

Using Oral Histories in the Classroom

Note: This guide is recommended for use with JFCS Holocaust Center’s *Teaching with Rywka’s Diary* curriculum. To request the complete *Teaching with Rywka’s Diary* curriculum, please email Coordinator of Education Services, Yedida Kanfer (YedidaK@jfcs.org).

“We look at this wonderful world, this beautiful spring, and at the same time we see ourselves in the ghetto deprived of everything...we don’t have the smallest joy, because, unfortunately, we’re machines with well developed animal instincts.”—Rywka Lipszyc

“Reactions in the ghetto were strange. They were not your norm. They were not the reactions you would expect out of a normal human being. You become callous, you become selfish, you become like a thing without feelings. Because it hurts too much to feel.”—Lucille E.

As young girls, Rywka Lipszyc and Lucille E. lived in the same 1.5 sq. miles of the Lodz ghetto. Did they know each other? Probably not. Yet the experience of Lucille E., who survived the war, helps us to shed further light on Rywka’s story.



What are “oral histories”?

Oral histories are testimonies of Holocaust survivors, recorded on audio and video tape. These personal stories provide us with an immediate way to grasp the horrors of the Holocaust, complementing the written words of diarists such as Rywka Lipszyc.

The oral history clips on this site are excerpts from testimonies in the JFCS Holocaust Center collection. They have now been digitized and will shortly be released as an integrated collection within the larger USC Shoah Foundation’s Visual History Archive (VHA). This website makes them available for the first time in their digital form.

Educators and students may use these clips for any appropriate Holocaust education project. However, each excerpt has been chosen to correspond to a particular lesson from the *Teaching with Rywka’s Diary* curriculum. On the next page, you will find a short description of each oral history clip and the corresponding lesson from the Rywka diary curriculum.

Using Oral Histories in the Classroom

Lesson 1: Introduction

Oral history clip: Benjamin S. The city of Lodz was one of the industrial centers of Poland. Benjamin S. describes the industrial importance of the Lodz ghetto.

Lesson 3: The Ghetto

Oral history clip 1: Rivka S. “If you work good, nothing’s going to happen to you.” Rivka S. tells of her first impressions of the Lodz ghetto.

Oral history clip 2: Nathan M. Nathan M. describes everyday life in the Lodz ghetto.

Lesson 4: Dehumanization

Oral history Clip 1: Erwin L. “Humans were pulling the wagons.” Erwin L.’s first impressions of the Lodz ghetto.

Oral History Clip 2: Lucille E. Lucille E. tells of the ghetto’s impact on self and humanity.

Lesson 5: Spiritual resistance

Oral history clip: Lucille E. “And we buried her: no tears, no prayers...” Lucille E. describes how the ghetto deprived individuals of dignity—both in life and in death. She then describes her response.