

## Using Young Writers' Diaries in the Classroom

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The purpose of the following “cheat sheet” is to offer several historical frameworks for using the diaries in *Salvaged Pages* in the classroom, and to suggest particularly strong, clear, and useful entries on each topic or theme. It is a good idea to read (or at least skim) the introductions from *Salvaged Pages* that correspond to the diary entries you plan to use as they offer detailed biographical information, historical context, and perhaps most importantly, analysis of the significance of the diary as a whole. They will give you the background you need to use the diary entries accurately and effectively in the classroom.

### WARTIME CIRCUMSTANCES

**Diary entries can illustrate specific and unique aspects of life in various wartime circumstances.**

#### EXILE

These include diaries of young people fleeing Nazi Germany or Austria usually in the late 1930s. Most escaped westward to France, Holland, England or America, though there is one notable exception (the diary of Lena Jedwab) in which the writer fled east to the interior of Russia. Young refugees write about the mechanics of flight; loss of home, language, and separation from family; adaptation to foster families or unfamiliar surroundings, foreign culture, and new language.

Within the broad framework of refugee diaries, there are those in which the writer was attempting to legally emigrate and those in which the writer was fleeing illegally (which shares certain qualities with diaries written in hiding.) Legal emigration meant dealing with bureaucracy and red tape, the broader world context of nations' willingness, or more frequently, unwillingness to accept refugees, and the internal struggle to accept one's loss of status and place in society. For those fleeing illegally, there were physical dangers, logistical complexities, risk and fear.

DIARIST	ENTRY DATE	ENTRY SUBJECT(S)	WARTIME EXPERIENCE
Klaus Langer	December 19, 1938 (page 24)	Difficulties and obstacles in emigration from Germany	Legal emigration from Nazi Germany
Elisabeth Kauffman	June 9, 1940 and June 11, 1940 (pages 55-56)	Preparations to flee Paris in advance of German invasion	Illegal refugee from Austria in France
Peter Feigl	May 22, 1944 (page 88)	Illegal crossing of French-Swiss border	Illegal flight from France into neutral Switzerland

#### HIDING

Diaries written by young people in hiding invariably deal—at their most obvious level—with the difficulties of physically going underground and attempting to occupy a space in

the world without leaving any trace of the writer’s existence. On a deeper level, diaries written in hiding inevitably touch on the conflict between coming of age (a time of finding identity, testing boundaries, exploring the self) and having to hide, conceal, or lie about that self. Few writers address this theme directly in these terms but many—notably the diaries of Anne Frank and Moshe Flinker—suggest the conflict by devoting much of their diaries to the deepest questions of personal identity, relationships with family members, and religious faith.

Some diaries were written in literal hiding and, as such, address the problems of physical isolation and the mechanics of complete concealment. Other writers were passing as non-Jews with false identity papers; their diaries reflect not only the stresses of hiding one’s true identity in public, but also living in close proximity to the enemy and others in the “outside” world.

DIARIST	ENTRY DATE	ENTRY SUBJECT(S)	WARTIME EXPERIENCE
Otto Wolf	June 24, 25; July 4; August 2, 1942 (page 130)	Problems and risks of daily life in hiding	Literal hiding in forests outside Olomouc, Czechoslovakia
Moshe Flinker	January 7 and 13, 1943 (page 110)	Close encounters with the police; deportation of acquaintances	"Passing" with false identity papers in Brussels

## GHETTOS

The vast majority of diaries that have surfaced from the Holocaust were written in the ghettos of Europe. By definition, ghetto diaries reflect the experience of segregation, imprisonment, and vulnerability to the oppressor; they reflect the extreme physical suffering of hunger, cold, illness, and deprivation; and they capture above all the endlessly complex collective and social existence of a group struggling for survival. As such, they are filled with reflections on inequity, privilege and “pull,” as well as solidarity and, in some cases, resistance.

DIARIST	ENTRY DATE	ENTRY SUBJECT(S)	WARTIME EXPERIENCE
Yitskhok Rudashevski	September 17, 1942 (page 206) and October 2, 1942 (page 207)	Daily ghetto life; the look of the ghetto streets and how they represent the suffering of the Jewish community	Vilna Ghetto, Lithuania
Anonymous Girl, Lodz Ghetto	February 27, 1942 (page 231)	Food rations and condition of family members	Lodz Ghetto, Poland

Miriam Korber	December 26, 1941 (page 254-5)	Extreme cold and deprivation in Djurin Ghetto	Djurin Ghetto, Transnistria (Romania Jews)
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## HISTORICAL EVENTS, TOPICS, AND THEMES

**Diaries reveal themes and address topics that are central to the Holocaust experience and that apply to victims across various wartime circumstances.**

Often, diarists recount events or experiences that are well documented in other sources about the Holocaust. Such personal reflections on major historical events shed a different kind of light on them and are especially useful for teachers who are taking a broadly historical approach to teaching the Holocaust.

DIARIST	ENTRY DATE	ENTRY SUBJECT(S)	WARTIME EXPERIENCE
Klaus Langer	November 11, 1938 (pages 19-21)	Kristallnacht in Essen, Germany	Refugee from Nazi Germany
Yitskhok Rudashevski	July 8, 1941 (page 199)	Imposition of the so-called Jewish badge	Vilna Ghetto, Lithuania
Miriam Korber	Tuesday November 4 – Saturday November 8, 1941 (pages 249-252)	Expulsion from Romania to Transnistria	Djurin Ghetto, Transnistria (Romania Jews)
Elsa Binder	Monday, January 12, 1942 (page 314)	Recollection at three-month anniversary of massacre of Stanislawow Jews	Stanislawow Ghetto, Poland

There is perhaps no more powerful or prevalent theme than that of **moral and ethical complexity**. It takes the form of individual internal conflict, struggles among family members, and reflections on the corruption and inequity that existed among the inhabitants of the ghetto at large.

DIARIST	ENTRY DATE	ENTRY SUBJECT(S)/THEME	WARTIME EXPERIENCE
Anonymous Girl, Lodz Ghetto	March 11, 1942 (page 238)	"Theft" of food from family and resulting conflicts, guilt, and shame	Lodz Ghetto, Poland

Ilya Gerber	September 3, 1942 (page 340-341)	Description of lavish birthday parties among privileged members of ghetto youth	Kovno Ghetto, Lithuania
Yitskhok Rudashevski	October 17, 1942 (page 209)	Moral complexity in the ghetto: a woman "stealing" a pot of soup	Vilna Ghetto, Lithuania
Elsa Binder	December 24, 1941 (mid-page 307-308)	Jewish council, corruption, inequity among Jews in ghetto	Stanislawow Ghetto, Poland
Yitskhok Rudashevski	January 7, 1943 (page 219-220)	Unfair food distribution in ghetto; "pull" and corruption	Vilna Ghetto, Lithuania
Otto Wolf	September 15-19, 1942 (page 132)	Asking non-Jewish family for help in hiding; personal risk vs. moral action	Literal hiding in Olomouc, Czechoslovakia

**Deportations, loss, and separation** are inevitably, present in almost every diary in the collection. Here are a handful of particularly powerful entries on the subject.

DIARIST	ENTRY DATE	ENTRY SUBJECT(S)	WARTIME EXPERIENCE
Klaus Langer	September 8, 1939 (page 33)	Alone in Denmark after sudden departure from home in Germany	Legal emigration from Nazi Germany
Elizabeth Kaufmann	March 7, 1940 (page 43)	Sixteenth birthday alone in France	Illegal refugee in France
Felicitas (Lici) Wolf (Otto Wolf's sister)	April 19, 1945 (page 155-56)	Otto Wolf captured on April 19, 1945. In his absence, his sister Lici wrote the story of his capture and completed the diary in his place.	Literal hiding in Olomouc, Czechoslovakia
Eva Ginzova	September 27-28, 1944 (page 179-80)	Brother Petr's deportation from Terezin	Terezin Ghetto, Czechoslovakia
Dawid Rubinowicz	May 6, 1942 (page 294-95)	Father caught in a raid and deported	Bodzenty Ghetto (region of Kielce), Poland

Many writers mention books they were reading or ways in which they attempted to make use of their time through study while in the ghetto or in hiding. The diaries of Yitskhok Rudashevski and Peter Ginz are particularly vivid on the subject of **intellectual and cultural activity** in the ghetto.

DIARIST	ENTRY DATE	ENTRY SUBJECT(S)	WARTIME EXPERIENCE
Yitskhok Rudashevski	October 22, 1942 (page 210-11)	School and youth group activities	Vilna Ghetto, Lithuania
Yitskhok Rudashevski	March 14, March 18 1942 (page 223)	Yehoash exhibition; meaning of intellectual activity in the ghetto	Vilna Ghetto, Lithuania
Petr Ginz	October 1943 -- September 1944 (pages 169-174)	Artistic projects, reading, and studies	Terezin Ghetto, Czechoslovakia

For all those living under Nazi oppression, the liberation was the primary focal point for hope. But in the absence of any control of their destiny, it was often their immediate circumstances – news of the Allied forces, the quality and amount of a food ration, the weather, or their treatment at the hands of the Germans – that dictated how they perceived their circumstances. For some, acts of self-determination, such as study or prayer, played a role. In any case, the vacillation between **hope and despair** is a theme that runs through virtually every diary of the period.

DIARIST	ENTRY DATE	ENTRY SUBJECT(S)	WARTIME EXPERIENCE
Moshe Flinker	December 22, 1942 (page 107-8); July 4, 1943 (page 120)	struggle to maintain hope	"Passing" with false papers
Yitskhok Rudashevski	December 10, 1942 (page 216-17)	fifteenth birthday	Vilna Ghetto, Lithuania
Elsa Binder	December 31, 1941 (page 311) and January 30, 1942 (page 319)	passage of time; wait for liberation	Stanislawow Ghetto, Poland
Anonymous Boy, Lodz Ghetto	July 19, 1944 (page 390-91)	impending liberation and end of war	Lodz Ghetto, Poland

Alice Ehrmann's diary is the only one in the book that spans the period of **liberation**. It is worth reading in its entirety for that reason alone but the final entries, in particular, challenge the common perception of the liberation as a time of relief and joy for the survivors. Alice's entries touch not only on the devastation and despair she felt in the wake of freedom, but also on the toll of prolonged suffering and dehumanization on the survivors of the concentration camps.

DIARIST	ENTRY DATE	ENTRY SUBJECT(S)	WARTIME EXPERIENCE
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Alice Ehrmann	April 20-21, 1945 (pages 414-15)	liberation and confrontation with mass death	Terezin Ghetto, Czechoslovakia
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### LITERARY THEMES

Diaries reflect an **impulse to write** that ranges from the deeply personal to the highly public. Many writers touched in their diaries on how they saw or felt about their own writing (for a complete set of short excerpts on this theme, including entries from diaries not included in *Salvaged Pages*, see Facing History's Teaching Guide for *I'm Still Here*, pp. 5-7).

The following two entries are more extensive reflections on the subject.

Anonymous Boy	June 11, 1944 (page 371)	Desire to express himself; limitations of written word	Lodz ghetto, Poland
Alice Ehrmann	November 1, 1944 (pages 405-6)	Writing as testimony	Terezin Ghetto, Czechoslovakia