

LESSON PLAN

What is a Ghetto?

Listen to testimonies from survivors about their time spent in a ghetto. Students will learn the history of the term “ghetto” and think critically about the implications the history has on their understanding of the term today.

 30-60 min  Grades 9-12

DOMAIN
The Holocaust

SUBJECT
Oppression

TOPIC
Ghettos

Enduring Understanding

Ghettoization was both physically and mentally difficult. The harsh conditions caused many to lose their lives.

Essential Questions

1. How does Nazi ghettoization differ from what people consider to be a “ghetto” in today’s society?

Readiness

 10 min

Write the word “ghetto” on the board. Have students share what they know about the word and record their responses. Follow this discussion by sharing the history of the word.

According to the [USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia](#), the term “ghetto” originated from the name of the Jewish quarter in Venice, Italy. In 1516, Venetian authorities compelled the city’s Jews to live in this quarter. Following Italy’s example, local authorities and even the Austrian emperor ordered the creation of Jewish ghettos in Frankfurt, Rome, Prague, and other cities.

Input

 30 min

This lesson is a simplified version of a lesson by Echoes & Reflections, the full version can be [found here](#).

Play the video testimonies for [Joseph Morton](#) and [Ellis Lewin](#). While they watch, encourage your students to listen for specific examples of how ghettos during the Holocaust differ from their understanding of what is referred to as a “ghetto” today. It could be beneficial to take students to the resource, [Life in the Ghettos](#) by USHMM and scroll through the photos and watch a few of the brief videos.

Open up into a class discussion with the questions below:

1. In their testimonies, Ellis Lewin and Joseph Morton share some of their early feelings and experiences in the ghetto. How does Ellis say his life changed after being forced into the ghetto? What does Joseph share about his observations of life in the ghetto?
2. Based on the testimonies you just watched, how were ghettos during the Holocaust different from your understanding of what a ghetto is today?
3. How do you think Ellis, Joseph and other ghetto survivors would feel about the use of the term today?
4. What images have begun to emerge for you about ghetto life after listening to these two testimonies?
5. How do you think Ellis and Joseph felt sharing these memories? How did you feel listening to them?

Output

 10 min

Lastly, divide the class into groups of three to five to discuss the following questions:

1. Reinhard Heydrich, Nazi head of the SIPO (security police) wrote, “For the time being, the first step toward the final solution is the concentration of the Jews...” What do you think Heydrich meant by “for the time being”?
2. Discuss the difference between physical and economic segregation.
3. When people describe a neighborhood today as a “ghetto,” how is it different from the Nazi ghettos? Are there any similarities?

If time permits, open into a class discussion.