the questions that follow.

<p>Speaker—Identify the speaker. Name, Experience Group, Relevant Info. What are her/his credentials on the topic?</p>	
<p>Occasion—What may have prompted the speaker to tell her/his story? What perspective or bias does the speaker bring because of an experience or situation?</p>	
<p>Purpose—In what way does the speaker convey the message? What's the emotional state of the speaker? Why did she/he give an interview? What does the speaker hope to accomplish?</p>	

¹ The exercise has been developed on the basis of the SOAPStone source analysis method. The link to the worksheet can be found at: https://assets.ctfassets.net/2fjqekz37jz/67LVNBEHTXLTpUJxBEaX/a101373d43b386596cec3f2cd77c4e8a/GO_Critical_Analysis_with_SOAPStone.pdf

Audience —Whom is the speaker trying to address (reach)? To whom is she/him speaking?	
Subject —On what topic is the speaker focusing?	
tone —What is the speaker’s attitude towards the subject? What diction (word choices) provides clues to the speaker’s viewpoint?	

1. Can the emotions aroused by Elżbieta Ficowska’s story have an impact on the assessment of the events described?

Your answer:

2. Why is it worthwhile using Holocaust survivors’ accounts and what are the challenges related to it?

Your answer:
