



LESSON PLAN 1

The Diary of Yitskhok Rudashevski DBQ

Based on a lesson plan by Douglas R. Greene, Charlotte NC

DBQ – Document Based Question Lesson: Middle-High School ELA or Social Studies Classes

Essential Questions: to be answered by the students using the resources within the DBQ.

- *What can we learn about Vilna and Yitskhok Rudashevski within the context of the Holocaust?*
- *What can we learn about the Holocaust within the historical context and documentation of Rudashevski's life and Vilna Lithuania?*

Procedure:

1. Guide students to go through the online YIVO exhibit, so that students are familiar with the platform and the history of the Holocaust.
<https://museum.yivo.org> - Teachers are encouraged to have students go through the website at their own pace.
2. Review the SOAPs chart with students.

	QUESTIONS TO ASK	RESPONSE SENTENCE FRAMES
SUBJECT	What is this document about?	The subject of this document is:
OCCASION	What is special about the time and place during which this document was created?	This document was created at this specific time because: The author is creating this document at this specific place because:
AUDIENCE	Who is the main audience? Who does the author want to communicate with?	The author wants _____ (specific persons or groups) to see or use this document.
PURPOSE	Why was this document created? What does the author want to persuade the audience to do? How do you know?	The purpose of this document is to:
SPEAKER	Who is the author? If unknown author – categorize (victim, perpetrator, bystander)	How does this document impact our understanding of the Holocaust?

3. Use one document to model with the class what students will be doing on their own prior to writing the DBQ.

Student Requirements:

1. Complete a SOAPs chart for each of the documents in the packet.
2. Citing the documents in the packet, write an essay response or essay responses to the following prompts:

How does Yitskhok Rudashevki’s diary provide insight into the daily experiences of Jews in the Vilna/Vilnius Ghetto under Nazi occupation?

What can we learn about Yitskok Rudashevski from these entries? List five things about his life.

Analyze the purpose and historical significance of keeping a diary. Why did Rudashevki document his circumstances? Why is the diary a historically significant document?

DBQ Essay Rubric

	8-9	5-7	2-4	0-1
Thesis	Articulates a clear, well-developed thesis that addresses all parts of the question	Contains a thesis that is partially developed and/or addresses only part of the question	Presents a thesis that may be simplistic, confused, or underdeveloped.	Lacks a thesis or simply restates the question
Use of Documents	Effectively employs a substantial number of documents	Satisfactorily employs a reasonable number of documents	Merely paraphrases, quotes, or briefly cites documents	Has little or no understanding of the documents
Use of Outside Information	Supports thesis with substantial and relevant outside information	Supports the thesis with ample, relevant outside information	Contains little outside information, or information that is inaccurate or irrelevant	Contains no outside information
Analysis	Supports the thesis with effective analysis	Analyses information to some extent	Lacks analysis, deals with the question in a general, simplistic, incomplete, or superficial manner.	Exhibits inadequate or incorrect understanding of the question
Organization & Writing	Is well organized and well written / May contain minor errors	Shows acceptable organization and writing; language errors do not seriously detract from essay	May be poorly organized and / or poorly written	Poorly organized and poorly written

Created by Douglas R. Greene.

Document Packet

DOCUMENT 1:

Source: <https://museum.yivo.org/experiences/the-war-begins>

Tuesday, June 24th, 1941.

"I recall how almost exactly a year ago I welcomed the Red Army in a little Lithuanian town. We ran for several kilometers to greet the first Soviet tank that had stopped there."

June 1941.

"Schoolwork is over. The days are sunny, warm. I feel like getting out of the city. We, the Pioneers, are going to a Pioneer meeting in our school yard. We walk along the Vilna streets that are bathed in sunlight. All we talk about is going to the camps. The group dreams of green fields and of cheerful camp life. The group yearns to get out of town. We travel by steamer to Verek. We are greeted by sunny greenery. In the evening we return to the noisy city that teems with life, with people, with the Red Army men's singing and laughter."

June 1941

"Never was life so happy and carefree as in the Soviet summer of 1941."

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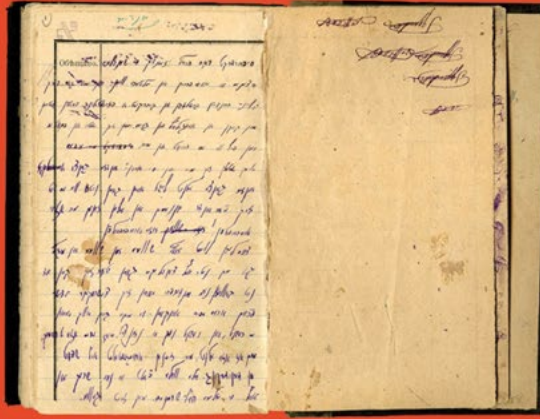
Never was life so happy and carefree as in the Soviet summer of 1941.

Tuesday, June 24th, 1941:

"I recall how almost exactly a year ago I welcomed the Red Army in a little Lithuanian town. We ran for several kilometers to greet the first Soviet tank that had stopped there."

DOCUMENT 2:

Source: <https://museum.yivo.org/artifact/diary-of-yitskhok-rudashevski-ca-1941>



Diary of Yitskhok Rudashevski

Vilna Ghetto, 1941-43. Diary of Yitskhok Rudashevski.

This is the diary of Yitskhok Rudashevski, a Jewish teenager in the Vilna Ghetto. It is available in the original Yiddish as well as an English translation. Rudashevski was 13 years old and was a student at the Real Gymnasium when the Germans occupied Vilna in 1941. He began keeping a diary in Yiddish that chronicled the misery of life in the ghetto. He and his family hid in September 1943, when the ghetto was liquidated (emptied) and its inhabitants sent away to labor or death camps. But their hiding place was discovered. They were shot in the mass killing site at Ponar. Rudashevski was 15 years old when he died.

He described his first day in the ghetto like this:

"The first ghetto day dawns. I run straight out into the street. The streets are still filled with a restless mass of people. It is hard to push your way through. I feel like I am in a chest. There is no air to breathe. Wherever you go you run into a gate that cuts us off from Strashun Street. That is part of the ghetto too. I look for relatives and friends. Some people still have no place to live. They settle in on stairs and in shops. Suddenly the mass of people in the street starts to sway. People start to run. German officers are coming to photograph the crooked alleys, the frightened people. They are satisfied with the Middle Ages which they have brought all the way to the twentieth century!!! Soon they leave. People calm down. I decide I have to find my friends. I think we will have to be together."

Digitization of this artifact has been made possible by the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections project.

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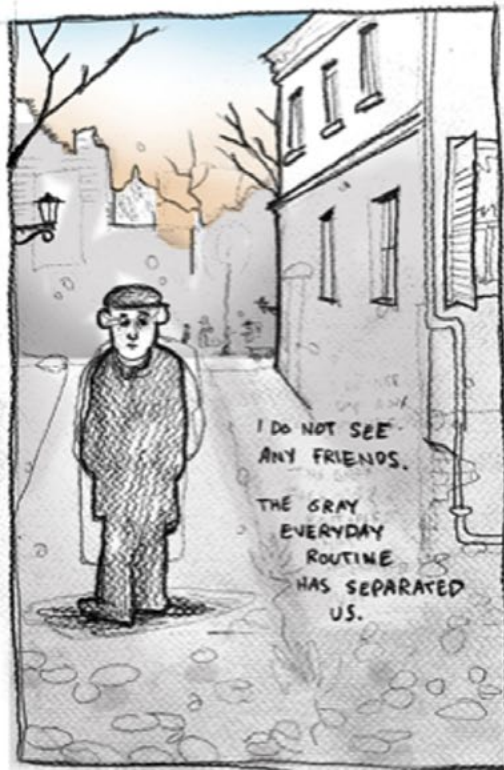
Digitization of this artifact has been made possible by the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections project.

DOCUMENT 3:

Source: <https://museum.yivo.org/experiences/life-in-the-ghetto/environment>







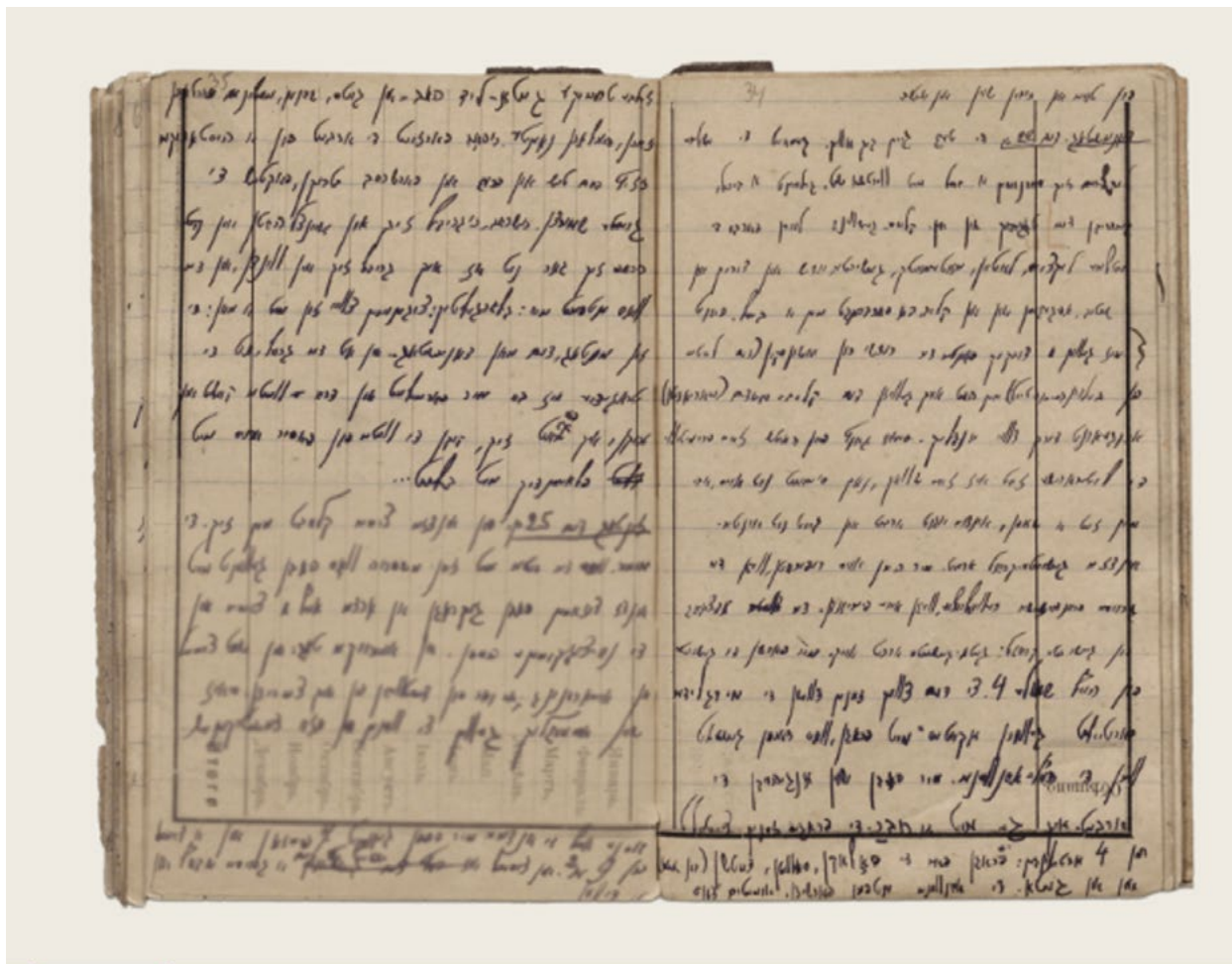






DOCUMENT 4:

Source: <https://museum.yivo.org/experiences/life-in-the-ghetto/culture-and-relationships>



Thursday the 22nd [of October 1942]

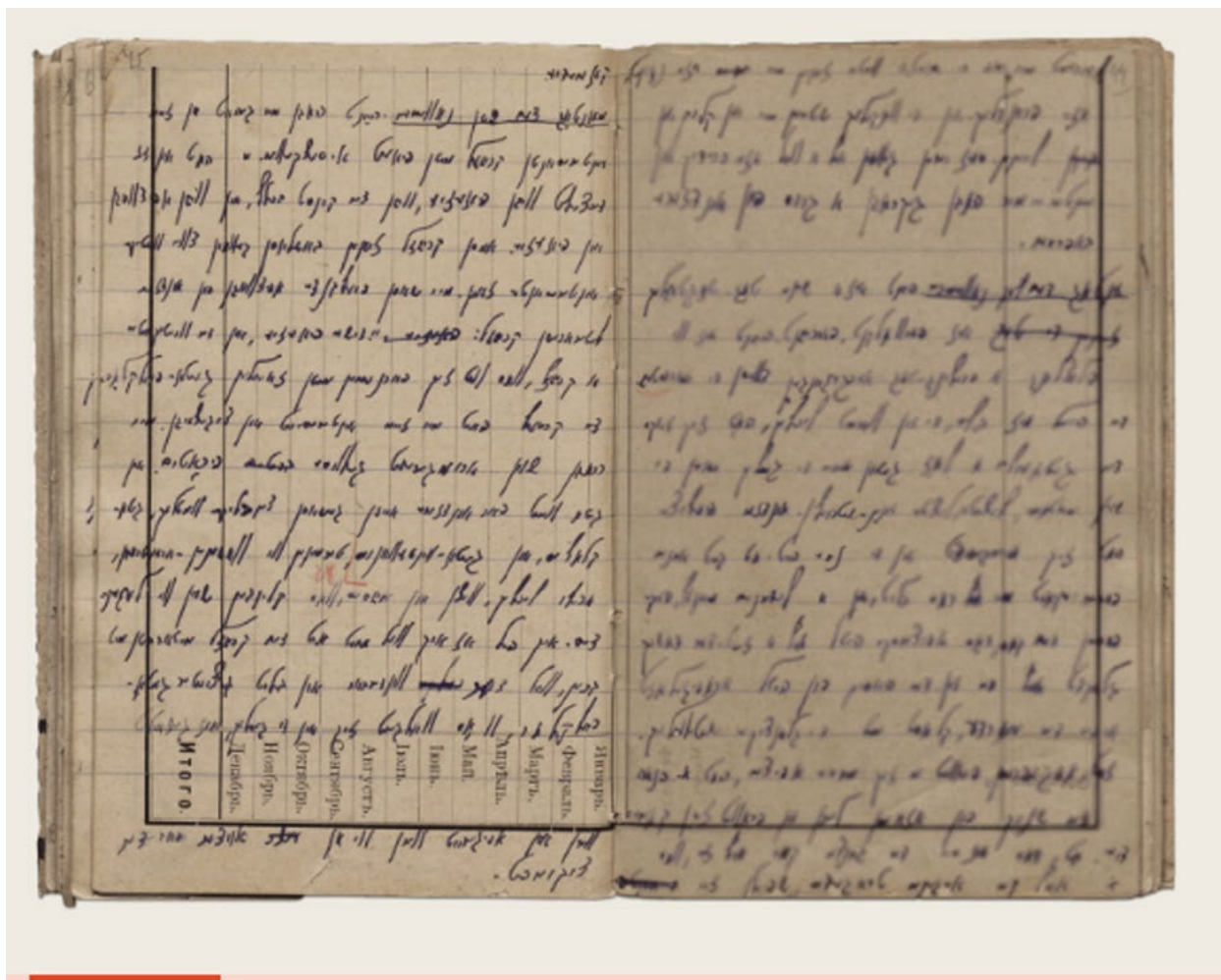
"The days go by quickly. I did my various assignments, occupied myself a bit with housekeeping. Read a short book, wrote in my diary and off to class. The classes went by fast: Latin, Mathematics, History, Yiddish – then back home, had a bite to eat and off to the Club. Here we enjoy ourselves a bit. Today there was an inspection led by Yashunski (the head of the Education Department). We also watched the Club's Maydim (puppets) performed by two boys. It's quite good, though pretty primitive. The literary side is very weak, but it doesn't matter if we see creativity. Our youth is at work and is not going under. Our History circle is functioning. We hear lectures about the great French Revolution and its phases. The second branch of the History circle – ghetto history – is also at work. We are researching the courtyard at 4 Shavler Street. For that purpose questionnaires, with the questions to be posed to the ghetto-inhabitants, have been distributed among the members. We have already begun the work. I go with a friend. The questions are divided into four periods: questions dealing with the Poles, the Soviets, the Germans (before the ghetto), and in the ghetto. The inhabitants answer in different ways, but everywhere it is the same tragic ghetto-refrain – possessions, certificates, malines, loss of property, loss of loved ones. I have tasted the work of the historian. I sit at the table and ask questions and write down the immense griefs dryly, factually. I write, I immerse myself in details and do not realize that I am immersing myself in wounds. And what answers people casually give me: They took away two sons and a husband. The sons on Monday, the husband Thursday. And this horror, this tragedy, is formulated by me in three words, coldly and drily. I ponder this and the words look up at me with flame and blood..."

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DOCUMENT 5

Source: <https://museum.yivo.org/experiences/life-in-the-ghetto/culture-and-relationships>



Monday the 2nd of November [1942]

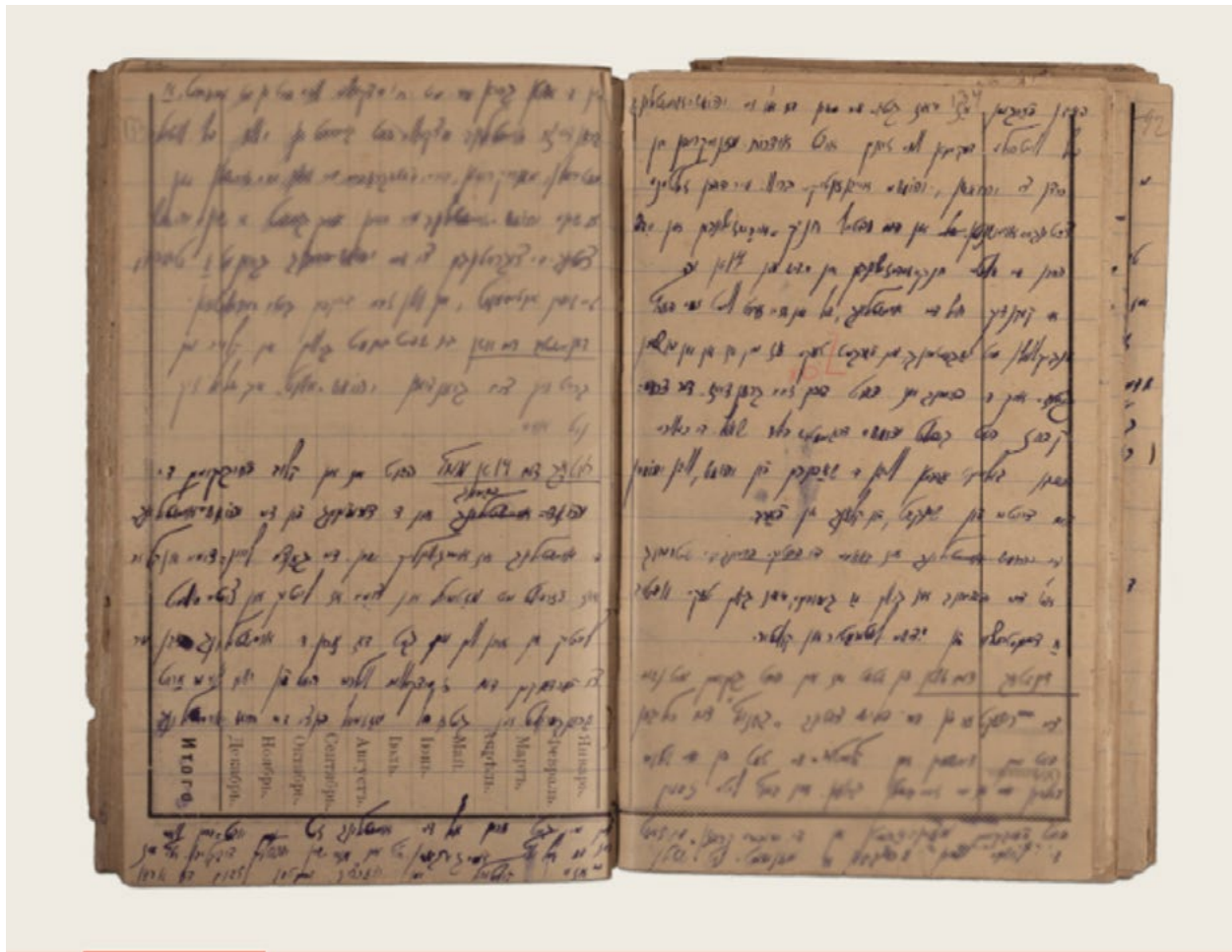
"Today our circle had a very interesting meeting with the poet A. Sutzkever. He spoke to us about poetry, about the art of poetry in general and about the varieties of poetry. At the meeting, two important and interesting things were decided. We are creating the following branches of our literary circle: Yiddish poetry, and most important, a group to concern itself with ghetto-folklore. I was very interested in, and attracted to, this circle. We have already discussed certain details. In the ghetto, before our own eyes, dozens of sayings, curses, good wishes and terms like vashenen – smuggle in – are being created, even songs, jokes and stories that already sound like legends. I feel that I will participate in the circle enthusiastically, because the wonderful ghetto-folklore, etched in blood, which abounds in the streets, must be collected and preserved as a treasure for the future."

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DOCUMENT 6:

Source: <https://museum.yivo.org/experiences/life-in-the-ghetto/culture-and-relationships>



Sunday the 14th of March [1943]

"Today there took place in the Club the Yehoash celebration and the opening of the Yehoash exhibition. The exhibition is exceptionally beautiful. The whole reading-room in the Club is decorated with material. It is well-lit and tidy and your eyes light up when you go in. For this exhibition we have Kh. Sutzkever to thank. From YIVO, where he works, he was able to smuggle in a lot of material for the Yehoash exhibition. When you go into the exhibition, you see the youthful energy which gave full vent to everything here. Everything was selected in a beautiful and youthful way. Everything is so cultural and full of warmth. People came in here and forgot that they are in the ghetto. We have here in the exhibition many valuable documents that are now treasures. Manuscripts sent from Peretz to Yehoash, Yehoash's handwritten letters. We have rare newspaper clippings. In the section "Tanakh [Hebrew Bible] Translations into Yiddish," we have old Yiddish Tanakh-translations from the 17th century. Looking at the exhibition, at our work, your heart fills up with pride and enthusiasm. You really do forget that we are in a somber ghetto. The celebration today also went splendidly. The Dramatic Circle presented Yehoash's dramatic scene "Saul." Club members read their essays about Yehoash's writings, about Yehoash the poet of beauty, sound and color. The mood at the celebration was lofty, it really was a holiday, a demonstration of Yiddish literature and culture."

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DOCUMENT 7:

Witnessing a Life: The Diary of Yitskhok Rudashevski

Alexandra Zapruder, 2024.

When Yitskhok Rudashevski, age 14, began his journal in the Vilna Ghetto in 1941, he could not have known that dozens upon dozens of young Jews in towns and cities across Europe were doing the very same thing: picking up pens, finding a corner of light, and opening their own notebooks in which to write themselves into existence.

What is it that makes a person begin a journal? Sometimes it's to put down innermost thoughts or grapple with the self. Sometimes it's to record a part of the writer's lived experience, to document a particular moment in time, or as an act of defiance against silence or oppression. Whatever the individual reason, it is a profoundly human gesture, stemming from the idea that each individual life matters and that to mark our place in the world is our birthright.

Beyond the question of what surviving wartime journals may mean for their writers, there is the question of what they mean for us, for those who read them years or decades later, in a world that often bears no relation to that of the writer. For us, suddenly, an individual voice rises up from amid the official records, the documents, the scholarly interpretations to say, I was there. This is what it was really like.

Of the many diaries and journals that have come down to us throughout history, those written by young people capture something more. Youth itself is fleeting, reflecting a particular point of view, a developmental moment, that once gone is lost to us forever. Young people who wrote diaries and journals have left us not only a record of their lives at a particular moment in history, but of a particular moment in the span of a life, as well. Youth journals often reflect first encounters with the wider world, encompassing the challenges of friendship, family, and romantic love, the search for identity, and such profound human mysteries as joy, sorrow, loss, justice, hope, and the very nature and meaning of life itself. While teens are often dismissed as "just kids," their journals show just how compelling their interior lives can be, offering insights into our shared human experience and revealing them as thoughtful, reliable witnesses to their own lives.

Yitskhok Rudashevski's diary is undoubtedly among the most lyrical, heartfelt, and haunting of all those written during the Holocaust. In the pages of his journal, we meet a young, aspiring writer, someone who earnestly wished to capture in words both his own lived experience and that of his community. Someone who had a vision not only for himself but also for all the young people sharing the grueling, grinding daily life in the Vilna Ghetto under the Nazis. He believed that through writing, learning, and creative effort and growth, the young people persecuted by the Germans could resist their fate, and could build a foundation for a life after the war. He worked tirelessly toward the belief that he and others could endure and survive, emerging with an education, renewed spirit, and determination to live and contribute.

That future was denied him in the most brutal fashion. And while there is no way to remedy the injustice committed against him and the millions like him during the Holocaust, that does not mean that there is nothing to be done. We can read the words he labored to put down. We can dwell for a time by his side—seeing the world as he saw it—and listening with intention to his voice, rising up out of a past that could so easily be obscured by time, distance, and indifference. It may not be enough, but it is something. So, let us witness his extraordinary, all-too-short life and recognize the singular mark he made on the world.

Alexandra Zapruder, Ed.M., is the author of “Salvaged Pages: Young Writers’ Diaries of the Holocaust.” Ms. Zapruder serves as the Education Director of The Defiant Requiem Foundation and sits on the Board of Directors for the Educators’ Institute for Human Rights (EIHR), a nonprofit that develops partnerships with teachers in post-conflict countries to provide training in best practices on human rights, genocide prevention, and Holocaust education. She has been published in Parade, LitHub, Smithsonian, and The New York Times, and is a co-curator of the present exhibition.

NC STANDARDS:

RL = Reading Literature

RI = Reading Informational Text

W = Writing

RL.7-8.1 — Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RL.7-8.2 — Determine a theme of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

RI.7-8.1 — Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RI.7-8.2 — Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

RI.7-8.3 — Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text.

RI.7-8.8 — Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.

W.7.1 — Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

- a. Organize information and ideas around a topic to plan and prepare to write.
- b. Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.
- c. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.
- d. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence.
- e. Establish and maintain a formal style.
- f. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.
- g. With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.

W.7.2 — Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

- a. Organize information and ideas around a topic to plan and prepare to write.
- b. Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information, using strategies such as definition, classification, comparison/contrast, and cause/effect; include formatting, graphics, and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
- c. Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
- d. Use appropriate transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
- e. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
- f. Establish and maintain a formal style.
- g. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.
- h. With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.



Please don't forget to check our other resources for teachers!

<https://museum.yivo.org/teaching-resources-yitskhok-rudashevski>

The full exhibit is here:

<https://museum.yivo.org/experiences/prologue-yitskhok-rudashevski>