

# LESSON: Three Minutes in Poland

**GRADE LEVEL:** Adaptable for grades 7–12

**SUBJECT:** Multidisciplinary

**TIME REQUIRED:** Approximately 60–75 minutes (extensions available)

**This is a *thematic* lesson that builds on fundamental knowledge and provides in-depth exploration of a topic.**

## RATIONALE

This lesson is designed to engage students in understanding the individuality of Jewish lives affected by or lost in the Holocaust and the cumulative effects of the Holocaust on communities.

After viewing archival film footage documenting Jewish life in Nasielsk, a small town in Poland, before the German invasion in September 1939, students explore how the community changed during the Nazi occupation that followed.

## OVERVIEW

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What can we learn from home movies of prewar Jewish life in Europe?
- What is a primary source?
- How can photographs and film footage be used as primary source materials?

### EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

**At the end of this lesson, students understand:**

- The catastrophic impact of the Holocaust on Jewish life in Europe
- The role of primary sources in historical understanding

### TEACHER PREPARATION

- Distribute the [KWL Chart](#) and [Student Organizer](#) used in the lesson
- Review the [Museum’s Guidelines for Teaching About the Holocaust](#)
- Read the Holocaust Encyclopedia articles [Jewish Life in Europe Before the Holocaust](#), [Jewish Population of Europe in 1933](#)
- Review this [video](#) shown at the end of the lesson

### LEARNER VARIABILITY MODIFICATIONS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

**The lesson is intentionally flexible to allow for individual teacher modifications to achieve the educational outcomes.** Technology and teaching strategies are suggested in the instructional sequence; please use other options if they support the learning needs of your students. Consider utilizing graphic organizers, note-taking strategies, reading choices, and online engagement tools.

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## PART ONE:

### PRIOR TO CLASS

**Prior to the lesson**, ask students to choose two favorite photos of friends and/or family from their phone, Instagram, or other social media platform, or actual printed photographs that meet the following criteria:

- The photograph must contain people
- The photo cannot be a portrait
- Once the photos are selected write a descriptive caption which answers the questions: Who, What, Where, When, Why and How? Ask students why these moments were documented with photos.

## PART TWO: EXPLORING HISTORICAL FILM FOOTAGE

### DEFINE

Define the word **primary source**.

### PRIMARY SOURCES:

- Immediate, first-hand accounts of a topic from people who had a direct connection with it.
- Archives store primary sources

Ask students if photos and film footage are primary sources. How?

Have students fill out a [KWL chart](#) about what they know about European Jewish life before the Holocaust. They will return to the KWL chart throughout the lesson.

Assign students to read the *Holocaust Encyclopedia* article “[Jewish Life in Europe Before the Holocaust](#)”. Ask students to return to their KWL chart to add what they learned. For further learning, you can assign the *Holocaust Encyclopedia* Article [Jewish Population of Europe in 1933](#).

### BACKGROUND

Provide students with the following background to prepare them to view the film footage:

#### SHARE WITH THE STUDENTS

Nasielsk is a small town in east-central Poland. Before Germany invaded in September 1939, an estimated 3,000 Jews lived there.

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David Kurtz was born in Nasielsk and emigrated to the United States with his wife, Lena (Liza), in the 1890s. David founded the American Blouse Company in the 1920s, later renamed the David Kurtz Shirt Company. The couple had three children.

In 1938, David and Liza took a sightseeing trip to Europe with three friends, Louis and Lillian Malina, and Louis's sister, Essie Malina Diamond. Like David, Louis was also born in Nasielsk.

David documented the trip on 16mm film, capturing scenes throughout Europe—including three minutes of ordinary life in Nasielsk before it was changed utterly by the Holocaust.

## REVIEW FOOTAGE

Watch the [film footage](#), and share the [student interactive](#) for students to complete.

Share with students if needed: This is the film footage David Kurtz shot of Nasielsk, Poland, in 1938. It provides the only known moving images of the predominantly Jewish town shortly before Germany invaded.

**Teacher note:** There is no sound accompanying this footage. The initial scenes are dark but you'll find the images become easier to make out as the film continues. There are two films; you can advance to the second film by clicking on the arrows at the sides of the screen.

After finishing the film footage, share the following with your students:

In 2008, David and Liza's grandson, Glenn Kurtz, discovered the footage in the closet of his parent's home in Florida and set out on what became a four-year journey to identify the faces in the film. David's journey eventually became the book, *Three Minutes in Poland: Discovering a Lost World in a 1938 Family Film*, which chronicles the rich and surprisingly intertwined stories of the people of Nasielsk.

Have students return to their KWL chart to fill out what they've learned.

Optional Activity: Assign students to read about the invasion of Poland by the Nazis in this [Holocaust Encyclopedia article](#).

## PART THREE: CONCLUSION ASSESSMENT

Watch this [video](#) with students describing how one family is discovered in the film footage. Have students return to their [student interactive](#).

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## ASK THE STUDENTS

- Explain what Glenn Kurtz means when he says, “Now that I’ve sat with Morry and have watched the film with him when he can identify people and tell us anecdotes about their lives, it’s brought a town into memory again as a place of life, instead of just a place of death.” Why is this important?
- After viewing the archival film footage and reading about prewar Jewish life in Europe, how would you describe what was lost in communities like Nasielsk throughout Europe during the Holocaust?

## EXTENSION

Prepare students to complete photo analysis with images from Nasielsk.

1. Assign students an image from this [list](#)
2. Provide students with this [Photo Analysis worksheet](#).
3. Have students share their observations in pairs or groups or as part of another assignment.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Invasion of Poland, 1939 Map](#)
- [World War II and the Holocaust Animated Map](#)
- [Pre-World War II Jewish Life Lesson Plan](#)
- [28-Minute Film on Jewish Life before World War II](#)