

Exploring the Lessons of the Holocaust through the Story of Survivor Peter Stein

“What are the lessons of the Holocaust? I think the importance of tolerance, of trying to understand other people...to understand their culture, to move beyond our own set of parameters [and] the blinders we have on our own eyes, and to appreciate other cultures, other people, other languages, other customs...and try and understand that we are all human beings. ~Peter Stein

Overview

In this lesson, students will view the short documentary about current North Carolina resident Peter Stein, a Holocaust survivor who was born in 1936 in Prague, Czechoslovakia to a Jewish father and a Catholic mother, just two years before Nazi occupation. His father was forced into slave labor and later deported to Terezin (Theresienstadt) - a work and death camp - and managed to survive, but his family of eight were all killed. Through the platform of Peter’s moving story, students will explore the realities of life in Terezin, while comparing this to the 1944 propaganda campaign Hitler launched with Terezin at its core. Based on Peter’s insights and words of wisdom, students will then explore what they believe the most important lessons of the Holocaust are by creating their own mural.

North Carolina Essential Standards for 7th Grade Social Studies

- 7.H.1.1: Construct charts, graphs, and historical narratives to explain particular events or issues over time.
- 7.H.1.2: Summarize the literal meaning of historical documents in order to establish context.
- 7.H.1.3: Use primary and secondary sources to interpret various historical perspectives.
- 7.H.2.1: Analyze the effects of social, economic, military and political conflict among nations, regions, and groups (e.g. war, genocide, imperialism and colonization).

North Carolina Essential Standards for World History

- WH.1.2: Use historical comprehension...
- WH.1.3: Use Historical analysis and interpretation...
- WH.1.4: Use historical research...
- WH.H.7.1: Evaluate key turning points of the modern era in terms of their lasting impact (e.g., conflicts, documents, policies, movements, etc.)
- WH.H.7.3: Analyze economic and political rivalries, ethnic and regional conflicts, and nationalism and imperialism as underlying causes of war (e.g., WWI, Russian Revolution, WWII, etc.)
- WH.8.1: Evaluate global wars in terms of how they challenged political and economic power structures and gave rise to new balances of power (e.g., Spanish American War, WWI, WWII, Vietnam War, Colonial Wars in Africa, Persian Gulf War, etc.).

Materials

- “Growing Up Under Nazi Rule in Prague – Peter Stein’s Story,” available for free viewing at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEfwMWZiFIY&list=PL_fMIWkr6JjZ3plmxBCOVfcpOcrSZmO-D.
 - The documentary is divided into 3 short chapters, with a total running time of approximately 23 minutes.
- Accompanying worksheet for “Growing Up Under Nazi Rule,” attached
- Terezin images (#1- #6) and accompanying questions, attached
- Theresienstadt: Red Cross Visit & Propaganda, handout attached
- Terezin Propaganda Images (#1 - #4), attached
- Lessons of the Holocaust Mural Assignment, attached
 - Teachers should determine what size they want students’ final murals to be and may want to provide the appropriate size and type of paper to them.

- Teachers may also want to consider the end goal of combining each student’s final piece of art into one large wall mural, to be prominently displayed in the school. If this is the plan, let students know this so that they can consider the larger work as they design their individual piece of art.
- Teachers who create a large scale mural can photograph it and contact the Holocaust Speakers Bureau at <http://www.holocaustspeakersbureau.org/> with the possibility of having your mural featured on their website.

Duration

60 minutes

Preparation

- Prior to this lesson (ideally for homework), provide students with the attached worksheet “Growing Up Under Nazi Rule in Prague – Peter Stein’s Story” and instruct them to view the 5 minute documentary clip provided then answer the questions.
- Let students know that in the video, they will be introduced to Holocaust survivor and North Carolina resident Peter Stein, who was born to a Catholic mother and a Jewish father in Czechoslovakia. As a young boy, his life changed dramatically in the Spring of 1939 when the Germans occupied Czechoslovakia and then began to systematically round up Jewish men, women, and children and force them into overcrowded ghettos, inhumane labor camps and eventually concentration and extermination camps. Most members of Peter’s Jewish family were arrested and sent to Terezin, a ghetto and concentration camp. Almost all were then sent to Auschwitz, an extermination camp in Poland, where they were murdered. Peter’s father was taken to Terezin in 1944 but survived.
- Let students know that when class meets again, they will discuss their first impressions of Peter Stein and learn more about his family’s struggle and survival during the Holocaust.
- If students do not have internet access at home or teachers do not want to assign this for homework, it should be completed in class prior to implementing the procedure below.

Procedure

What Do You Need to Survive?

1. As a warm up, instruct students to pair up and explain that they will have 5 minutes to brainstorm a list of items that would be necessary for a person’s survival if they were going to be living away from home for an extended period of time. Set a timer and encourage students to get as many thoughts on paper as possible. After 5 minutes, compile a master list by having each pair share an item. (As students share their answers, write any responses that would only be relevant in modern times – e.g., a cell phone – off to the side. Teachers should organize the master list so that it only contains items applicable in the 1940s.) As responses are shared, students should only provide an answer that is not already reported. After all partners have shared, ask for items not yet reported and add those. Teachers should look for missing items and pose questions to the class to highlight this. For instance, if medicine isn’t noted, ask students, “What if you get sick? Or what if you have a chronic illness, like asthma or diabetes?” If all of the items noted are physical items, teachers might also want to ask, “Are there aspects of survival that aren’t ‘things?’ Meaning, are there particular people, or conditions, or attitudes, etc., that you need for survival?” Leave the final list displayed, as students will need to refer back to it.
2. Next, tell students that they are going to look at some images from the Theresienstadt "camp-ghetto," which was located in the garrison city of Terezín (German: Theresienstadt), in German-occupied *Czechoslovakia*. It existed for three and a half years, between November 24, 1941 and May 9, 1945. Remind students that they were previously introduced to Holocaust survivor Peter Stein by watching the first chapter of his documentary, and that that most members of Peter’s Jewish family were arrested and sent to Terezin, including his father. Tell students that they will be learning more about Peter and his family by viewing chapter two of Peter’s video in a moment, but you want them to first examine the image provided to them with their partner. (Each pair of students should be given one of that attached 6

worksheets, each containing a different image.) Students should discuss the provided questions in their pairs:

- What do you first notice about this photo? What first strikes you?
- Describe the people pictured (their clothing, body language, posture, etc.)
- Describe the environment pictured (the weather, the conditions, etc.)
- What possessions and/or resources do the people pictured seem to have?
- After analyzing the photo, reconsider our class list about what is necessary for a person's survival. Do the people pictured appear to have what they need to survive? Explain.
- Based on this image, how would you describe life at Terezin?

3. Encourage students to share their thoughts with the entire class. Teachers should consider projecting a copy of each image and having all partners who worked on each particular image report out. As students share their thoughts about life in Terezin, note these in another list labeled "Life in Terezin" up front. Teachers will ask students to refer back to this list later in the lesson.

Growing Up Under Nazi Rule in Prague – Peter Stein's Story

4. Tell students they are now going to hear more of Peter Stein's story, including additional information regarding his family's experience in Terezin, by watching chapter two of "Growing Up Under Nazi Rule in Prague." Have students first debrief the questions they answered for homework, as well as discuss some additional aspects of chapter one:
 - What was Peter's childhood like before the Nazis?
 - What does Peter mean that it was an "assimilated culture" when referring to life in Prague and his parent's marriage?
 - What happened in 1938? What was the Munich Pact and what resulted based on this agreement?
 - Peter said that "life changed during the German occupation." What examples does he provide of this?
 - Why do you think pictures of Adolph Hitler and German flags hung in the classrooms? How do you think this made Jewish children feel? How did the other children feel?
 - What types of restrictions were placed on Jews? Why did Peter never wear the yellow star but his father did?
 - Why didn't Peter's father want to take the street car?
 - Consider the Nazi law requiring Jews to sit at the back of trams. What laws throughout history (and in America) might you compare this to?
 - Teachers should lead students in discussing the similarities to America's Jim Crow laws.
 - What happened when Peter's father's briefcase partly hid the yellow star on his coat? How do you think his father felt when being questioned and reprimanded in front of his family? How did Peter feel?
5. Tell students you are now going to play chapter two of Peter's story (around 6 minutes long.) Remind students: "After the Germans took over Czechoslovakia in the Spring of 1939, life became more difficult for Czech Jews. Peter later found out that his father's entire family was taken to Terezin, named Theresienstadt in German – a ghetto/camp where the Nazis sent many Czech Jews." (Additional information about Theresienstadt can be found at the USHMM at <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007466>.) After viewing the chapter, discuss:
 - What does Peter mean that Terezin was a ghetto rather than a concentration camp?
 - Theresienstadt served as a "settlement," an assembly camp, and a concentration camp, and thus had recognizable features of both ghettos and concentration camps. In its function as a tool of deception, Theresienstadt was a unique facility. *Source:* <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005424>
 - What types of people did Terezin house?

- What happened to Peter’s grandmother at Terezin? In what ways would Terezin (and any of the ghettos, labor camps and concentration camps) have been even more difficult and harrowing for people with illnesses (acute and chronic?)
- What did the euphemism “trains going east” mean? What is a “euphemism” and why did the Nazis use these so frequently?
 - A euphemism is a mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing. For example, many people prefer to say that someone “passed away” rather than died. (Ask students to create a list of euphemisms used in our own culture.)
 - Additional Nazi examples include *Sonderbehandlung* (“special treatment”), which meant execution, and the term *Endlösung* (“final solution”), which referred to the systematic extermination and mass murder of the Jewish peoples.”
- What slogan was displayed at the entrance of each camp including Terezin?
 - The phrase “Arbeit Mach Frei,” or “work will make you free” was displayed at the entrance. Rabbi Schlomo Rothstein in a letter to Vanderbilt students states: “Arbeit Macht Frei” — or “Work Makes You Free” — is *not just a slogan. It represents hate at its worst. They were the words twisted in metal above a Nazi death camp in which millions of human beings, Jews and non-Jews alike, were cruelly killed. “Arbeit Macht Frei” has been purchased with blood; it belongs to the murdered*”.
- What happened to Richard Stein, Peter’s favorite uncle, and his wife, as well as Peter’s father’s two sisters, their husband’s, and children? What do you think were the long term consequences of Peter’s father’s entire family being wiped out in this way?
- By the end of the war, how many of the Czech Jews who were sent from Terezin to Auschwitz survived? What impact does this have on a culture and on a once thriving community of individual people?
- What contributed to Peter’s father surviving?
- Based on what Peter shared, what were conditions like in Terezin? How does this compare to what you predicted conditions were like based on reviewing actual photos of Terezin earlier? (Have students refer back to their compiled list of “Life in Terezin.”)
- How do you think Peter felt not knowing where his father was? Why do you think Peter was kept in the dark (i.e., being told “he’s on a business trip”)? What do you imagine this was like for Peter’s mother?
- Why was it dangerous for Peter to get into a simple childhood brawl at school?
- Why do you think Peter was told to never tell his classmates his father was Jewish? How do you think this made Peter feel, knowing that he couldn’t be completely upfront about his identity in this way?
- What happened to Peter on the tram and why was this so terrifying for him?

Propaganda at Terezin

6. Tell students that you want to spend some time focusing on something that happened at Terezin that Peter mentioned: an inspection of Terezin by the Red Cross and Hitler’s subsequent commission of a film about Terezin. Discuss:
 - How did the Red Cross respond to conditions in Terezin in their 1944 visit? What happened to the people at Terezin as a result?
 - Why did Hitler commission a film about Terezin? What was the purpose of the film?
7. Tell students to return to their partners and to briefly review the image they initially examined of Terezin as well as the class list they compiled about life in Terezin. Next, provide students with the attached “Theresienstadt: Red Cross Visit & Propaganda” handout, as well as one of the four attached images of Terezin. Tell students that their image is one of Terezin from the summer of 1944, when the Red Cross visited. Explain that you are also going to play some of the footage from the film Hitler commissioned after the visit. The excerpt is of an orchestral performance and is available at: https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_fi.php?ModuleId=10007463&MediaId=234 . Tell students that as

they examine the photo provided and the various images in the film footage, you want them to discuss the differences (and perhaps similarities) as directed in #1 and #2 on the handout provided. After students have had time to discuss and answer the questions, have them report out their thoughts on the questions as a class. Further discuss:

- What is propaganda? Who and what groups develop propaganda?
- Peter (rightfully) called the film that Hitler commissioned Nazi propaganda. What makes the film a propaganda piece?
- Why is it important to always identify propaganda, both in history and today?
- Can you think of any examples of propaganda that you have seen lately? (For instance, students might note a commercial on television or a campaign ad.) Can you think of periods of history when you know propaganda was used purposely?
- Why are propaganda techniques often utilized? How are people influenced by propaganda?
- The worksheet asked you how you would describe Terezin if you only had this one image or video to go on. How does your answer to this question compare to how you described life in Terezin based on the earlier images? How does this illustrate the importance of consulting more than one source before forming an opinion (whether regarding a historical event, a current news story, a political candidate, etc.)?
- What role do you think propaganda played leading up to and during the Holocaust?

8. Instruct students to read the short article “Theresienstadt: Red Cross Visit” then answer the questions that follow:

- Why did Germany allow the Red Cross to inspect Terezin?
- What measures did the Nazis take to deceive the Red Cross?
- What do you imagine it was like for the prisoners in Terezin to be forced to participate in Nazi propaganda in this way?
- Why do you think none of the prisoners spoke with the Red Cross inspectors during the Red Cross visit? What would have happened to those who spoke? What does their silence tell you about the realities of surviving the Holocaust?
- Teachers may also want to offer a bit more information about *Brundibár*:
 - *Brundibár* is an opera written for children. Forty minutes long, it was composed in 1938 by Hans Krása, with lyrics by Adolf Hoffmeister. In July 1943, the score of *Brundibár* was smuggled into Terezin, where it was re-orchestrated by Krása for the various instrumentalists who were available to play at that time. The premiere of the Terezin version took place on 23 September 1943 in the hall of the Magdeburg barracks. Nazis arranged a special new staging of *Brundibár* for the propaganda film and the same production was performed for the inspection of Terezin by the International Red Cross in September 1944. This would be the last of the fifty-five performances in the Terezin ghetto; two weeks later, transportation of artists to Auschwitz and other destinations East began, silencing the most popular theatrical production in Terezin.
 - Tony Kushner staged a production of *Brundibar* in the USA a few years ago with sets designed by Maurice Sendak. Kushner wrote: “*Brundibár* offers inspiration to action, and exhortation. Be brave, and you can make bullies behave! Rely on friends! Make common cause, build communities, organize and resist! And tyrants of all kinds, in every generation, can be and must be made to fall.”

Escape to America

9. Tell students that they are now going to watch the last chapter of Peter’s story (around 11 minutes long.) Afterwards, discuss:

- Why was Peter’s grandfather actually risking his life by the seemingly innocuous act of owning and listening to a radio?
- Why was there such a difference in the reporting between the BBC broadcasts and the German controlled media?) In what ways does this happen today?

- What was the D-Day invasion? How do you imagine Peter felt hearing that the Allies had landed in Normandy?
 - The D-Day invasion occurred on June 6, 1944 when allied troops landed on the heavily fortified beaches in Normandy, France to fight the Nazis. More than 9,000 allied forces were killed or injured but their sacrifice allowed over 100,000 troops to take the fight to the Nazis in Western Europe. The Normandy invasion has been called the beginning of the end of the war in Europe.
- Peter’s dad returned on a Russian army truck in May of 1945 – how do you think Peter felt seeing his father? What does he mean when he says “my world is complete again”? Why was it a Russian army truck and not an American army truck that brought his father home?
- While Peter’s father was successful before the war and had worked hard in owning a bent wood factory, what happened to his business? What impact can such injustice have on the legacy of a family?
- Why did it take Peter’s family 2 years to get a visa to come to America?
- Why was leaving Prague difficult? How much longer did it take Peter’s father to acquire his American visa?
- Who sponsored Peter to come to the US? What do you think happened to those trying to flee who were not lucky enough to have a sponsor?
- Why did many Jews flee to Shanghai?
 - Many Jews fled to Shanghai during WWII, as there was no visa required to enter and there was a welcoming Jewish community already there.
- How do you think Peter felt when he saw Statue of Liberty and the lights of Wall Street for the first time?
- What type of culture shocks do you think Peter felt when starting school?
- Imagine the difficulty of moving to a new country where you do not speak the language. How was Peter able to manage?
- What do you think it was like for Peter and his father to return to Terezin for a visit, where so many of their family members died?
- Peter mentions a colleague who denies that the Holocaust occurred – how do false beliefs such as this develop, in your opinion? Why is it important to combat Holocaust denial?
 - Read more about Holocaust denial at <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007273>
- While Peter was lucky enough to survive, to have some family members survive, and to not suffer starvation or deportation himself, millions of others did. And even still, his experiences of worry, fear, antisemitism, and injustice are still unimaginable. Overall, what do you think the most difficult thing was for Peter to deal with?
- Despite everything Peter and his family dealt with, what sense do you get of Peter’s personality, character, and views on life today?

The Lessons of the Holocaust

10. As a culminating activity, tell students that you’d like them to think about what the lessons are from the Holocaust. Pass out the attached mural assignment and discuss:
- Peter notes that Germany was cultured, and Europe was full of art and music, yet the Holocaust was still perpetrated by these very people. Why is this important to note?
 - According to Peter, what are the lessons of the Holocaust? (Refer students to Peter’s quote on the mural assignment sheet to help focus their conversation.)
 - Consider our society today based on the lessons Peter says that we should learn from the Holocaust. Do you think we have learned these lessons? Why or why not? What specific examples throughout our society can you cite to back up your thoughts?
 - Are there additional lessons of the Holocaust, in your mind? What lesson do you think is most important and why?

- Teachers may also use this as an opportunity to discuss more current genocides. See <https://www.ushmm.org/confront-genocide/defining-genocide> for additional information.
11. Let students know that they will be reflecting further on Peter's story, everything they have learned about the Holocaust, and the question about lessons from the Holocaust in a mural assignment. Review the details of the assignment and let students know the due date. Teachers should determine what size they want students' final murals to be and may want to provide the appropriate size and type of paper (e.g., poster board, cardstock, chart paper, etc.) to them. Teachers may also want to consider displaying students' final work into a combined, large scale mural somewhere in the school. If this is the plan, let students know this so that they can consider the larger work as they design their individual piece of art.
 - Teachers who create a large scale mural can photograph it and contact the Holocaust Speakers Bureau at <http://www.holocaustspeakersbureau.org/> with the possibility of having your mural and your students featured on their website.

 12. On the due date of the mural, teachers will ideally provide time for students to view each other's work. For instance, at the beginning of class, have students hang their art around the classroom. Provide time for students to do a gallery walk around the room, viewing the works and taking notes on questions provided to them (i.e., "Which pieces of art most catch your eye and/or strike you and why? Which pieces of art do you feel best address the question of lessons to be learned from the Holocaust and why?") Another option is to provide students with Post-It notes that they write comments and observations on regarding particular pieces of art and then post them by that piece. After students have had 10-15 minutes for their gallery walk, debrief the art together as a class. In a final discussion regarding the lessons to be learned from the Holocaust, ensure the following themes from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum are touched upon:
 - Understand the roots and ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping in any society.
 - Develop an awareness of the value of pluralism and an acceptance of diversity.
 - Explore the dangers of remaining silent, apathetic, and indifferent to the oppression of others.
 - Think about the use and abuse of power as well as the roles and responsibilities of individuals, organizations, and nations when confronted with civil rights violations and/or policies of genocide.
 - Understand how a modern nation can utilize its technological expertise and bureaucratic infrastructure to implement destructive policies ranging from social engineering to genocide.
 - As students gain insight into the many historical, social, religious, political, and economic factors that cumulatively resulted in the Holocaust, they gain awareness of the complexity of the subject and a perspective on how a convergence of factors can contribute to the disintegration of democratic values. Students come to understand that it is the responsibility of citizens in any society to learn to identify danger signals and to know when to react.
 - Source: <https://www.ushmm.org/educators/teaching-about-the-holocaust/why-teach-about-the-holocaust>

 13. In closing, ask students to respond to: If you could ask Peter a question, what would you want to know and why? If you could offer words of gratitude or encouragement to Peter, what would you want to say to him?
 - Teachers who are interested can contact the Holocaust Speakers Bureau at <http://www.holocaustspeakersbureau.org/> or Peter Stein directly at: steinpeterj@gmail.com. (Peter is also available to visit schools in the Triangle region to share his personal experiences and teach Holocaust history.)



German Jews, wearing identification tags, before deportation to Theresienstadt. Wiesbaden, Germany, August 1942. (https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_ph.php?ModuleId=0&MediaId=1609)

- What do you first notice about this photo? What first strikes you?
- Describe the people pictured (their clothing, body language, posture, etc.)
- Describe the environment pictured (the weather, the conditions, etc.)
- What possessions and/or resources do the people pictured seem to have?
- After analyzing the photo, reconsider our class list about what is necessary for a person's survival. Do the people pictured appear to have what they need to survive? Explain.
- Based on this image, how would you describe life at Terezin?



Czech Jews are deported from Bauschowitz to Theresienstadt ghetto. Czechoslovakia, between 1941 and 1943. Source: https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_ph.php?ModuleId=0&MediaId=2785. Bauschowitz was the village where Jews had to get off the train and walk to the Theresienstadt ghetto, carrying their bundles. Peter Stein's 78 year old grandmother Sophie probably had to take that walk on a hot or warm summer day in 1942.

- What do you first notice about this photo? What first strikes you?
- Describe the people pictured (their clothing, body language, posture, etc.)
- Describe the environment pictured (the weather, the conditions, etc.)
- What possessions and/or resources do the people pictured seem to have?
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- Based on this image, how would you describe life at Terezin?



The arrival of Jews at the Terezin (Theresienstadt) Ghetto, about 60 kilometers from Prague, Czechoslovakia. Source: www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org. The trains unloaded at Bohusovice, the nearest train station to Theresienstadt, approximately 2 km away. The deportees were then forced to disembark and march the rest of the way to Theresienstadt – carrying all of their luggage.

- What do you first notice about this photo? What first strikes you?
- Describe the people pictured (their clothing, body language, posture, etc.)
- Describe the environment pictured (the weather, the conditions, etc.)
- What possessions and/or resources do the people pictured seem to have?
- After analyzing the photo, reconsider our class list about what is necessary for a person's survival. Do the people pictured appear to have what they need to survive? Explain.
- Based on this image, how would you describe life at Terezin?



Women prisoners lie on thin mattresses on the floor of a barracks in the Theresienstadt ghetto. Czechoslovakia, between 1941- 1945. (This is also the same barrack where Peter Stein's grandmother lived for 19 days before she died.) Source: https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_ph.php?ModuleId=0&MediaId=1612

- What do you first notice about this photo? What first strikes you?
- Describe the people pictured (their clothing, body language, posture, etc.)
- Describe the environment pictured (the weather, the conditions, etc.)
- What possessions and/or resources do the people pictured seem to have?
- After analyzing the photo, reconsider our class list about what is necessary for a person's survival. Do the people pictured appear to have what they need to survive? Explain.
- Based on this image, how would you describe life at Terezin?



Women prepare food outdoors in the Theresienstadt ghetto. Theresienstadt, Czechoslovakia, between 1941 and 1945. Source: https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_ph.php?ModuleId=0&MediaId=1614

- What do you first notice about this photo? What first strikes you?
- Describe the people pictured (their clothing, body language, posture, etc.)
- Describe the environment pictured (the weather, the conditions, etc.)
- What possessions and/or resources do the people pictured seem to have?
- After analyzing the photo, reconsider our class list about what is necessary for a person's survival. Do the people pictured appear to have what they need to survive? Explain.
- Based on this image, how would you describe life at Terezin?



A transport of Jewish prisoners marches through the snow from the Bauschovitz train station to Theresienstadt. Czechoslovakia, 1942. Source:

- What do you first notice about this photo? What first strikes you?
- Describe the people pictured (their clothing, body language, posture, etc.)
- Describe the environment pictured (the weather, the conditions, etc.)
- What possessions and/or resources do the people pictured seem to have?
- After analyzing the photo, reconsider our class list about what is necessary for a person's survival. Do the people pictured appear to have what they need to survive? Explain.
- Based on this image, how would you describe life at Terezin?

Name: _____

Theresienstadt: Red Cross Visit & Propaganda

1. What differences do you notice between the images of Terezin you viewed earlier and the images presented to you now, both in the photo provided here and in the video excerpt? Respond in terms of the following categories:
 - Living conditions
 - Surrounding environment
 - People (their clothing, facial expressions, body language, etc.)
 - Activities/Actions
 - Other observations of differences/inconsistencies
2. How might you describe life at Terezin if you only had this one image and video to go on?

Theresienstadt: Red Cross Visit

Succumbing to pressure following the deportation of Danish Jews to Theresienstadt, the Germans permitted representatives from the Danish Red Cross and the International Red Cross to visit in June 1944. It was all an elaborate hoax. The Germans intensified deportations from the ghetto shortly before the visit to make the place much less crowded, and the ghetto itself was "beautified." Gardens were planted, houses painted, food stores opened up and stocked with supplies and barracks renovated. The Nazis staged social and cultural events for the visiting dignitaries. Once the visit was over, the Germans resumed deportations from Theresienstadt, which did not end until October 1944.

Danish leaders—from King Christian on down—were insistent that the Danish Red Cross visit the Danish deportees to gather firsthand information on their treatment in Theresienstadt. German diplomats felt that German standing in Denmark and Sweden would deteriorate, to a point harmful to German interests. The Wehrmacht (German armed forces) wanted peace and quiet in Denmark, and the Germans hoped, in Sweden, to continue to import ball bearings needed for the war effort. Under considerable pressure, the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) agreed to consider the matter and, at the end of 1943, ordered the Theresienstadt camp-ghetto authorities to "prepare" the facility. After considerable stalling, the RSHA finally authorized a visit for representatives of the International Red Cross and the Danish Red Cross for June 1944 and ordered the SS staff in Theresienstadt to complete the preparations.

Elaborate measures were taken to disguise conditions in the ghetto and to portray an atmosphere of normalcy. The SS engaged the Council of Jewish Elders and the camp-ghetto "residents" in a "beautification" program. Prisoners planted gardens, painted housing complexes, renovated barracks, and developed and practiced cultural programs for the entertainment of the visiting dignitaries to convince them that the "Seniors' Settlement" was real. The SS authorities intensified deportations of Jews from the ghetto to alleviate overcrowding, and as part of the preparations in the camp-ghetto, 7,503 people were deported to Auschwitz between May 16 and May 18, 1944.

On June 23, 1944, as planned, two delegates from the International Red Cross and one from the Danish Red Cross visited the ghetto, accompanied by Theresienstadt commandant SS First Lieutenant Karl Rahm and one of his deputies. The facility had been "cleaned up" and rearranged as a model village. Hints that all was not well included a bruise under the eye of the "mayor" of the "town," a part "played" by Paul Eppstein, the Elders' Council member representing German Jews. Despite these hints, the International Red Cross inspectors were taken in. This was in part because they expected to see ghetto conditions like those in occupied Poland with people starving in the streets and armed policemen on the perimeter.

The Jewish administration, under duress from the Germans, treated the visiting delegation to the trial of a person "charged" with theft, which "just happened" to be taking place; a soccer game in the camp square complete with cheering crowds; and a performance of the children's opera *Brundibár*, performed in a community hall built specifically for this occasion.

As a result of preparations for the Red Cross visit, the summer of 1944 was, as one survivor later wrote, "the best time we had in Terezín. Nobody thought of new transports."

In the wake of the inspection, SS officials in the Protectorate produced a film using ghetto residents as a demonstration of the benevolent treatment the Jewish "residents" of Theresienstadt supposedly enjoyed. In Nazi propaganda, Theresienstadt was cynically described as a "spa town" where elderly German Jews could "retire" in safety. When the film was completed, SS officials deported most of the "cast" to the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center. Despite the effort involved in making the propaganda film, the German authorities ultimately decided not to screen it. (Source: <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007463>)

3. Why did Germany allow the Red Cross to inspect Terezin?

4. What measures did the Nazis take to deceive the Red Cross?

5. What you think the prisoners in Terezin thought and felt while being forced to participate in Nazi propaganda?

6. Why do you think none of the prisoners said anything during the Red Cross visit? What does their silence tell you about the realities of surviving the Holocaust?

Terezin – Propaganda Images

Image 1



A photograph of Jewish children in the Theresienstadt ghetto taken during an inspection by the International Red Cross. Prior to this visit, the ghetto was "beautified" in order to deceive the visitors. Czechoslovakia, June 23, 1944. Source: https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_ph.php?ModuleId=0&MediaId=6600

Image 2



Children in the Theresienstadt ghetto photographed by the Red Cross on June 23, 1944 during their visit in the ghetto. Source: <http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/about/03/terezin.asp>

Image 3



A scene staged by the Nazis for the International Red Cross inspection of the Theresienstadt ghetto. The people are probably watching a soccer match. Czechoslovakia, June 23, 1944. Source: https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_ph.php?ModuleId=0&MediaId=6603

Image 4



Still photograph from the Nazi propaganda film, "Der Fuehrer Schenkt den Juden eine Stadt" [The Fuehrer gives the Jews a City]. Prisoners sitting outside watch an outdoor event at the Theresienstadt concentration camp. (1944). Source: <http://history1900s.about.com/od/theresienstadt/a/terezin.htm>

Name: _____

Mural Assignment: The Lessons of the Holocaust

What are the most important lessons we can learn from the Holocaust? According to Holocaust survivor Peter Stein:

“What are the lessons of the Holocaust? I think the importance of tolerance, of trying to understand other people...to understand their culture, to move beyond our own set of parameters [and] the blinders we have on our own eyes, and to appreciate other cultures, other people, other languages, other customs...and try and understand that we are all human beings. We also need institutions, we need policies, we need laws that protect human rights and equality.” -Peter Stein

Continue to consider this question for yourself and create a mural that represents your answer to “What are the lessons of the Holocaust?” To complete your mural, take the following steps:

1. Brainstorm what you feel are the most important lessons of the Holocaust. Create a list of words and phrases as you think. Finally, try and find the main themes (3 or more) of your brainstorm – this will become your answer to the question, “What are the lessons of the Holocaust?”
2. Select 3 (or more) images that represent your answer the question, “What are the lessons of the Holocaust?” Your images can be literal or abstract. They might be images from the Holocaust, images from other points in history, or current event images.
3. Paste the images onto the paper provided. Label each photo with a word or phrase that illustrates how it represents a lesson from the Holocaust. Be creative and artistic in how you use text on your mural.
4. You can also embellish your mural with other artistic features. For example, you might choose to represent your work in a mosaic or collage style. You might intermingle your own drawings with the images and text. Or, you might decide to make a statement with various colors, symbols, or three-dimensional objects that you add to the overall work. Be creative in how you represent your answer to “What are the lessons of the Holocaust?”
5. Finally, give your mural a title that reflects your answer to the question, “What are the lessons of the Holocaust?” Write an artist’s statement (at least one paragraph) that summarizes your answer to the question and how your mural reflects your ideas.

Due date: _____

What questions do you have about this assignment?