

Grade: 6-12	Lesson: Art Analysis
Topic: Holocaust art	Subject(s): Social Studies

Lesson Plan

LEARNING OBJECTIVE:

- Students will understand how many detainees used art as a medium to help them cope with their imprisonment and to show the world what went on in these camps through their experiences.
- Students will analysis works of art and place them in historical context to better understand the lives of those in the camps.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S):

- How is art a form of resistance?
- Why was it important for those in the camps to make works of art despite the risks?

STRUCTURE/ACTIVITIES/MATERIALS:

Starter Activity:

1. The Nazi Creed: Read this excerpt from Hitler’s book *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), published in 1925. Answer the following questions. (Note: This was written while Hitler was in prison for leading the Nazis’ unsuccessful “Beer Hall Putsch” in the German state of Bavaria, their first attempt at seizing the German government by force.)

- Compare and contrast paragraphs #2 and #8.
- Reread paragraph #6. How does it relate to #2 and #8?
- Which paragraph stands out to you? Why?
- Why do you think people believed this ideology? (a system of ideas and ideals, especially one which forms the basis of economic or political theory & policy.)
- Why doesn’t this writing make sense?

2. Discuss savior/scapegoat dichotomy after reading. Mention how propaganda was on every corner (like billboards). Discuss concepts of race as a social construct that has been debunked

by science.

Lesson Activity:

1. Introduction:

Give a short history of how Hitler's writing outlined many of the key concepts that led to the Holocaust. Review the stages of genocide: classification, symbolization, discrimination, dehumanization, organization, polarization, preparation, persecution, extermination, denial. Include censorship, propaganda, public humiliation, laws, ghettos, deportation, death camps. (Camps were first built in 1933, used mainly for POWs.) Give students time to think and discuss before and during the lesson. You may choose which works of art you'd like to discuss or ask students which pique their interest.

2. Forbidden Art:

Look through the artwork. In the camps, victims were forbidden from creating or keeping artwork or mementos in their barracks. A victim found in violation of these rules would be subject to harsh punishment from the Nazi guards. Despite the risks, many detainees used art as a medium to help them cope with their imprisonment and to show the world what went on in these camps through their experiences. ([Activity Google Slides](#))

Analysis Guiding Questions

- What do you see?
- What do you feel after viewing this image?
- Why would a person risk their life to create art?
- Do you think it is important to preserve these pieces of art?
- Why or why not?

Closing Activity:

1. Ask students to select one of the works of art in this lesson. Use that work of art to write a diary entry about what life was like in the camps for the prisoners. What can we learn about their experiences from *forbidden art*?

Teacher Guide



Fig. 7. Mieczysław Kościelniak, *A Return from Work*, 24 x 32,5 cm, paper, crayon, Auschwitz, 1942, Collections of the Auschwitz Memorial

Who are the people in this image?

What are they carrying? Alive or dead? Why?

Notice the uniforms. Inmates are forced to carry this sick and dying.

What material might the artwork have been made with?

Who are all the different people represented?

Note the women. Hair done, nice dresses, embracing their date/husband. Historical note: Some would take pictures in front of killing pits and send as a postcard (like after a lynching in US).

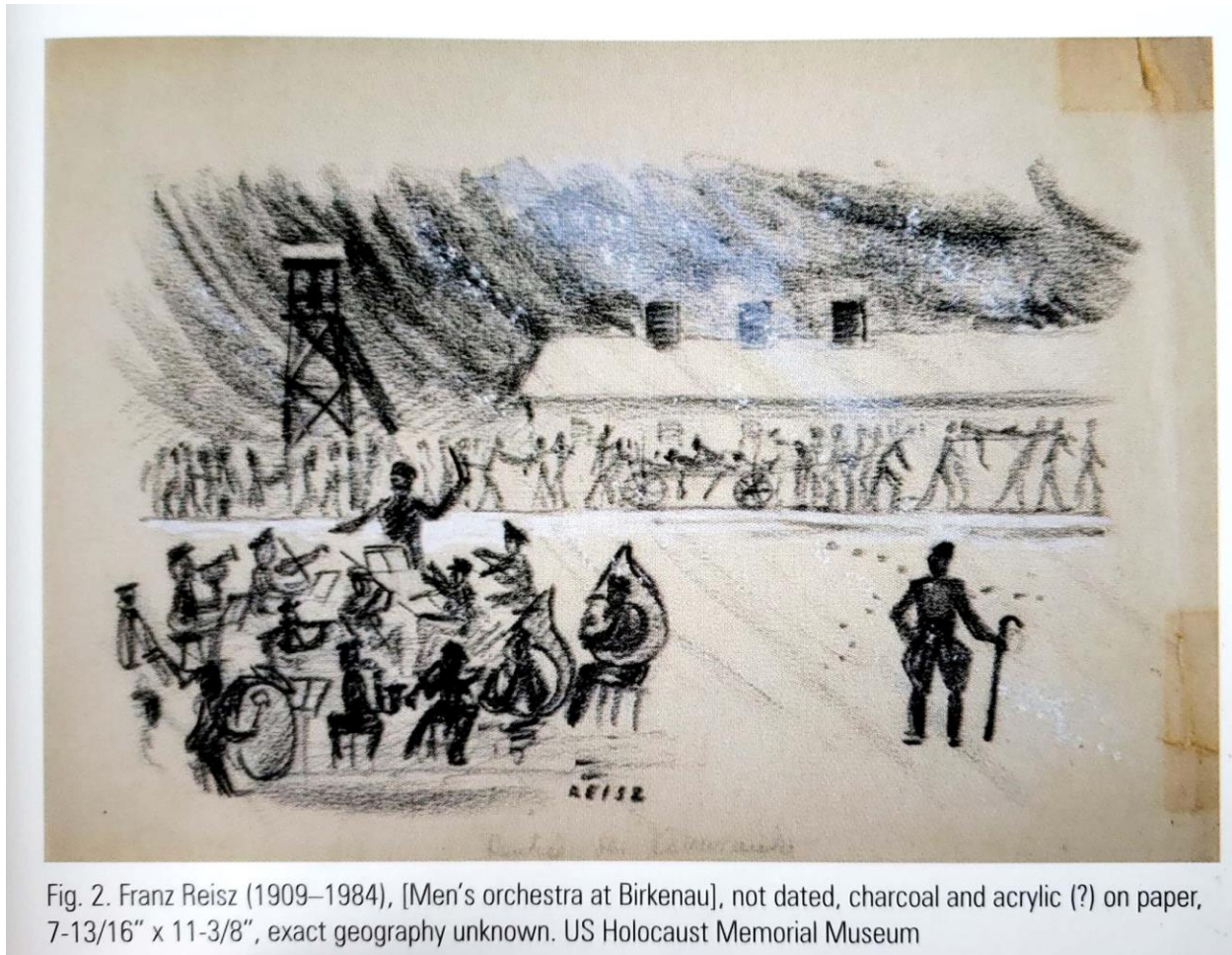
How many dogs to one victim?

Background fence – anywhere to run?

What used to happen on Sundays? (church) Nazi Creed: “Christian love, mercy, and charity must be replaced by pride, willpower, defiance, and hate.”



Fig. 9.
Abraham Ryza,
*A Sunday Pastime
of the SS: Setting
the Dogs on an
Inmate*,
pen and ink; 1945,
Lebenau camp,
21.3 x 30 cm



Look at all parts of this artwork:

Orchestra

Selection?

Stretcher

Ash clouds

Guard Tower

Structures in rear

Guard/cane

Why do you listen to music? How does it make you feel? (Relaxed/calm/to cope)

Why would Nazis want victims to feel that way? Why have an orchestra?

What might be happening in the background?



Fig. 6. Herbert Sandberg, *The Innate*, 1945, soot and whiting, 16.6 x 21.6 cm, Inv. No. V 985 L

Who are these people? (discuss the [Sonderkommando](#)) Note that all are prisoners/victims.

Are they dragging a person who is dead or alive?

Discuss "Soot and whiting." What materials might have been used to draw this? Possibly someone's ashes? Soot from human remains?

"Whiting" – could be scraping soot or adding material?

Discuss darkest parts of artwork near the body.



Read the title "Dividing a Loaf of Bread" and discuss.

What are they wearing?

Who do you think they are? How do you know?

Notice how tattered the paper is. What might have happened to it?

Why such serious faces? Why are they all concentrating?

How much food did they eat? ("coffee" or "tea", rotten soup, bread with marmalade, sausage, or margarine.

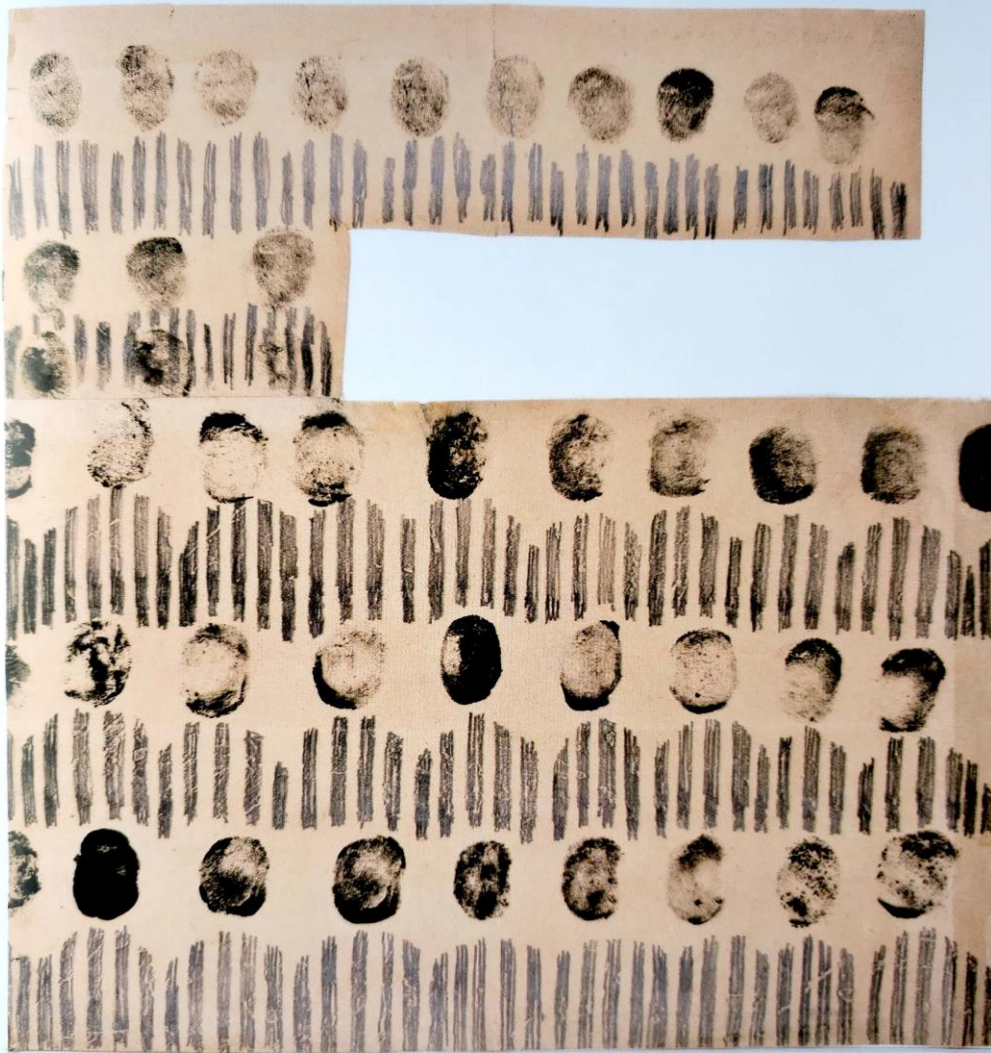


Fig. 3. Józef Szajna, *Our Biographies*, 34 x 29,8 cm, paper, pencil, ink, Buchenwald, 1944/1945.
Collections of the Auschwitz Memorial

Faces or back of heads?

How might it have been created? Ink, ash, another way?

What are the stripes?

Why is part of the artwork missing? Cut out? If so, why? Was a scrap reused? Needed to write on it?

What does "Our Biographies" mean?

Would you want to be remembered? Why?

Why would someone choose to design their artwork this way?



Fig. 9. An unknown author, *The Separating of Families*, *The Sketchbook from Auschwitz*, paper, pencil, ink, 13,5 x 20,8 cm, Auschwitz, 1943, Collections of the Auschwitz Memorial

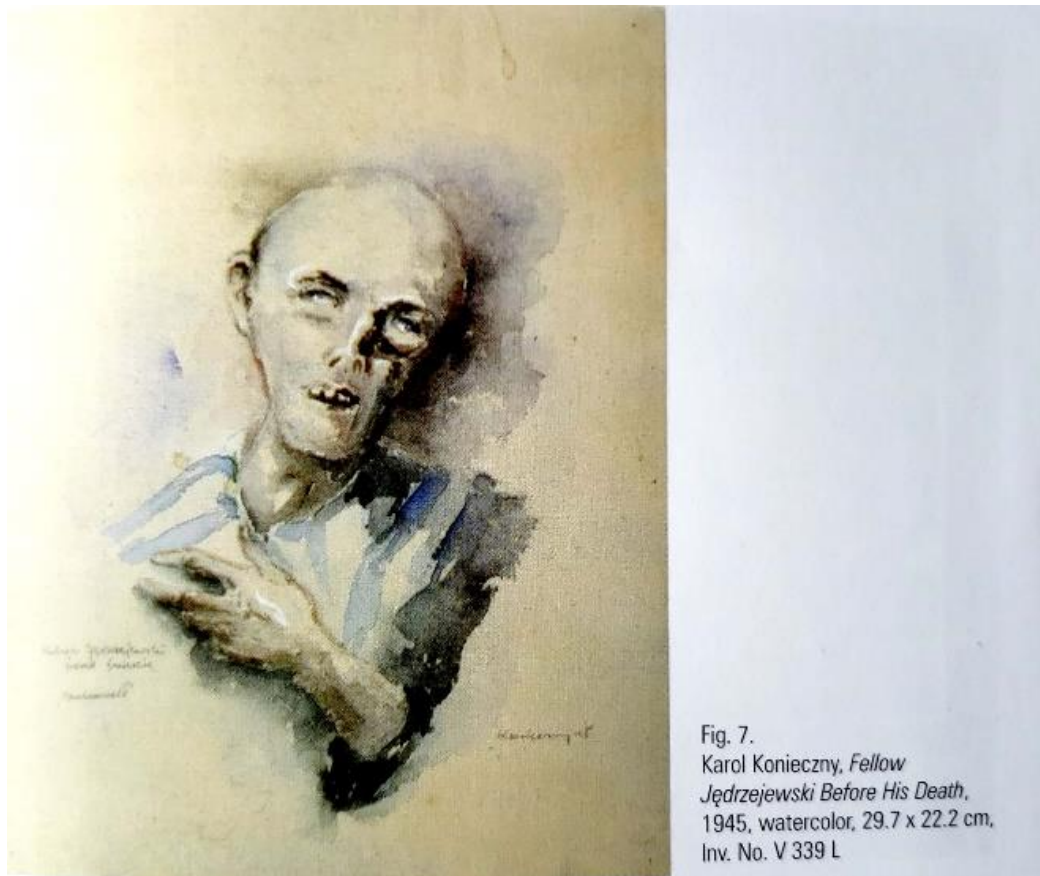
Discuss the title “The Separating of Families”.

Discuss what happened with the train would arrive. Left = gas chambers and right = hard labor. Boy and man are separating here (front right). In which direction might each one go? Why is the guard holding the boy? Do you think they are they related? How?

Note the Jewish Star on the man’s jacket (front left). In which direction might he go? Why?

What’s happening on the upper right? Selection? Roll call? Something else?

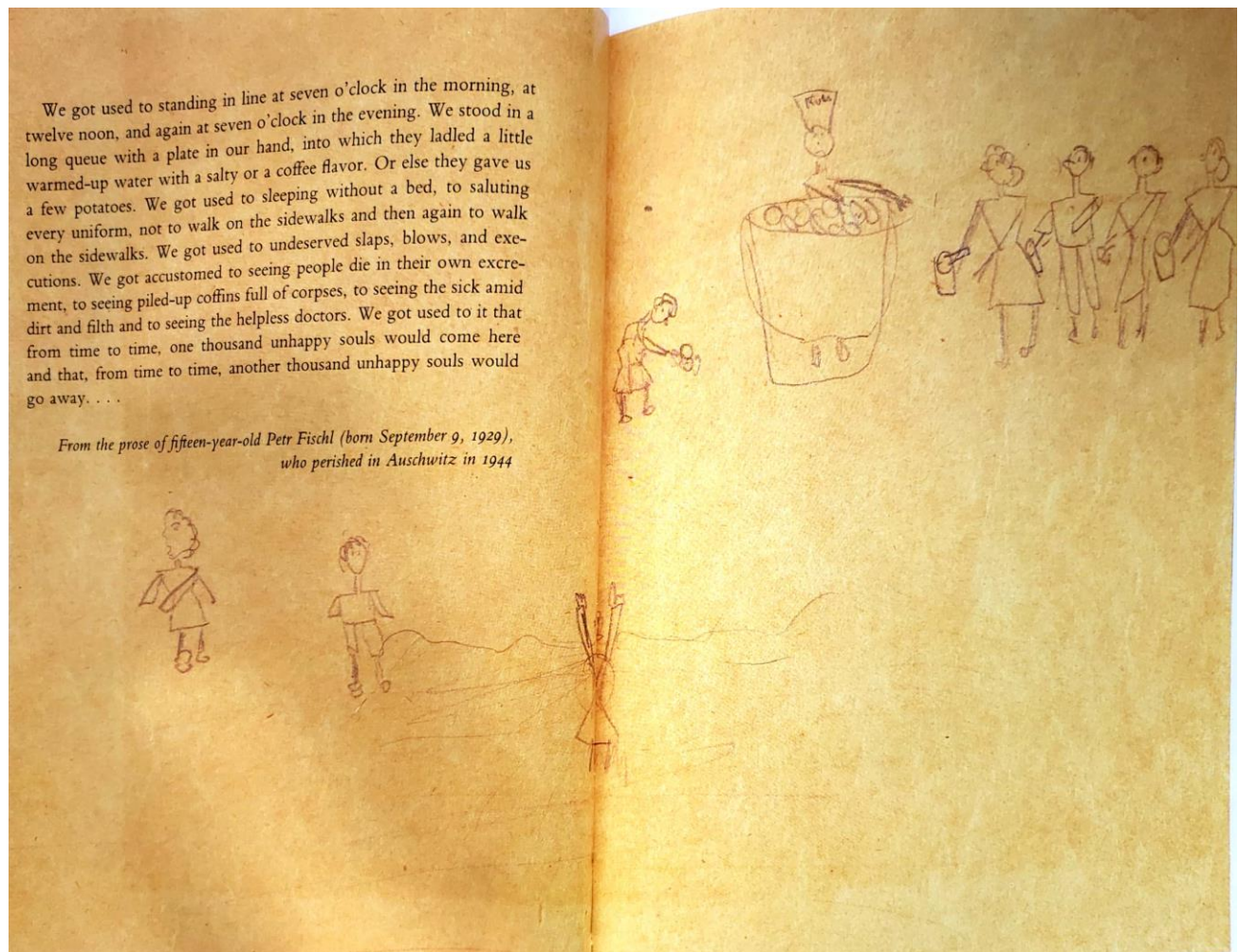
What’s happening with the trucks?



- Discuss the title: “Fellow Jędrzejewski Before His Death”. What may have happened to this man? (starvation? Disease? Worked to death? Other?)
- Why would someone draw him? (bunk mate? Friend? Family?)
- How does this make you feel?
- How might the artist have felt?
- This is the surname of a famous Polish general who was murdered by the NKVD in Lvov in 1940. He came out of retirement at age 76 to fight the Nazi invasion. The NKVD was a Russian (Soviet) police, but it cooperated with the Gestapo during WWII.
- Did the author know this? He probably knew of the general. He may have known the general volunteered to fight for Poland against the Nazis. He might not have known of his death.

We got used to standing in line at seven o'clock in the morning, at twelve noon, and again at seven o'clock in the evening. We stood in a long queue with a plate in our hand, into which they ladled a little warmed-up water with a salty or a coffee flavor. Or else they gave us a few potatoes. We got used to sleeping without a bed, to saluting every uniform, not to walk on the sidewalks and then again to walk on the sidewalks. We got used to undeserved slaps, blows, and executions. We got accustomed to seeing people die in their own excrement, to seeing piled-up coffins full of corpses, to seeing the sick amid dirt and filth and to seeing the helpless doctors. We got used to it that from time to time, one thousand unhappy souls would come here and that, from time to time, another thousand unhappy souls would go away. . . .

From the prose of fifteen-year-old Petr Fischl (born September 9, 1929), who perished in Auschwitz in 1944



This is from a collection of children's artwork called *I never Saw Another Butterfly*.

What do you see in the drawing?

Read the testimony. What was daily life like for victims? How does the drawing relate to the paragraph?



This is from a collection of children's artwork called *I never Saw Another Butterfly*.

What do you see in the drawing?

Read the poem. What emotions do you notice? What is the theme of the poem? How does the drawing relate to the poem?