

# JANUS KORCZAK AND THE CHILDREN OF THE WARSAW GHETTO



## TEACHERS GUIDE

VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST  
EDUCATION CENTRE

Frieda Miller



# INTRODUCTION FOR TEACHERS

This supplement was developed by the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre as an adjunct to the exhibit catalogue *Janusz Korczak's Warsaw*, produced by the Holocaust Resource Center and Archive at Queensborough Community College, Bayside, New York.

The intent is to provide teachers and students with activities and discussion questions to complement the readings, photographs and documents found in the exhibit catalogue. Teachers are encouraged to use some of these activities as preparation for and as follow-up to their class visit to the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre's exhibit *Janusz Korczak and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto*.

## WARSAW BEFORE THE WAR

### RECONSTRUCT A CULTURE



*Courtesy of USHMM Archives*

Before the Holocaust, Warsaw had one of the most vibrant Jewish communities in the world. In addition to the loss of life during the Holocaust there was also a cultural loss that saw this community and its unique way of life vanish forever. Read about Jewish life in Warsaw before the war (catalogue pages 5-13) and examine the related photos and documents.

Make a list of what was lost during the Holocaust and sort your list into categories. Consider language, literature, arts, culture, religion, education, science, business, sports, etc. Compare your list with others in the class.

### EXTENSION

Find examples of cultural losses experienced by other ethnic groups or communities, past or present. Research the cultural loss experienced by one such group. For example, consider the Kwakwa'kawakw people, whose potlatches were banned by the Canadian government in 1884 and sporadically enforced until 1921.

## THE WARSAW GHETTO

### MAP WORK

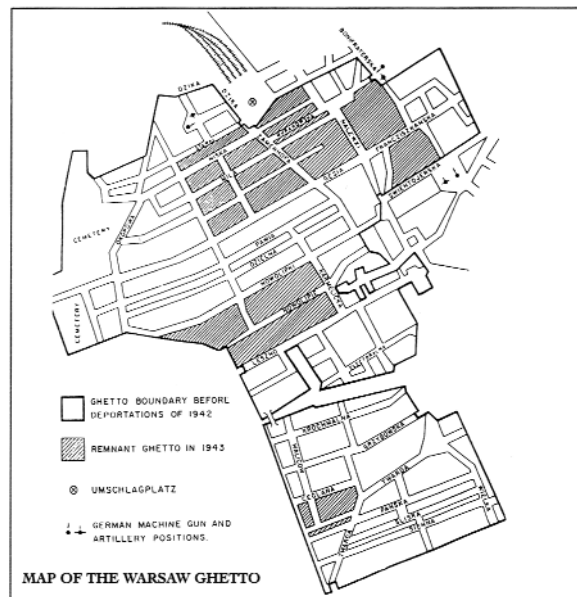
For the Jews of Warsaw, the ghetto represented a removal from home and a time of deprivation, fear and uncertainty. Examine the map in the catalogue on page 15 and the documents on pages 16, 18 and 20.

## FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do these documents teach you about the process of ghettoization?
2. The Nazis severely punished people who were found keeping records or writing diaries like those written by Avraham Levin (catalogue page 18) and Janusz Korczak (catalogue page 19). Why do you think they kept such records, given the personal risk? What would you have done under similar circumstances?
3. The Nazis referred to the deportation of Jews to Treblinka and other death camps as a 'resettlement to the east'. What do you think motivated the use of this kind of deceptive language?

## EXTENSION

A group of writers, teachers, rabbis and historians led by Dr. Emmanuel Ringelblum wrote diaries and collected historical records to document life in the Warsaw Ghetto. This secret operation known as Oneg Shabbat (Hebrew for Sabbath delight) came to an end with the liquidation of the ghetto in the spring of 1944. These materials, now known as the Ringelblum Archives, were placed in metal boxes and three milk cans and buried beneath the streets of the ghetto. Several of the boxes and two of the cans were retrieved after the war. Research this project and explain its significance.



# KORCZAK'S LIFE & CAREER

## READ & REFLECT

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization) declared 1979 "The Year of Korczak", to coincide with the International Year of the Child and the centenary of Korczak's birth. Read about Korczak and examine the photos and documents on pages 4-5, 10, 14, 17, 19, 21-22 in the catalogue. Write a journal of personal reflections while reading about Korczak. Reflect on those aspects of his life that you find the most interesting. Consider his contributions as a children's physician, educator, author and radio personality.

## FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think that Korczak is often remembered, not for his life, but for the way in which he died?
2. Why is it important to remember the man, not just his death? Consider his legacies including the ideas of progressive orphanages and just communities for children.
3. Explain the significance of Korczak's statement, "You do not leave a sick child in the night, and you do not leave children at a time like this."
4. Who do you think UNESCO should honour this year for his/her recent contribution to children's rights or welfare.



# POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre's exhibit *Janusz Korczak and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto* focuses on three themes: 1.) The life and contributions of Janusz Korczak, 2.)

The experiences of children in the Warsaw Ghetto, 3.) The rights of children.



Courtesy of USHMM Archives

## FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why were children particularly vulnerable in the Warsaw Ghetto?
2. In what ways did they contribute to life in the ghetto and to the resistance?
3. What do you think motivated the Nazis to document life in the ghetto through photographs?
4. Does your knowing that the photographs were taken by the Nazis affect your perception of them?

## KORCZAK & CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Korczak was an advocate for children's rights, wrote passionately about children's welfare and applied his progressive educational ideas in the orphanages which he directed.

His ideas preceded the children's rights documents later developed by the Geneva Convention and the United Nations General Assembly. Read the document, *Korczak's Writings on Children's Rights*, on pages 6 and 7 of this guide. Make a chart comparing Korczak's ideas with the UN document.

### The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

(<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>) is a statement that recognizes the inherent dignity and the equal rights of all people. The United Nations adopted the declaration in 1948, after World War II in response to the abuse of human rights perpetrated during the Holocaust. The declaration later became the basis for the 1959 Children's Human Rights Declaration and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (<http://www.unicef.org/crc>).

## FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of Korczak's progressive educational ideas and practices have influenced education today? Consider children's self-government, children's authored publications and the Court of Peers.
2. Reflect on ways that your school might benefit by adopting some of Korczak's ideas?
3. How do you think the UN document was influenced by Korczak's writings?



Courtesy of CIDA

4. What rights were violated by the internment of Jewish children in the Warsaw Ghetto?  
Consider food, housing, education, etc.
5. Why do you think human rights violations during the Holocaust were a catalyst for the development of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

### **EXTENSION**

Debate whether the Convention on the Rights of the Child is effective, given the ongoing violations and atrocities such as child labourers, child soldiers, street children, etc.

Design a media campaign to ensure that people are better informed about the children's rights. The campaign may be carried out in the community or role-played in the classroom and might consist of a petition, letter or postcard writing campaign, speech, poster, etc. The campaign should be: 1.) Responsible and legal, 2.) Feasible (in terms of time and costs), 3.) Effective in influencing public opinion.

# KORCZAK ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The child has the right to love.

*"Love the child, not just your own."*

The child has the right to respect.

*"Let us demand respect for shining eyes, smooth foreheads, youthful effort and confidence, Why should dulled eyes, a wrinkled brow, untidy grey hair, or tired resignation command greater respect?"*

The child has the right to optimal conditions in which to grow and develop.

*"We demand: do away with hunger; cold, dampness, stench, overcrowding, overpopulation. "*

The child has the right to live in the present.

*"Children are not people of tomorrow; they are people today."*

The child has the right to be him or herself.

*"A child is not a lottery ticket, marked to win the main prize."*

The child has the right to make mistakes.

*"There are no more fools among children than among adults."*

The child has the right to fail.

*"We renounce the deceptive longing for perfect children."*

The child has the right to be taken seriously.

*"Who asks the child for his opinion and consent?"*

The child has the right to be appreciated for what he is.

*"The child, being small, has little market value."*

The child has the right to desire, to claim, to ask.

*"As the years pass, the gap between adult demands and children's desires becomes progressively wider."*

The child has the right to have secrets.

*"Respect their secrets."*

The child has the right to "a lie, a deception, a theft".

*"He does not have the right to lie, deceive, steal."*

The child has the right to respect for his possessions and budget.

*"Everyone has the right to his property, no matter how insignificant or valueless."*

The child has the right to resist educational influence that conflicts with his or her own beliefs.

*"It is fortunate for mankind that we are unable to force children to yield to assaults upon their common sense and humanity."*

The child has the right to a Children's Court where he can judge and be judged by his peers.  
*"We are the sole judges of the child's actions, movements, thoughts, and plans . . . I know that a Children's Court is essential, that in fifty years there will not be a single school, not a single institution without one."*

The child has the right to be defended in the juvenile-justice court system.  
*"The delinquent child is still a child...Unfortunately, suffering bred of poverty spreads like lice: sadism, crime, uncouthness, and brutality are nurtured on it."*

The child has the right to respect for his grief.  
*"Even though it be for the loss of a pebble."*

This list was compiled by Betty Jean Lifton from Korczak's writings *How to Love a Child, The Child's Right to Respect* and other works.

## CHILDREN'S HUMAN RIGHTS DECLARATION

Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 20, 1959.

### The Principles

1. All children have the right to what follows, no matter what their race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, or where they were born or to whom they were born.
2. Children have the special right to grow up in a healthy and normal way, free and with dignity.
3. Children have the right to a name and to be a member of a country.
4. Children have the right to good food, housing and medical care.
5. Children have the right to special care if handicapped in any way.
6. Children have the right to love and understanding, preferably from parents, but from the government where you have no parent.
7. Children have the right to go to school for free, to play, and to have an equal chance to be what they are and to learn to be responsible and useful.
8. Children have the right always to be among the first to get help.
9. Children have the right not to be harmed and not to be hired for work until old enough.

# EXHIBIT GLOSSARY

## **Aktion**

German word meaning action but used to refer to any non-military campaign, such as an operation undertaken for political or racial reasons.

## **Auschwitz-Birkenau**

First established as a Nazi concentration camp in 1940 at Oswiecim, Poland primarily for Polish prisoners. In 1942 it was expanded to include the extermination camp—Birkenau (Auschwitz II) and the labour camp—Buna-Monowitz (Auschwitz III). Surrounded by numerous sub camps, it grew to become the largest of all the Nazi concentration camps. Approximately 1.1 to 1.6 million Jews and 100,000 other victims were murdered or died at Auschwitz. At liberation, only 7600 prisoners—those not forced on death marches—were found alive.

## **Concentration Camps**

The Nazis established prison camps shortly after assuming power in 1933 to hold and isolate political opponents and those considered to be "racially" undesirable such as Jews and Gypsies. Most of the approximately 1800 camps were transit or labour camps. The first were Dachau, Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen. After the occupation of Poland, extermination camps were established for mass murder at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, Chelmno and Majdanek.

## **Gas chamber**

Sealed rooms in extermination camps and some concentration camps, often masked to look like shower or delousing facilities. Prisoners were crowded into the chambers where poison gas or carbon monoxide was released. Zyklon B was used at Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek. Most of the other killing centres used carbon monoxide. After gassing victims' bodies were cremated or buried in mass graves.

## **Ghetto**

The Nazis revived the medieval term ghetto to describe the compulsory "Jewish Quarters" often in the poorest section of the city, where Jews from the surrounding areas were forced to live. Surrounded by barbed wire or walls, the ghettos were sealed before the deportation of Jews to the concentration camps. Established mostly in Eastern Europe, the ghettos were characterized by overcrowding, starvation and forced labour.

## **Kibbutz**

A collective farm where the members own all property in common. Social Zionist organizations promoted this form of collective agriculture. After the Holocaust, kibbutzim were formed in Europe to provide agricultural training to survivors, in the hope of relocating the kibbutzim and their members to Palestine.

## **Nazi**

A member of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) founded in 1919 and brought to power in 1933 under Adolf Hitler.

## **Star of David**

Symbol adopted by the Nazis as a way to identify Jews. In 1939, all Polish Jews were required



to wear the star. This requirement was later extended to Russia, Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe.

### **Treblinka**

A death camp in Poland where about 870,000 Jews were murdered, including most of the Jews of Radom and Warsaw. Treblinka I, a penal camp, was established in 1941 to exploit raw materials from the quarry. Treblinka II, the death camp, was run from July 1942 to August 1943 by the Nazis with the help of Ukrainian guards. After an armed uprising on August 2, 1943, the Nazis completely destroyed the camp and converted the site to a farm.

### **Umschlagplatz**

The German word for transfer or assembly point. Place in the Warsaw Ghetto where Jews were loaded on trains for deportation to concentration camps.

### **Warsaw Ghetto**

Enclosed area in the city of Warsaw, Poland established in November 1940 to imprison the Jews of Warsaw and those deported to the ghetto from surrounding towns and shtetls. The ghetto was enclosed by a high wall, topped with barbed wire. Thousands of Jews died there from starvation, and disease. Following the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in April 1942 the Nazis liquidated the ghetto and sent the remaining 300,000 Jews to Treblinka.

## **BOOKS**

Boraks-Nemetz, Lillian. *The Old Brown Suitcase: A Teenager's Story of War and Peace*. (Brentwood Bay, WA, 1994)

Slava is a fourteen-year old girl, who immigrates to Canada from Poland after the Second World War. While she struggles with English and learns Canadian ways, she is haunted by terrifying memories - her escape from the Warsaw Ghetto and her survival in hiding.

Korczak, Janusz. *Ghetto Diary*. (New York, 1978).

The personal diary of Janusz Korczak written almost entirely during the time he spent in the Warsaw ghetto. Includes a substantial introduction by Aaron Zeitlin which gives background information about Korczak's life..

Lifton, Betty Jean. *The King of Children: A Biography of Janusz Korczak*. (New York, 1988).

A comprehensive biography of Korczak, drawing on his own writings as well as interviews with his orphans. It chronicles his life from early childhood, his career working with children, life in the Warsaw ghetto and his tragic death at the side of his orphans.

Ringelblum, Emmanuel. *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto: The Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum* (New York, 1958).

Dr. Emmanuel Ringelblum wrote diaries, collected historical records and organized a group of writers, teachers, rabbis and historians to document life in the Warsaw Ghetto. The materials were buried and some were retrieved after the war.

Roland, Charles G. *Courage Under Siege: Starvation, Disease and Death in the Warsaw Ghetto*. (Oxford, 1992).

An examination of life in the Warsaw Ghetto and the hardships faced by the Jews. Examines the administration of the ghetto, daily life, disease, starvation, mortality, education and the experiences of children.

## VIDEOS

### **The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising**

Begins with the Nazi invasion of Poland, portrays life in the ghetto, the formation of a resistance organization, the deportations and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Uses archival film footage, photographs and survivor testimonies.

*1993, 22 min./ B&W. Available at the VHEC*

### **Korczak**

Tells the story of this renowned physician and author, who ran a home for Jewish orphans in Warsaw and refused to abandon his children when they were moved into the Warsaw ghetto and ultimately deported to extermination camps.

*Polish with English subtitles, 1990, 118 min. / B&W. Available at the VHEC*

## WEBSITES

<http://korczak.com/englisch.htm> (this is the biography site)

<http://www.korczak-school.org.il/> (Ghetto fighters house)

<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/biography/Korczak.html>

<http://www.ushmm.org/topics/article.utp?id=10005069> (online exhibit about the Warsaw Ghetto)

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Text: Frieda Miller, Education Coordinator  
Design: Sean Matvenko  
Research: Scott Anderson  
Copy Editing: Jennifer Douglas

Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre  
#50 - 950 West 41st Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5Z 2N7  
p. 604.264.0499 f. 604.264.0497 info@vhec.org

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