

Lesson: Introduction

Julia Lentini, Sinti and Roma Survivor Deprivation and Perseverance

Target Audience:

Grades 9-12
(Note: Teachers may also find the lesson applicable and suitable for Grade 8)

Curriculum Connections:

American History, World History, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Government, Psychology, Sociology, and Language Arts

Materials for Lesson:

- [“Genocide of European Roma, 1939-1945” article](#)
- [Map of European Romani Population Distribution Circa 1939](#)
- Primo Levi quote from *Survival in Auschwitz*
- Julia Lentini’s 30-minute visual history testimony
- Julia Lentini’s biography
- “Deprivation and Perseverance” student-activity handout
- Discussion questions
- Testimony glossary

Time Requirement:

1-3 class periods

Student Objectives

- To use viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret Julia Lentini’s visual history testimony.
- To develop a basic understanding of the Nazi persecution of the Sinti and Roma.
- To generate a list of ways the Nazis and their collaborators deprived Julia and her family and to consider the ways in which the Lentinis still asserted their humanity.
- To examine the use of deprivation and dehumanization in post-Holocaust genocides.
- To discuss ways we can combat contemporary global instances of systematic dehumanization and destruction.

Lesson Overview

Teachers will introduce the lesson by discussing with students that the Nazis targeted different groups during the Holocaust. One such group was the Sinti and Roma (Gypsies). After teachers use the Historical Introduction section to provide a brief context for **Genocide of European Roma, 1939-1945**, students—with teacher guidance—will define and reflect on the concept of deprivation as described by Holocaust survivor Primo Levi in *Survival in Auschwitz*. Then, through the use of Julia’s testimony and the accompanying student activity, students will identify ways the Nazis and their collaborators sought to systematically deprive and destroy their victims. Teachers are also encouraged to use the postviewing discussion questions to examine Julia’s testimony for deeper meaning and contemporary connections.

Standards Addressed

To align this lesson with state content standards, teachers may visit **Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning** (McRel) for an ‘Online Compendium’ of K-12 content-area standards, which were selected from various state standards and from professional subject-area organizations. McRel national standards include **Historical Understanding, United States History, World History, Civics, Language Arts, and Behavioral Studies**.

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Historical Introduction

Prior to the use of this lesson, assign and/or discuss the “[Genocide of European Roma, 1939-1945](#)” article from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s *Holocaust Encyclopedia* to provide students brief background information on the Nazi persecution and murder of the Sinti and Roma. Students should also examine the [Map of European Romani Population Distribution Circa 1939](#) for additional historical context.

Previewing Focus

Write the following quote by Primo Levi on the board:

“Imagine now a man who is deprived of everything he loves, and at the same time of his house, his habits, his clothes, in short of everything he possesses: he will be a hollow man, reduced to suffering and needs, forgetful of dignity and restraint, for he who loses all often easily loses himself.”—Primo Levi (*Survival in Auschwitz*)

Have students free-write in response to the quote for about five minutes.

POSSIBLE PROMPTS: What does it mean that “he who loses all often easily loses himself”? What is dignity? How does dignity relate to humanity? Do you agree or disagree that humanity, in addition to life itself, can be lost in times of extreme deprivation? Why or why not? Afterward, allow students to share, but only by quoting their own written responses.

Transition

Students should start to consider why the Nazis and their collaborators systematically deprived their victims in an effort to destroy them. In addition, students should think about the forms deprivation can take: physical, mental, emotional, and/or spiritual, and how one form influences the others. Through examination of Julia’s testimony, students will see the forms and effects of deprivation, as well as efforts to maintain one’s humanity in the midst of such loss.

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Viewing Activity

Before students view Julia's testimony, teachers may want to briefly introduce her by quoting from the introductory text card in her testimony:

"Julia Lentini was born April 15, 1926, in Eisern, Germany. In this interview, Julia describes her experience as a young Sinti and Roma (Gypsy) woman in Nazi Germany who, along with most of her family, was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in March of 1943."

Then hand out the "Deprivation and Perseverance" activity for students to complete while they view Julia Lentini's abridged 30-minute visual history testimony. Students should read through the activity to familiarize themselves with the instances of deprivation that Julia describes in her testimony. While viewing the testimony, students should order the events as a way to see that deprivation leading to destruction often happened in increments. Additionally, students should consider ways in which Julia and her family attempted to persevere and assert their humanity in the face of deprivation. In combination, or as a separate activity, teachers can also prepare students to examine Julia's testimony by use of the discussion questions below.

It is also useful to have students examine Julia's narrative style to discuss ways in which it contributes to the overall poignancy of her testimony.

POSSIBLE PROMPT: How do Julia's verbal and nonverbal communication techniques effectively contribute to her meaning? *(Sample answer: Many aspects contribute to Julia's style as an interviewee, such as the inflection/modulation/tone/volume of her voice, the tempo/pacing of her narrative, and her descriptive word choice, as well as physical gestures, such as her eye contact, posture, and facial expressions.)*

Postviewing Focus

In small groups, have students compare their order of events on the activity and then together answer the activity's discussion questions to further contemplate the relationship among loss, perseverance, and survival in Julia's testimony and life. Groups should be prepared to share their conclusions with the larger class.

Lesson: Discussion Questions

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Discussion Questions

The following comprehension/discussion questions were created for use with Julia's testimony. They may be used in addition to the lesson or apart from it.

1. How does Julia describe family life? *(Sample answer: Julia describes their life as being wonderful: a large, close-knit, religious family, traveling together in a custom-built wagon in the summers, singing songs, and sleeping under the stars.)*
2. What does it mean to Julia when Adolf Hitler comes to power? Why? *(Sample answer: Julia is young, unconcerned, and unaffected. She has no idea that she, as a Sinti and Roma, will be in any danger. In fact, she envies the girls in the BDM (League of German Girls) and wishes to join them, but her mother won't let her.)*
3. How does Julia describe her arrival at Auschwitz? *(Sample answer: She remembers arriving at night, and the lights were so bright. She remembers dust was everywhere and the people being crowded into barracks, the children screaming and crying, the tattooing of a number on people being assigned to a barracks along with the 'delousing,' and the shame her mother felt being naked in front of her family, especially her sons.)*
4. In Julia's experience, she describes death as commonplace in Auschwitz. How so? *(Sample answer: Julia describes her own bout with typhoid fever, which was an epidemic in the camp. She lost her mother, father, and oldest sister to typhoid and almost died herself. She additionally describes a selection of Jewish male prisoners from the sick block, who were put in trucks and hauled, presumably, to the gas chambers.)*
5. Julia believed that to survive, one had to adapt. Describe ways in which Julia adapted to her surroundings. *(Sample answer: She says that if she hadn't adapted to the horrific odors, the brutality, the humiliation, and the sickness all around her, she'd have been finished right there.)*
6. Sometimes nonverbal communication is used, either consciously or unconsciously, to convey intended meaning in visual media. Where are examples of Julia using gestures or other nonverbal techniques to illustrate her meaning? *(Sample answer: With both hand and facial gestures, she describes the uniforms worn by the young girls in the BDM, demonstrates when they were tattooed, and describes her father's decline in weight and health.)*

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7. After her transfer to the Schlieben concentration camp, Julia suffers a brutal and humiliating lashing. How might both the crime and punishment reflect Nazi beliefs? *(Sample answer: For stealing a small can of food to share with other girls in her barracks, Julia endured a public, brutal whipping. Such punishment reflects the Nazi beliefs in their own superiority. Prisoners, for example, who were Jewish and Sinti Roma, were deemed subhuman by the Nazis and as such did not deserve anything, including adequate food, no matter how plentiful the supply might be. The nature of the punishment demonstrated that to break a rule would result in immediate, brutal, and public punishment in order to discourage others from acting similarly.)*
8. Julia implies that she was fortunate to twice be chosen for kitchen duty. Why? How could the kind of “assignment” a prisoner received make the difference between life and death? *(Sample answer: Julia’s assignment was less arduous work, was mostly indoors, and may have provided her the chance to get a little bit of extra food. These factors, taken either separately or together, likely would improve one’s chance for survival.)*
9. In any survivor’s story there are instances where luck made the difference between life and death. Besides her having been assigned to kitchen duty twice, can you think of other examples in Julia’s testimony where her survival depended at least in part on luck? *(Sample answer: She survived typhoid, recovered from the brutal whipping, and dodged Allied bombs prior to her liberation by the Soviet Army.)*
10. In Julia’s testimony, she described a German soldier whom the prisoners hid to keep him safe at the time of liberation. What might such a response by prisoners indicate? *(Sample answer: Such a response could indicate that prisoners, despite all attempts to dehumanize them, still were able to distinguish and act upon core beliefs of justice, including judging the innocence, complicity, and guilt of their captors.)*
11. Although Julia survived the Holocaust, she shared that in addition to physical scars, she was emotionally scarred. Discuss some of the ways her experience shaped her later life. *(Sample answer: She thought she wasn’t capable of loving anybody anymore and she really didn’t think God existed. She had to learn to trust people again and accept that this was a certain time in her life, which would never happen again. In contrast, she refers to the deep love that she and her surviving siblings share, a love that has only become stronger over the years. Teachers might choose to explore this contrast in emotions with students.)*

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12. Why were dehumanization and degradation vital elements of the Nazis' plan for their victims? *(Sample answer: Being removed from familiar environments and possessions was frightening, difficult, and disorienting. To then rob victims of identity and separating families were further blows to well-being. On top of that, the debasement, the contagion, and the brutal conditions further assured victims' destruction, serving the genocidal intent of the Nazis.)*
13. In what ways did Julia still manage to assert her humanity and spirit even in the midst of extreme suffering and deprivation? *(Sample answer: Julia tries to steal food—not only for herself but for her fellow prisoners and is severely punished for it. She also tried to carry out from the barracks a fellow prisoner who was too weak to walk when the Allied bombing occurred prior to liberation.)*
14. Besides the Sinti and Roma, who were other groups targeted in the Holocaust, and why were they targeted? *(Sample answer: Other groups targeted were the Jews, those with physical and mental disabilities, Poles, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, homosexuals, and political dissidents. These people were all targeted for destruction or suffered grievous oppression.)*
15. Julia is just one of many survivors and witnesses who chose to give testimony about their experiences during the Holocaust. Why do you think people give testimony? Should they give testimony? *(Answers will vary—anecdotal reasons for giving testimony, including to warn, to bear witness, to speak for those who cannot, to pass on family history, etc. Most students will agree that people should give testimony because audiences learn so much from it—testimony personalizes history.)*
16. Intentionally inflicting conditions of deprivation resulting in dehumanization and genocide by attrition were not techniques invented by or ending with the Nazis. What other examples exist in the history of the modern world or in present day? *(Sample answers could include the displacement of people, a lack of resources, abysmal conditions, or the rape of women and their infection with HIV, all of which have resulted in genocide by attrition in Darfur.)*
17. As members of a global citizenry, what actions can we take to stop and/or reverse conditions designed to deprive, dehumanize, and destroy that exist in the world today? *(Answers will vary; try to make students see the small steps they can take, including raising awareness with classmates, friends, families, and within communities. Becoming informed and creating public noise is the first step we can all take.)*

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Biographical Connection

Once students have watched Julia Lentini's testimony and completed the activity and/or discussion questions, teachers may wish to print and hand out Julia's biographical profile for students to read as a closing activity.

SUGGESTED PROMPTS: Compare and contrast how Julia's story is transmitted through the two forms of media: visual history testimony and written biographic profile. What content information, if any, is unique to each medium? What is the advantage of each medium? Are there any disadvantages? Which medium do you prefer? Why?

Lesson: Glossary

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Glossary

The following glossary has been created to assist students and teachers with potentially unfamiliar words, phrases, or concepts in Julia's testimony.

Auschwitz II-Birkenau¹ In October 1941, 10,000 Soviet POWs began the construction of Auschwitz II-Birkenau. When construction was complete, the camp had nine sections separated by electrified barbed-wire fences. Originally intended as a camp for 100,000 Soviet POWs, Auschwitz II-Birkenau's main function became the murder of European Jews. The insecticide Zyklon B was used in the camp's gas chambers. Four large gas chamber and crematoria facilities became operational between March and June 1943. When all four were operational, Auschwitz II-Birkenau possessed an unsurpassed capacity for mass murder and body disposal. Gassing operations continued until November 1944. On January 27, 1945, the Auschwitz camp complex was liberated by Soviet forces; at Auschwitz II-Birkenau 5,800 prisoners remained alive. During the course of its existence, prisoners in the camp represented many categories, including political prisoners, Poles, criminals, Jews, Soviet POWs, and Sinti and Roma ("Gypsies"). It is estimated that 1.1 million to 1.6 million predominantly Jewish men, women, and children were murdered at Auschwitz, nearly all of them in the gas chambers at Auschwitz II-Birkenau.

Bund Deutscher Mädel¹ The League of German Girls (BDM) was organized in a similar fashion to the Hitler Youth. There were two general age groups within the BDM: young girls 10 to 14 years of age and older girls 15 to 21 years. The central focus of this group was to remind young girls that they were the "carriers of the National Socialist worldview." Toward that end, they were expected to dedicate themselves to service and physical fitness aimed at preparing them for motherhood.

Bürgermeister³ The literal English translation is master of the town [mayor].

Hitler Youth¹ The Nazis established the Hitler Youth (*Hitler Jugend* or HJ) organization in 1926 to teach German boys the beliefs of the Nazi Party and to transform them into a "violently active, dominating, brutal youth." Once they had been indoctrinated, Hitler Youth were highly disciplined and fanatically loyal to Hitler. During the years of the Third Reich, the Hitler Youth became Germany's principal youth organization, and in 1936 it was made a state agency. German boys 14 to 18 years old were expected to enlist. Membership in the Hitler Youth became compulsory after 1939.

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Magazine³ A storehouse; warehouse.

SS² The German abbreviation for *Schutzstaffel*, which literally translates to protection squads. It was a paramilitary formation of the Nazi Party initially created to serve as bodyguards to Hitler and other Nazi leaders. It later took charge of political intelligence-gathering, the German police and the central security apparatus, the concentration camps, and the systematic mass murder of Jews and other victims.

Shoah⁴ A Hebrew word meaning “catastrophe,” referring to the Holocaust.

Sinti and Roma (Gypsy)¹ The collective term *Gypsy* (supposedly derived from *Egyptian*) pejoratively refers to members of distinctive Sinti and Roma tribes. Members of these groups refer to themselves as “Rom,” which means “man” or “husband.” Allegedly originating from northern India, waves of Gypsies migrated to Western Europe by the fifteenth century. In Europe most Gypsies belong to either Sinti (in Germany and Western Europe) or Roma (in Austria, Eastern Europe, and the Balkans) tribes and speak an Indo-European language called Romani. Persecution of Sinti and Roma, which existed for centuries in Europe, was based on differences in language and appearance and on their nomadic lifestyle. Granted full equality under the Weimar Constitution, German Gypsies continued to be targeted by both new and existing discriminatory legislation. Such targeting continued on an expanded, and often “racial” basis throughout the Nazi period. Gypsies were classified as asocial and work-shy, and were targeted for discrimination along with the Jews under the Nuremberg Laws.

Tattooing² During the Holocaust, concentration camp prisoners received tattoos only at one location, the Auschwitz concentration camp complex, which consisted of Auschwitz I (Main Camp), Auschwitz II (Auschwitz-Birkenau), and Auschwitz III (Monowitz and the subcamps). Incoming prisoners were assigned a camp serial number, which was sewn to their prison uniforms. Only those prisoners selected for work were issued serial numbers; those prisoners sent directly to the gas chambers were not registered and received no tattoos. Beginning in February 1943, SS authorities issued two separate series of numbers to Roma (Gypsy) prisoners registered at Auschwitz: one for the men and one for the women. Through August 1944, 10,094 numbers were assigned from the former series and 10,888 from the latter. Gypsy prisoners were given the letter Z (*Zigeuner* is German for Gypsy) in addition to the serial number.

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Typhoid fever¹ An acute infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Salmonella typhi*. The bacterium usually enters the mouth by ingestion of contaminated water or food.

Source of Definitions

¹ USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archives Search Terms and Definitions

² The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum online glossary and/or *Holocaust Encyclopedia*

³ www.dictionary.com

⁴ *Echoes and Reflections: a Multimedia Curriculum on the Holocaust*

Extension Activities

If time permits, teachers might consider including the following additional activity.

1. Besides the Sinti and Roma, who were other Nazi victims of persecution? Assign students different victim groups and have them research the who, what, when, where, why, and how (5Ws and H) of the group's persecution.

References

The following is a list of the full Internet addresses used in this lesson.

1. **Genocide of the European Roma:** <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005219>
2. **Map of European Romani Population Distribution Circa 1939:** <http://www.ushmm.org/lcmedia/viewer/wlc/map.php?RefId=EUR77050>
3. **McRel:** <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

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Additional Resources:

To learn more about the Sinti and Roma, teachers/students may wish to consult the following online sources:

1. **The Danish Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, “The Gypsies during the Holocaust”:** <http://www.holocaust-education.dk/holocaust/sigojnerne.asp>
2. **Florida Center for Instructional Technology, A Teacher’s Guide to the Holocaust, “Sinti and Roma”:** <http://fcit.usf.edu/HOLOCAUST/people/VictRoma.htm>
3. **Jewish Virtual Library, Gypsies in the Holocaust:** <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/gypsies.html>
4. **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, library bibliography for additional resources:** http://www.ushmm.org/research/library/bibliography/index.php?content=sinti_roma