



THE NEW MUSICAL
**IMAGINE
THIS**

**EDUCATION
RESOURCE PACK**

written by Helen Cadbury

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INTRODUCTION FOR TEACHERS

Imagine This is a musical about the triumph of the human spirit, set against the backdrop of the Warsaw Ghetto, where love and art were still able to flourish.

In the Education Pack we have included background information and questions for discussion and further study. These resources will be useful to students of History, Citizenship, RE and Performing Arts subjects and can be used for preparation or follow up activities, although we strongly recommend that all students are prepared by considering the historical context of the play.

The education pack is aimed at students from year 9 up to and including post-16.

HISTORY

Imagine This is a story based on historical events in the Warsaw Ghetto during the Holocaust. Although its characters are fictional, it is important that students coming to see the show have some background understanding of the issues raised. We have included personal stories of those who survived the Holocaust as well as pages on theatre in the ghetto. Within **Imagine This** is a second story, the play within-the-play, about Masada. We have included information about the place, its legend and its symbolic importance in Jewish history.

PERFORMING ARTS AND THEATRE STUDIES

At the centre of **Imagine This** is the idea that people continue to create art and culture as an essential element of human nature, despite horrific deprivations. It is in this context that the show might be studied as part of the performing arts curriculum. We have also included background information about the writing of **Imagine This** and about the history of theatrical performance in the ghetto itself.

FURTHER RESOURCES

In the wider context of teaching about the Holocaust, whether it is through history, religious education, psychology or the various performing arts disciplines, we have signposted websites and publications at the back of this pack to support your programme of work. We would particularly like to highlight the guidelines for teachers published by The Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research, available at www.holocausttaskforce.org

With thanks to all those whose contributions made this pack possible.

SYNOPSIS

The Setting: Warsaw, Poland

The Time: 31 August 1939-Winter 1941

ACT II

As *Imagine This* opens, REBECCA WARSHOWSKY is remembering her life before the war. Darkness turns to daylight and Rebecca's family appears: her father, DANIEL WARSHOWSKY, the head of a Polish theatre company; her mother, Daniel's wife and leading lady, HANNAH; Rebecca's 10 year old brother, LEON; the comic acting duo of Daniel's sister SARAH and her husband MAX; and Rebecca's grandfather, ADOLPH (Daniel and Sarah's father), a renowned Shakespearean actor. What a glorious day it was, that last day of Summer, August 31st, 1939 the day before the Nazis invaded Poland.



Imagine This rehearsals: Photo Alastair Muir

Fast forward two years to the ghetto in Warsaw. Daniel and his family, along with 450,000 other Polish Jews, have been imprisoned behind stone walls topped by barbed wire. In the abandoned train depot where the Warshowsky family have taken refuge after their theatre was bombed, they and the other cold and hungry members of the acting company prepare to rehearse. There's IZZY, a comic from Berlin, OTTO, a German film actor, LOLA, a chorus girl, JAN, the son of a Rabbi, and JACOB, a young Polish actor. Daniel has written a musical about Masada, the ancient Judean mountain where 980 rebels held 10,000 Roman soldiers at bay - a story to inspire his audiences.

ADAM, a resistance fighter, bursts into the building, chased by Nazis. Daniel hides Adam's gun and instructs him to pretend to be one of the actors. When CAPTAIN BLICK and his soldiers enter to search the premises and discover Jacob removing Adam's gun from the floorboards, BLICK has Jacob arrested. Adam has no choice but to keep up the subterfuge if he's not to betray the Warshowskys for giving him shelter. So after Jacob is dragged away, Adam is forced to play the leading part opposite Rebecca. As they begin to rehearse, they find that one thing on which they can agree is there's no place for love in a world like theirs. However, as the days go by leading up to opening night, both young people start to experience a strong attraction to each other.

The moment approaches for Daniel's show to start. The actors are preparing while Adam argues with Daniel that it's pointless to put on plays while the Nazis are bent on destroying them. Rebecca shares Adam's disillusionment. She says they're just playing into the Nazis' hands, keeping the ghetto entertained while everyone starves to death. Daniel argues that they can still feed the souls of their ghetto audience with hope. As the curtain rises on Daniel's play of *Masada*, he addresses his ghetto audience, asking them to see more than bare floorboards and starving actors, to close their ears to those who say they can't survive, to come with him on a journey two thousand years ago...



Imagine This rehearsals: Photo Alastair Muir

Jerusalem 70 A.D. A courageous band of rebels led by the freedom fighter ELEAZAR (played by Daniel) makes their way to King Herod's former fortress, a desert mountain known as Masada, created onstage by the members of Daniel's acting company with tables, chairs, ironing boards and all manner of found objects. As they arrive on the 'mountain' a celebration breaks out, TAMAR (played by Rebecca) dreams of the handsome Roman General SILVA (played by Adam) whom she had met in the

Jerusalem marketplace. Although the connection between them, as they gazed into each others eyes, was electrifying, no love is possible between a Jewish girl and a Roman General and so she watched him depart, with only a white rose to remember her by.

At the same time Silva, in Rome, receives orders from CAESAR (played by Adolph) to go back into battle and capture the rebels. Silva had returned to Rome expecting to be hailed as a conquering hero, allowed to retire from war. Upon receiving Caesar's directive, Silva realizes he's nothing but a slave at the mercy of a tyrant, all the while dreaming of the beautiful girl in Jerusalem.

Silva discovers that a palace slave, POMPEY (played by Izzy), has overheard him complaining. Silva draws his dagger and POMPEY begs for his life. Silva spares him and agrees to take Pompey with him to Masada as his personal slave. When Silva's army surrounds the mountain to demand surrender, Eleazar refuses. On their mountain fortress, the rebels are safe from Roman attack. Silva, in his tent, despairs that he is losing the confidence of his men. RUFUS (played by Otto), Caesar's Tribune in Judea, arrives and conveys Caesar's order that Silva build a gigantic ramp from the desert floor to the summit of Masada along with a battering ram that can knock down the walls. Little does he suspect that the girl from the Jerusalem marketplace is up on the mountain at that very moment.

When Eleazar returns from a raid on the Roman camp with the news that one of the rebels, AARON (played by Jan), has been captured, Tamar's pain and anger are unleashed and she grabs a dagger and heads down the mountain path toward the Roman camp. Meanwhile, at the encampment, Rufus discovers that Pompey is a hidden Christian and informs Silva that the slave must be crucified. Pompey refuses to deny his faith, despite the General's pleas, and is dragged away. Silva decides to return him to Rome and allow Caesar to decide the slave's fate.

That night, Silva sits alone in his tent, making final plans for the massacre of Masada. A figure flies out from behind a tent curtain, dagger raised high. Silva wrests it away, unmasking the robes to reveal Tamar. He stares, shocked to see she's the one who meant to take his life. She stares, equally shocked, waiting for him to kill her - but he can't. As Silva takes her in his arms and they kiss, the Nazi Captain, Blick, interrupts the performance. He addresses the ghetto audience...

“Friends, your hunger is at an end. You may leave the ghetto tomorrow morning. A new life awaits you in the east where we Germans have built a beautiful new labour camp. You will each be allowed to take one suitcase. And as a bonus, all who cooperate will receive one loaf of bread and a jar of marmalade.”

As the headlight of a train approaches and the whistle blows, Act I comes to an end.

ACT II

Backstage, the actors are excited to leave for the labour camp at Treblinka. Rebecca believes they will find her missing mother there, that the family will be reunited. Adam desperately attempts to make them all listen to the truth - that Treblinka is a death camp and getting on the train, a death sentence. An angry Captain Blick arrives with his soldiers. Having discovered, from an informer, Adam's real identity, he informs Daniel that he and Adam are under arrest and that the rest of the company will be on the trains in the morning, on a ride from which they'll never return.

But then Blick presents them with a choice: if Daniel and the others will finish the play, if they help Blick to keep the audience calm so they unsuspectingly board the trains the next day, in return Blick will spare Daniel and his family. As Blick departs, the actors turn to Daniel in desperation - do they continue the performance and save themselves without telling the audience what they know? Can they let thousands of others get on the trains and die? Without giving them an answer, Daniel orders everyone back on stage and the performance resumes as we return to the play of *Masada*.



Imagine This rehearsals: Photo Alastair Muir

Back in Silva's tent, Tamar is full of remorse. Caught between two worlds, her only hope is a peace that seems impossible. Motivated by love, for Silva as well as for her people, she heads back up the mountain to arrange a meeting between her father and the man she loves. At the same time, Rufus is determined to destroy the chance of an agreement between Silva and Eleazar and encourages an insurrection against Silva by the Roman troops. When Tamar returns to Masada, she swears Silva will protect everyone if they will surrender peacefully. Eleazar says it's a trick. But when Silva spares Aaron's life and frees him, Eleazar agrees to meet with the General. Eleazar arrives at the meeting in time to hear Tamar and Silva pledge their love. Silva swears he'll protect Tamar - and her people. Eleazar can't help being moved. But just when peace appears to be at hand, Silva is betrayed by Rufus's officers, determined to sack Masada and kill Silva. He and Eleazar fight them off but, in the end, Eleazar realizes that Silva's love for his daughter isn't enough to save them from Roman tyranny.

Eleazar retreats back up the mountain. He tells the rebels they have a choice – to live as slaves or die in freedom. The next morning, after the Romans attack, Silva enters the fortress to discover an eerie silence. The rebels have killed themselves. Silva sees Tamar lying dead next to her father. Thus ends the tale of *Masada*.

However the fate of Daniel, his family and his acting company is still unknown: will they save themselves or find a way to inform their audience not to get on the trains?

The Writer

GLENN BERENBEIM

talks about the inspiration behind **Imagine This**

I couldn't imagine having written **Imagine This** without the kind of close collaboration that I've had with Shuki Levy, the composer, who has had a dream since childhood of making a musical about Masada. I was approached to write the show by a friend of mine who was a Broadway producer. I was given a CD of musical themes that Shuki had written and when I listened to the sweeping and evocative music, the story of Masada took hold of me, but I couldn't immediately see how to bring it to the stage.

A couple of days later I was struck by a kind of epiphany, a flash of insight which led me to put in a phone call to Shuki. I said: *"Let's get together, because I've worked out how to do the musical."*

I began by saying that I could understand if he wasn't interested, but this was the only way I felt I could tell this story and that I'd figured out a way to change the ending. And he said: *"You can't change the ending, this is history."*

"Well," I said, *"just hang on and listen. The curtain opens and we're in Warsaw, Poland, in 1942. A troupe of Jewish actors is performing a musical that they've created."*

In essence, the story of Masada is a mirror image of the story of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto. It's 2000 years apart, but the parallels are extraordinary, down to even minute facts such as Hitler adopting the Nazi salute *heil*, based on his admiration for Roman emperors and the way they were saluted with the word 'hail!' What you have in both situations, whether it's on a mountain or in a ghetto, is a handful of Jews surrounded by superior military forces, bent on their destruction. And in each case those trapped decided to act in such a way that would send a message to the world.

Many years before, I had been fortunate to travel in Poland when it was still 'behind the iron curtain'. I was researching theatre and dance but I also visited Auschwitz. I took the train and arrived at the same station where the victims arrived. I walked through the gates with the sign *Arbeit Macht Frei*, 'work makes you free', and I had the kind of experience which defies the statement - 'it changed my life' - there was no context in my life that was there to change. What it did was this - it created a rupture. On my way home, having seen cases filled with glasses and vats of children's toys, I didn't think there was ever anything I could or would do with that experience. I returned to theatre and dance, not having any context for what I had just seen. So it was an enormous surprise to me when, twenty five years later, I found myself sitting in an al fresco restaurant, listening to a composer propose the notion of Masada the Musical and then, a few days later, to have this flash in my mind that I knew how to tell the story. I'm quite sure that the seeds were planted when I visited Auschwitz. It's amazing how the mind works and how the imagination gestates. Shuki's initial response was: *"Well, no, this is not what I want. I want something more universal."*



Imagine This rehearsals: Photo Alastair Muir

But I think that this is what makes it universal: the fact that it is a story that repeats itself and not simply in the history of one religious group. I can well imagine that there are a huge number of people in this modern world who might look at the story of Masada and see themselves in those trapped on top of the mountain, being surrounded by forces that are intent on destroying them. 24 hours later, the phone rang and when I picked it up there was a voice: *“Brilliant! It’s absolutely brilliant, I’ve thought about your idea and we must do this. It is the way we must do this!”*

So I said to him that I couldn’t just dive into this material, I would need to go and spend a night on top of Masada, so that I would know what it was like for the residents of that place to see the sun rise and the sun set. And he arranged it for me. I was flown to Israel, where I had private lectures from top University professors, to give me a background into Roman history, and especially the history of Judea. I was then driven to the base of Masada, where a feast was arranged with the kind of food which might have been eaten two thousand years ago. I drank Bedouin coffee, the recipe for which hasn’t changed in two thousand years, and then I was taken to the top of Masada and I had the extraordinary experience of not just reading about it, not just having it interpreted for me in those amazing lectures, but of walking on the soil, and calling down and hearing my voice echo away, (we’re told that the acoustics meant that the Romans and the Jews could hear each other) and seeing the makeshift temple that they built two thousand years ago. Then I could feel this story taking hold of me in the way it had taken hold of Shuki.

Points for Discussion and Further Activity

How would you approach creating your own drama based on historical events?

What choices would you need to make about costume and set?

As a writer, how much would you rely on your own personal experiences?

As an actor, how would you research your role?

TIMELINE OF THE WARSAW GHETTO

Before World War Two Warsaw was a major centre of Jewish life. About 30% of the city's population was Jewish and it was the largest Jewish Community in Europe, with a vibrant culture and economy. Although there were anti-semitic incidents, many Warsaw Jews lived side by side with their Polish neighbours and fought alongside them against the Germans in the early stages of the War.

September 1st 1939 Germany invades Poland and submits Warsaw to heavy bombardment from the air and from artillery on the ground.

September 29th 1939 German troops enter Warsaw. Early October The German officials order the establishment of a Jewish Council (Judenrat.) An engineer named Adam Czerniaków, who had previously been a Polish senator, is appointed as its chairman. His role is to implement German orders and administer the ghetto which the Germans are planning.

November 23rd 1939 Jews are required to wear white armbands with a blue Star of David. Jewish Schools are closed, businesses and property confiscated and Jewish men between 16 and 60 are conscripted into forced labour.

October 12th 1940 The German authorities decree that a ghetto is to be established where all Jews will have to live. The Germans convince the Poles that the Jews are carrying the disease typhus. Almost 30% of the city's total population is herded into an area which covers only 2.4% of the city, surrounded by a ten foot high wall. .

November 1940 The ghetto is sealed off from the rest of the city.



Crossing a bridge which joined one part of the ghetto to another.

Photo Yad Vashem archive.

1940 - 1942 The population of the ghetto is swelled to over 400,000 by Jews who are sent from the surrounding districts. Starvation and disease are rife. By January 1942 over 5000 people die in one month, while the survivors struggle for survival.

April - June 1942 Roma people are herded into the ghetto from surrounding areas.

April 18th 1942 During what Jews come to refer to as ‘the bloody night’, truckloads of German soldiers and members of the SS enter the Warsaw ghetto. The Germans take about 60 men, including some members of the underground, from houses and apartments and shoot them in the streets. Fifty-two die. The incident provokes terror and unrest, and rumours about impending deportations intensify among the ghetto population.

July 22nd 1942 Adam Czerniaków is told that all Warsaw’s Jews are to be deported East. He spends the day pleading to exempt as many people as he can, but he cannot save the children of Janusz Korczak’s orphanage. He is told that the deportations will continue at a rate of 6000 people per day. If he doesn’t help the Nazis draw up a list of names, various members of the Judenrat and Czerniaków’s own wife will be executed. He returns home and commits suicide rather than comply with the Nazis’ demands.

July 1942 The Germans force residents to the Umschlagplatz and crowd them into railway trucks. They are deported to the Treblinka killing centre 50 miles away.

September 1942 The ghetto population is now down to 55,000.

April 19th 1943 As deportations continue, fighters within the ghetto stage an armed uprising which surprises the Germans and challenges their forces for several weeks. Known as the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, this brave act of resistance begins on the eve of Passover.

May 16 The Germans crush the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and burn the remaining ghetto survivors out of their homes. The entire area is razed to the ground. Those who remain are sent to concentration and extermination camps. Up to 20,000 Warsaw Jews survive by hiding on the Aryan/Polish side of the wall.



Soldiers forcing Jews on board a train during a deportation
Photo USHMM



All that remains after the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto.

Photo Zbyszko Siemaszko, ‘Warszawa 1945-1970’

LIFE IN THE WARSAW GHETTO: EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS

Of the 489,000 people who passed through the Warsaw ghetto in the years that followed its creation in 1940, less than 10% survived. Numbers can tell us part of the story but the voices of those who lived in the ghetto give us a much more accurate picture. Diaries and documents in many cases outlived their authors. The Oneg Shabat group, led by Emmanuel Ringelblum, collected observations written by people from all backgrounds and classes. The documents were buried under the buildings and two thirds of the archive was recovered after the war. Ringelblum himself died. Other accounts were smuggled out, hidden or written after the war by survivors. They are an invaluable source of historical evidence about this terrible period of history and the unprecedented atrocities perpetrated by the Nazi regime.

“And they will ask if this is the truth. I will answer in advance: no, this is not the truth, it is only a small part, a tiny fraction of the truth. The essential truth, the real truth, cannot be described even with the most powerful pen.”

Stefan Ernest. Warsaw ghetto resident (1940-1943)

May 8, 1941

“Children starving to death.”

Diary entry of **Adam Czerniaków** - leader of the Jewish Council

“It’s the hard winter of 1941. Despite all its various activities, the Council is unable to keep the situation under control. The hunger and misery are so shocking it’s beyond imagining. Every day the Germans bring in thousands of poor Jews settled from the provinces. The population keeps growing. There’s no room; the shortage of living space is appalling, so these masses of people live in punkty, communal shelters converted from movie houses or whatever happens to be available.”

Marek Stok (survived and lived in Brazil after the war)

21 July 1942

“There is nowhere to go, there is no way to be alone. The streets moan and yell with a thousand voices, they reek of rotten fish and dying bodies. Wherever we turn, whatever we look at, all is ugliness. So we run away and hide from it in the flat. Here at least we are safe from sounds and smells...For a while there was no one around and Roman stroked my cheek, and I stroked his, and we moved close to each other. But then Jadwiga suddenly opened her door and went to the loo, then back; then Sophie went up and down; then Henryk came home from his afternoon walk and winking at us, shut himself in the kitchen to let us feel undisturbed. I could hardly bear it so I asked Roman to go. My eyes filled with tears as I said it... He said the only way we could be alone was to go to a hotel... How shall I answer him tomorrow?”

The next day, 22 July 1942, the mass deportation from the Warsaw ghetto began.

Janina Bauman from her memoir

Beyond These Walls Escaping the Warsaw Ghetto - A Young Girl's Story

DAILY LIFE FOR CHILDREN IN THE WARSAW GHETTO

HOUSING

In November 1940 the ghetto covered 340 hectares, including the Jewish cemetery. Several families were squeezed into each apartment. Originally 400,000 people were crowded into the area but later the ghetto was shrunk by several streets on each side and a further 72,000 Jews from the district surrounding Warsaw were brought to the ghetto. Many remained homeless, while the average number of residents per room was 13. It was common to have to move several times. There was very little fuel to heat the houses in winter. When the deportations began, some people hid in attics and cellars.

FOOD

The food allocation for Jews in the ghetto was 184 calories per day (today, the recommended calorie intake for a 9 -12 year old who is moderately active is 1600- 2000 calories). Hunger was a constant presence. Jewish organisations ran kitchens to feed children and the destitute. Smugglers risked death bringing in food from outside.

ORPHANS

Around 60,000 children between six and twelve years old lived in the ghetto. There were many orphans. Dr Janusz Korczak, a well-known doctor and children's author had run a Jewish orphanage in Warsaw since 1912. When it was forcibly moved into the ghetto, he moved with it. He worked tirelessly to keep the children fed. In August 1942, his orphans were rounded up and he went with the children to the *Umslagplatz*, even though he had been offered his freedom. Korczak and twelve staff members were deported with 196 children to Treblinka death camp.

**“Two hundred pure souls, condemned to death, did not weep.
Not one of them ran away. None tried to hide. Like stricken swallows
they clung to their teacher and mentor, to their father and brother,
Janusz Korczak, so that he might protect and preserve them...
The very stones of the street wept at the sight of the procession.”**

Joshua Perle eyewitness

SCHOOLS

By the end of 1939, the Germans had closed every Jewish school in Warsaw. The Judenrat and the Federation for the Care of Orphans began a secret system of unofficial schools. Children's kitchens provided several hours of lessons each day. In September, 1941, the Germans permitted the opening of 16 schools - three using Hebrew, four Yiddish, four Polish, and five religious schools. One fifth of the ghetto's total number of children were organized into three grades. Many children were too cold, sick or hungry to attend. Secondary education was forbidden, but groups of up to twenty young people would meet in secret with their former teachers. There were even two secret university- level courses in medicine and technology, as well as a course to train teachers for Jewish schools. Learning improved morale in the ghetto and provided rare positive activities for children.



Children eating on the Streets in the Warsaw Ghetto

Photo USHMM

THE MUSIC BOX IS WORKING

Performances in the Warsaw Ghetto

“...The melody palace or the little theatre Femina sometimes have good concerts, and *Szafa Gra** is known for its clever satirical sketches. The Polish production of *Mirele Efron* was a great hit: they also put on *Got fun Nekome* by Asch. But conditions in the ghetto are more conducive for performing penance than indulging in entertainment.

Chaim Hasenfus (resident in the ghetto 1939-41 fate unknown)

* The name means ‘the music box is working’ a Warsaw expression for ‘everything’s fine’.

BEFORE THE WAR

Although Warsaw had been a vibrant cultural city before the war, the theatres and concert halls went dark in 1939. Immediately after the German occupation began, Jews were afraid of assembling in one place for fear of being rounded up and sent to forced labour camps. The Nazis were also likely to accuse people of meeting for a political purpose. Many leaders of cultural organisations, actors and musicians had fled to the Soviet area as the Germans advanced.

IN THE GHETTO

The curfew imposed on Jews in the ghetto forced them to remain at home at night, so some of the earliest cultural events took place in people’s homes. These were sometimes fundraising evenings organised by wealthier Jews to support an artist to feed his family.

STARTING AGAIN

In the beginning of 1940 permission was granted to run cafés with entertainment. These were organised by the Jewish Council or by Germans who used their influence to secure a licence. In the summertime there were gardens where musicians and actors performed. Some of the cafés were frequented by German soldiers and the girls who danced in them were vulnerable to unwanted attention.

In time, performers began to rent halls and give one man shows to support themselves. Professionals joined together to put on performances and an attempt was made to organise theatres on a commercial basis.

On Walowa Street, next to the Franciscan Church, a theatrical troupe was organised at the beginning of 1940 that performed three times a week. The performances were held in an attic, where a stage was set up with a curtain. Pillows and table cloths were used in decorations with kerosene lamps for lighting. Benches were set up in the hall. In front of the entrance a table stood as a cashier's window, where a young lady sold tickets for the performance. In order to get to the house where the theatre performed you had to pass through many side streets and rubble of destroyed houses. In order to let the public know the place of performance, guides would be stationed at many corners to direct the people. They would also see that no undesirable (German) guests would come.

Yonas Turkow - actor

CHILDREN'S THEATRE

Children's theatres were seen as an important source of education in the Ghetto.

The Judenrat issued an order:

Morning performances must be organised for the children in order to develop the individual ability and talent of the child.

In the communal children's kitchens there were plays both for and by the children, about Jewish holidays, folklore and legends.

In our kitchen we are producing a very lovely play which the teacher wrote for us. I play the role of a Jewish mother who tries to steal a piece of bread for her children from a passerby on the street. After that we danced the "famine dance". But the sun shines for us. The Germans are kicked out and we Jewish children live to see a good life and a new era. This is how our play ends. When I am performing, I forget that I am hungry and I no longer remember that the evil Germans are still roaming about. In the morning, I quickly run to the kitchen and I wish the day would never end because we are forced to disband and go back to our homes"

From *The murdered teachers of CIZO schools in Poland* ed. C.S. Kasdan (New York 1951)

In 1942 Janusz Korsczak, children's author and doctor, staged a performance in his orphanage of the The Post Office, by Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore. Estera Winogronowa, the teacher who directed it, had originally trained as a dancer. It is likely that they chose this text because of what it tells us about life and the triumph of the spirit.

YIDDISH THEATRE

In November 1941, just after the ghetto was sealed, the Germans permitted the Eldorado Theatre to open, followed by Nowy Azazel in May 1941. They were both owned by a woman called Judith (Yehudit), who held the only licence for official performances in Yiddish. Audiences were large and shows were a popular mixture of sentimental romances and folk stories. Eye witness accounts suggest that the quality wasn't very high and most shows were designed as a way to forget the everyday suffering of ghetto life. Towards the end, however, their subject matter became more serious and included celebrated productions such as *Song of Songs* and the *Village of Youth*, which was a major cultural event. The last play at the Eldorado was *Des Dorf Yingel* (The Country Boy.)

“I went to the Yiddish Theatre yesterday.. You are looking for an escape from reality. The hall is beautiful. For two hours you forget the bitterness of the wretched world around you.”

Ksvim fun geto (Notes from the Ghetto) Emmanuel Ringelblum

POLISH LANGUAGE THEATRE

Jewish actors were not allowed to perform in Polish, which was considered an Aryan tongue. However, Polish language theatres were established and functioned throughout the ghetto's existence. Their audience was made up of the many Polish Jews who didn't speak Yiddish. *Na Piaterku* (The Upstairs) opened on June 3rd 1941, followed by *Nowy Kamealni* (The New Room) in July 1941. The theatres focused on Polish language productions of classic Jewish texts and stories. There was also the Femina, which produced satires on ghetto life and the Palac Melodie (The Melody Palace) which presented both burlesque and serious shows.



Theatrical Performance
in the Warsaw ghetto:
May 1941.

Yad Vashem photo archive.

In total there were 3000-4000 seats in ghetto theatres from which we can estimate that upto 30,000 in a population of 500,000 could attend the theatre weekly

GERMAN ATTITUDES

It is probable that the Germans allowed the theatres to flourish because the performances distracted people from the reality of what was being done to them. The authorities seemed to turn a blind eye to light or humorous entertainment, but sometimes stepped in to censor serious or classical works. In June 1942 the Germans suddenly began to enforce strict censorship. In retrospect it is possible to see that this was a sign of the ghetto's imminent destruction.

PERFORMING TO SURVIVE

The Judenrat was put in charge of cultural activities and sought to have theatrical production officially recognised to give employment. According to Emanuel Ringelblum, there were 61 amusement halls in the Warsaw Ghetto in April, 1941, giving employment to some of the 267 professional actors and 150 musicians registered with the Central Programs Commission. Outside of the official and unofficial performance venues, many talented musicians and actors were forced to perform on the streets, begging for a living.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

- Why do you think theatre continued to be popular, even when conditions in the ghetto were terrible?
- Does the theatre have anything to say, in times of human suffering?
- *Szafa Gra*, the name of a ghetto venue, is a Polish phrase, which means 'The Music Box is working' or 'everything's all right' - why do you think this name was chosen?

RESEARCH TASK

Find out about Jewish Culture in Europe before World War Two.
What sort of theatre, music, dance and cabaret were being created?

ACTS OF REBELLION AND RESISTANCE

“A resistance fighter is hiding somewhere in the vicinity”

Captain Blick

The methods developed by the Nazis to create terror and fear among the people of occupied Europe, coupled with the strength of their military campaigns, made it very difficult to resist them. However, there are many examples of individuals and groups who risked their lives to fight back.

THE POLISH RESISTANCE (THE AK)

The Polish Home Army was established when Poland was invaded in 1939. It was one of the largest underground resistance armies during WWII and supplied the allied forces with essential military intelligence and undertook guerrilla style attacks on the German army within Poland. Across Europe the Resistance, or underground, armies were involved in intelligence, propaganda, non-co-operation and direct armed attacks.

THE WARSAW GHETTO UPRISING

In January 1943, the SS planned to deport up to 80,000 Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to forced labour camps. Word had reached the Ghetto of what had happened to those deported to Treblinka. The AK helped smuggle in arms to the organised Jewish groups, the ZOB and the ZZW. Small groups of mainly young people were able to stage armed attacks and inflicted casualties on the SS. They continued to resist the deportations for four weeks until the Germans liquidated and destroyed the Ghetto. Many were deported to labour camps and death camps. A few survived in the ruins or were able to escape to the Aryan side of Warsaw.



Monument to the
Heroes of the
Warsaw Ghetto.

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AUSCHWITZ

In 1944 members of the Sonderkommando (camp prisoners forced to burn the corpses) staged a rebellion at Auschwitz-Birkenau. They blew up a gas chamber and crematoria in a last ditch attempt to fight back.

SAVING LIVES AS AN ACT OF RESISTANCE

All over German occupied Europe, individuals hid Jews in their own homes. For example, in the Netherlands several hundred Communist resistance workers hid Jewish children and families.

Oskar Schindler, a member of the Nazi party and a business man, ran a factory in Poland using Jewish forced labour. He may have initially been motivated by money but he began to protect his workers, giving bribes and exploiting his SS contacts. He blocked the transportation of those who worked for him and helped smuggle children out to Nuns who hid them from the Nazis. He was quoted as saying...

“I knew the people who worked for me... When you know people, you have to behave toward them like human beings.”

In 1943, in German-occupied Denmark, the Danish people enabled the entire Jewish population of 7000 to escape to neutral Sweden on the eve of the Nazi's planned deportation programme.

MASADA

In *Imagine This*, the Warshowsky's are putting on a play about Masada. As part of his research the writer Glenn Berenbeim spent a night on top of the real Masada, to feel what it was like for its residents to see the sun rise and set and to imagine the power of the Romans below. But what is the historical evidence for the Masada story?

LOCATION

Masada (from the Hebrew for fortress) stands on a plateau at the top of cliffs, at around 400 metres above the Dead Sea.



Photo Israeli Tourist Board

HISTORY

After the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70CE, a small group of Jewish Zealots survived and fled to the hill fortress. This sect had started what is known as the Great Revolt against Rome as early as the year 6. Its remaining followers (an estimated 960 men, women and children) would not be allowed to get away easily and the Roman Tenth Legion soon arrived and began to build battering rams and other weapons. According to the account of one Flavius Josephus (who wrote a history of the Jewish Revolt), the leader of the Zealots, Eleazar ben Yair, decided that the community should commit suicide, rather than become captives of the Roman Empire.

“I cannot but esteem it as a favour that God has granted us, that it is still in our power to die bravely, and in a state of freedom.”

The men are said to have killed their wives and children, then each other. In Josephus' account, a handful of people survived and told him their story.

SYMBOL

For centuries, the story was hardly mentioned in Jewish writings and does not feature in the Talmud, the rabbinical writings second only to the Jewish Bible, that were begun in 200CE. Its symbolic importance was revived in the 1920s in a poetic history called *Masada*, written by Isaac Lamdan. It is said that this text was an inspiration for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

In the 1960s, Professor Yigael Yadin, led a team to uncover the evidence to support the story of Masada. What he found confirmed that there had been a Jewish community living on the site. More recently, the archaeological evidence has been disputed, but nonetheless Masada has remained a compelling symbol of resistance.

CHOICELESS CHOICES

Perhaps we will never know what really happened at Masada, but the story is a powerful example of a people who, like the victims of the Holocaust, were faced with choiceless choices.

FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES

RESPONDING TO THE PERFORMANCE

“If you’re not here, who will remember them?”

Adam (to Rebecca)

1. STIMULUS FOR CREATIVE WRITING

Imagine that Adam and Rebecca survive and are able to start a new life after the war. For many of the survivors it was a long time before they could talk about their experiences. Write a letter, as Adam or Rebecca, to your children, explaining what has happened to you and your family and friends, recalling the events which are covered in **Imagine This**.

2. LIFE AFTER THE HOLOCAUST: DRAMA ACTIVITY

a. Create a scene where Rebecca and Adam arrive in New York.

In your performance, how can you present the mixed emotions of seeing a new home and leaving behind the family which has perished? Try to play this scene without language. The stage picture you create, together with facial expression and body language are often more powerful.

b. Further Research

Glenn Berenbeim, who wrote **Imagine This**, describes himself as a ‘research hound.’ The actors and director also spend many hours reading and researching the events of the time. To research into the stories of real survivors you could go to http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/life_after_holocaust/ for first hand accounts of those who rebuilt their lives in America. Using these first hand accounts will help to give your work authenticity and will help to avoid generalisations.

c. Script Writing

Develop a script for your scene. Work sensitively and check that you are being respectful to the histories of the people involved.

3. EXTENSION ACTIVITY

The experience of many refugees from the Holocaust is mirrored by those in present times who are forced by war, famine or political oppression to start their lives in a new country, with a new language. Research the lives of contemporary people who have started afresh. This source material can be an excellent resource for drama, creative writing or visual arts.

4. WRITE A REVIEW OF *IMAGINE THIS*

Here's a checklist of questions

a. Comment on the design (the look of the show)

- What colours and textures were used?
- What were the costumes like?
- What did you notice about the lighting?
- How was shade and brightness used, what different lighting states were used to show place, time of day and to evoke emotions?

b. Comment on the performances

- How did the actors relate to each other and to the audience?
- What was the effect of the music?
- How were the transitions from speech to song created?
- Comment on the choreography, how does the contemporary style of Liam Steel, from DV8, serve the story?

c. Comment on the script (the book as it is called in Musical Theatre)

- How did the play-within-a-play (about Masada) relate to the framing story set in the Warsaw ghetto?

d. And most importantly

- What did the play make you think and feel?

GLOSSARY OF TERMS & HOW THEY ARE USED IN THIS PACK

AK

Armia Krajowa or home Army, an umbrella group of underground resistance movements, sanctioned by the Polish government in Exile.

Germans and Nazis

The terms used in this pack to refer to the German occupiers of Poland in WWII, consisting of SS, Gestapo, regular army, civilian officials and members of the National Socialist (Nazi) party. It does not refer to present day German people.

Ghetto

The word comes from the Italian word, *getto* - for foundry because the first Jewish ghetto was built in Venice on the site of a foundry. It came to mean the Jewish quarter of a city. Under the Nazis the ghettos were sealed and Jews were imprisoned in them, along with Roma and Sinti people. In contemporary English the word has come to mean the poor quarter of a city, from where it is hard to escape economic hardship.

Judenrat

Jewish Council instructed by the Germans to manage the affairs of the ghetto.

Oneg Shabbat

Which means *Sabbath Joy* because its members met on the Sabbath. This was the project led by historian Emmanuel Ringelblum to create a secret archive of the life of the ghetto.

Roma

A term for Romany people, also referred to as gypsies. The word actually means 'man'. Not all Romany people use this term, some of these are the Sinti, a distinct European ethnic group. Between half to one and a half million Roma and Sinti died in the Holocaust.

Umslagplatz

German word meaning collection or loading point. This is where Jewish people were gathered prior to being deported by train to the killing centre at Treblinka. The *Umslagplatz* was created by fencing off the western part of the freight train station that was adjacent to the ghetto.

ZOB

Zydowski Organizacja Bojowa, the Jewish Fighting Organisation

ZZW

Zydowski Zwiasek Wojskowy, the Jewish Military Alliance

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Theatrical Performance during the Holocaust: Texts Document Memoirs

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Maus: A Survivor's Tale

(pbk London 1995)

Graphic novel in which the writer explores his father's experiences as a Holocaust survivor. A level of distancing is achieved by all the Jewish characters being played by mice.

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WEBSITES

www.bethshalom.com

An excellent internet resource incorporating **holocausthistory.net** a site for students with detailed timelines and contextual information.

www.het.org.uk

The Holocaust Educational Trust is a UK based organisation which works in schools, universities and in the community to raise awareness and understanding of the Holocaust, providing teacher training, an outreach programme for schools, teaching aids and resource material. Their DVD *Recollections* gives an excellent selection of first hand accounts of people affected by the Holocaust from several different backgrounds.

www.holocausttaskforce.org

The site for The Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research and contains guidelines for teachers and students.

www.mousetrap.org.uk

Mousetrap Theatre Projects enables young people with limited resources, access or support to engage with the best of London's theatre.