

Lesson Plan – Group 4

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A group-based classroom activity built on the testimony of Teofila, allowing students **to explore her character and her world** and, finally, to assemble together in plenary a complex portrait of a person who lived in three worlds: **pre-war Jewish-Polish Kraków → the world of persecution and extermination → life after the war**.

The testimony is especially suited to this because Teofila describes a happy childhood, a family that was assimilated yet kept tradition, studies and friendships with Jews and non-Jews, and later a sharp transition to persecution, the ghetto, Płaszów, Auschwitz and the death march.

Activity: "Who Was Teofila?"

Grade: 10–11

Time: 60–75 minutes

Structure: 4–5 groups

Product: each group creates a different type of product + a 3–5 minute presentation in plenary.

The Overarching Question of the Activity

How can we understand the life of Teofila Silberring through the memories she chooses to tell?

Three concepts can be written on the board:

Identity | Rupture | Continuity

Ask students, as they work, to check: What changed? What was destroyed? And what, nevertheless, remained?

Group Division

Group 1 – "The Life That Was"

Topic:

Kraków before the war – what did Teofila's childhood look like?

Students receive excerpts from the sections about the family, the home, the street, school, friends and holidays.

They must locate in the testimony at least **8 concrete details** about her life before the war.

For example:

- The language spoken at home
- Clothing
- The family home
- Holidays
- Food
- School
- Friends
- Games
- Music
- Cultural life

- Relations with non-Jews

The testimony particularly highlights the interesting tension between integration and keeping tradition: the family spoke Polish, dressed like their surroundings and sent the children to Polish schools, yet kept Jewish holidays and traditions.

Product:

"Teofila's Childhood Room"

The group creates a poster / visual map of her life.

In the center: **Teofila at age 10–12.**

Around her, at least 8 "windows" representing her life.

A short sentence from the testimony can be added next to each detail.

Presentation:

The group presents the poster and explains:

"If we had met Teofila in 1937, what would we have known about her?"

Group 2 – "Who Am I?"

Topic:

Teofila's identity

Here I would turn the testimony into a philosophical-historical question.

Students must find expressions in the testimony related to:

Jewishness / Polishness / family / tradition / secularism / school / language / friendships.

They must ask:

Was Teofila "Jewish", "Polish", or both?

It is important not to give them the answer in advance.

The testimony itself allows for complexity: she recounts that she felt no barriers between herself and Polish children at school, and even went to church with her nanny; on the other hand, the family observed Jewish holidays, went to synagogue and gave her a Yiddish name – Taube.

Product:

"Teofila's Identity Meter"

The group creates an axis/map and places different events from her life on it.

For example:

More Polish ← ————— → **More Jewish**

But the goal is not to find the "correct position", but to show that her identity **is not a single point.**

Extension task:

At the end, the group must formulate **one sentence**:

"Teofila's identity was complex because..."

Presentation:

One student presents the map, and two other students bring two quotations from the testimony that support their interpretation.

Group 3 – "The Moment the World Broke"

Topic:

The transition from childhood to war

Here the group should focus specifically on **change**.

They must choose 5–7 moments in the testimony that show how Teofila's world changes.

For example:

Home → Persecution → Ghetto → Labor → Płaszów → Auschwitz → Death March

The group must ask:

Can we identify in the testimony a single moment at which "the old world" ended?

The transition is especially dramatic: her mother is murdered in their home by Germans, the family is sent to the ghetto, and she later moves on to Płaszów and Auschwitz.

Product:

A Human Timeline

Not an ordinary timeline of dates.

They create a timeline containing three kinds of information:

What happened to Teofila?

What did she feel / remember?

What changed in her life?

For example:

Home and family → Loss of her mother → Ghetto → Labor → Płaszów → Auschwitz → Death march

And beneath each event – a word or short sentence from the testimony.

Presentation:

The group presents the timeline and explains:

"Which transition was, in our view, the hardest?"

Group 4 – "The Words That Cannot Be Forgotten"

Topic:

The power of memory

This is the more artistic group.

Students receive the passage about the death march, and in particular her descriptions of the snow, the cold, the single shoe, the sound of wooden clogs and the blood in the snow.

Their task:

To choose **3–5 images** from the testimony and consider:

Why did these particular details remain in her memory?

Product:

"A Drawing of Memory"

They create a single visual image – a drawing, collage, composition or even a minimalist poster – based on the testimony.

But there is one rule:

No realistic scene of a concentration camp may be drawn.

Instead, they must use symbols.

For example:

- A single shoe

- Snow
- A row of people
- A red stain
- A voice
- Hands
- A road
- Four people leaning on one another

Beneath the artwork they write:

"We chose this image because..."

Presentation:

The group presents the artwork for two minutes, then reads aloud the passage on which it was based.

This can be a very powerful moment in plenary.

Group 5 – "After Everything"

If there are 5 groups, I would give the fifth group one of the most important topics in the testimony:

Topic:

How does one return to life after the Holocaust?

Students will look in the testimony not only for "what happened", but for **how a person rebuilds their life**.

They must find at least five signs of renewed life:

- Return to Poland
- Searching for family members
- Studies
- Work
- A relationship
- Marriage
- Children
- A home
- Grandchildren
- Renewed contact with friends

After the war, Teofila posts a note saying that she is alive and asks other survivors to contact her. She later returns to Kraków, studies at the university, meets Adam through a textbook, and they marry in 1947.

But here too there is complexity: the house on Miodowa Street is returned to her, yet the place remains bound in memory to her mother's murder, and she says she is still unable to go there.

Product:

"Front Page of a Newspaper – 1947"

Students imagine they are editing a newspaper in Kraków in 1947.

The headline:

"Teofila Returns to Life"

They must create a newspaper page that includes:

- A main headline
- A short news item
- A short "interview" with Teofila
- A picture / illustration
- Sub-heading: "What did she lose?"
- Sub-heading: "What is she rebuilding?"

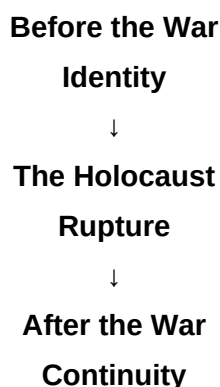
Presentation:

The group presents the "newspaper" as if it were a newsroom.

Plenary Stage – "Assembling Teofila"

Here I would do something important: **do not let each group simply present its product and finish.**

Draw three circles on the board:



After presenting, each group must stick on the board **two sentences from the testimony.**

One that expresses:

What was taken from Teofila

And one that expresses:

What remained in her

In this way, a shared "portrait" of Teofila is created at the end.

The Closing Question – I would choose precisely this one

Not:

"What did we learn about the Holocaust?"

But rather:

"Is Teofila's testimony primarily a story about the Holocaust – or a story about a whole life?"

Each student votes:

The Holocaust ← ————— → **Life**

And then explains the choice in one sentence.

This is a good question because the testimony itself begins with childhood, family, food, home, school and friends – and only later does the Holocaust arrive. And it does not end after the Holocaust either: it continues on to studies, marriage, children, grandchildren and life in Kraków.

A closing sentence that can be left on the board for students:

"The Nazis tried to turn Teofila into a number. The testimony gives her back her name, her home, her childhood, her family, her friends and her voice."

This, in my view, can be the strongest pedagogical axis of the whole activity: **not to learn only about a victim of the Holocaust, but to get to know a person who had a whole world before the Holocaust and who kept trying to build a world after it as well.**