



Sharing the Art and Story of Holocaust Survivor Esther Nisenthal Krinitz

WORLD WAR II IN POLAND

Resources: [Memories of Survival](#) (book), [Through the Eye of the Needle](#) (film), [World War II \(Sutori\)](#), Timelines with major dates (see Page 3), Timeline Spreadsheet ([Google Document](#) or [fillable PDF](#)) Note: Google Document requires account or sign-in.

Subject Areas: Math, History, Geography, Social Studies, Literature

Grades: 7-12

Topics/Themes: Timelines, World War II (Europe), Holocaust, Unaccompanied Minors, Timelines, First Person Accounts, Jewish Life, Poland

OVERVIEW:

Timelines tell a story and provide a frame of reference for students to better understand history. Visual representations of the continuity of time help to see parallels in history, as well as the differences. Teaching with timelines enriches the learning about significant events and/or people in history.

By merging events from the non-fiction story of Esther's journey into a timeline of significant events of World War II (WWII), students will have a visual resource that will enable them to learn more about the events that took place before, during and after the war and how they impacted Esther's community.

These activities are best suited for educators and students who have some prior knowledge about WWII, the events leading up to it, the United States' involvement and some understanding of the atrocities of the Holocaust. We have provided some resources in this lesson, and even more in the related [World War II in Poland](#) (Sutori) to help you and your students use Esther's story to enhance your teaching and learning. It is highly suggested that in preparation for this lesson, you review the suggested resources; they will be helpful in making connections and will provide information that your students can use with this lesson and beyond.

OBJECTIVE:

Students will be able to:

- arrange events that took place during Esther's journey in chronological order by creating a timeline parallel to the events of WWII. Students can use the book or the film to select events and first person accounts.
- locate specific information on a timeline pertaining to WWII.

- have a basic understanding of village life before, during and after WWII.
- create a map key and locate the major WWII events.

LEARNING STANDARDS:

- Understand, analyze and evaluate chronological thinking, sequential order and distinguishing past, present and future time
- Understand, analyze and evaluate continuity and change and the context for events
- Explain, analyze, interpret, synthesize and evaluate historical sources and mathematical and visual data including maps, graphs, and tables
- Explain, analyze, interpret, synthesize and evaluate historical sources for multiple perspectives
- Explain, analyze and evaluate the fundamentals of historical interpretation including differentiating fact from opinion, multiple points of view, cause and effect, illustrations in historical stories, author's or source's point of view, and the central or main idea
- Describe, explain, analyze, interpret, synthesize and evaluate historical research such as historical events, facts, folklore, fiction, historical questions, primary and secondary sources and project-based assessment

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

1. What were the main causes of WWII?
2. Who were the main Axis Powers in Europe?
3. Who were the main Allied Powers in Europe?
4. What role did the Soviet Union play in the defeat of Germany?
5. When and why did the United States get involved in WWII?

TIMELINE AND GEOGRAPHY ACTIVITY:

Activity Setting: Classroom. This can be a collaborative activity by breaking class into small teams to cover specific years

Materials: An existing classroom timeline is useful but not essential, WWII timeline events (see Page 3) and Timeline Spreadsheet ([Google Document](#) or [fillable PDF](#)) edited by teacher depending on which details you want students to fill in, [Memories of Survival](#) (book) and/or [Through the Eye of the Needle](#) (film)

Duration: 90-180 minutes

The teacher can start the lesson by giving a brief background on World War II's Allies and Axis Powers. It should be mentioned that the war started in Europe but spread throughout Africa and Asia, and that the United States was trying to remain neutral, but joined the Allied Forces after the Pearl Harbor attack.

BACKGROUND:

World War II was fought between two major groups of nations. They became known as the Axis and Allied Powers. The major Allied Powers were Britain, France, Russia, and the United States.

The Allies formed mostly as a defense against the attacks of the Axis Powers. The original members of the Allies included Great Britain, France and Poland. When Germany invaded Poland, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany.

At the start of World War II, Russia and Germany were allies. However, on 22 June 1941, Hitler ordered a surprise attack on Russia. Russia then became an enemy of the Axis Powers and joined the Allies.

BACKGROUND: VILLAGE LIFE DURING THE WAR

Before the war, life for Jews in the villages was much the same as for other villagers. Most villages didn't have synagogues or Jewish schools; instead, many Jews held services and lessons in their homes. During the war and the German occupation, many Jewish families like Esther's continued to live in their homes until they were sent to labor camps or deported to death camps. Nevertheless, during the occupation, Jewish villagers were killed by Nazi soldiers and sometimes by their non-Jewish neighbors.

TIMELINE OF MAJOR EVENTS IN WORLD WAR II IN EUROPE (1938-1945)

- **August 23, 1939:** Germany and USSR sign the Nazi-Soviet Pact, promising no attacks for 10 years.
- **September 1, 1939:** Germany invades Poland, starting World War II in Europe.
- **September 3, 1939:** Great Britain and France declare war on Germany.
- **April 9, 1940:** Germany invades Norway and Denmark
- **May 10, 1940:** Germany launches an invasion of Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and France. Within a few weeks, all but France surrendered.
- **June 10, 1940:** Italy successfully invades France
- **July 10, 1940:** Germany starts air force bombing of Great Britain in the Battle of Britain. The British Royal Air Force successfully defends Britain, forcing Germany to stop its attack.
- **September 13, 1940:** Italy invades British-controlled Egypt
- **October 1940:** Italy invades Greece, and Germany and Bulgaria send troops to help Italy in 1941.
- **April 6, 1941:** Italy and Germany successfully invade Yugoslavia, which surrenders on April 17.
- **June 22, 1941:** Germany invades the Western Soviet Union. The Soviet Union joins the Allied Powers.
- **Dec 7, 1941:** Japanese airplanes destroy the US naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The US declares war on Japan, Germany, and Italy.
- **December 1941:** Soviet forces defeat Germany at the Battle of Moscow
- **December 11, 1941:** The Axis Powers declare war on the United States
- **June 1942:** The British Royal Air Force begin bombing campaigns against German cities

- **June 1942:** The Soviet Union fights Germany for six months at the Battle of Stalingrad. The Germans surrendered on February 2, 1943. About 500,000 Soviet soldiers were killed in action.
- **October 24, 1942:** British soldiers defeat the Germans and Italians in Egypt
- **May 13, 1943:** The Axis commanders in North Africa surrender to the Allies.
- **July 10, 1943:** US and British troops land in Sicily and begin fighting to defeat Italy.
- **November 6, 1943:** Soviet troops defeat the Germans at Kiev
- **June 4, 1944:** Allied troops defeat Italy and occupy Rome.
- **June 6, 1944:** British and US troops start the D-Day invasion of Normandy, France. This forces the Germans to fight in Western and Eastern Europe at the same time (two fronts).
- **August 25, 1944:** The Allies defeat the Germans in Paris. By December, all of France, Belgium, and the Netherlands has been freed from German control.
- **December 16, 1944:** Germany launches a final offensive battle called the Battle of the Bulge to reconquer Belgium. It does not succeed, and after two weeks of fighting, the German soldiers retreat.
- **January 12, 1945:** The Soviet army defeats the Germans in Poland.
- **February 13, 1945:** The Soviet army defeats German and Hungarian soldiers to capture Hungary.
- **March 7, 1945:** Allied soldiers cross the Rhine River into Germany.
- **April 4, 1945:** The Soviet Union defeats the Germans in Czechoslovakia.
- **April 13, 1945:** The Soviet Union defeats the Germans in Austria and captures Vienna.
- **April 16, 1945:** The Soviet Union invades the German capital of Berlin.
- **April 30, 1945:** Adolf Hitler commits suicide in Berlin.
- **May 2-9, 1945:** Several German Generals surrender to Soviet and Allied armies all over Germany.

MORE QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Which countries border Poland? Were the bordering countries allies?
- Why did Russia change from an Axis power to an Ally power?

MORE IDEAS AND ACTIVITIES:

ESTHER'S TIMELINE AND SIMILARITIES IN OTHER TEXTS

Activity Setting: Classroom collaboration (grades 7-12)

Materials: Major WWII timeline events (see above), Timeline Spreadsheet - [Google Doc](#) or [fillable PDF](#), *Night* by Elie Wiesel, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Journal of Helene Berr*, or another first person account of World

War II and/or the Holocaust.

Duration: 60-90 minutes

Using the [spreadsheet](#) from Google (requires account or sign-in) or the [fillable PDF](#) as a foundation you will add in a new column and include important events of the survivor/victim from first person accounts in literature. Here is an example of the parallels of Anne Frank's story to Esther's story.

Example:

Year	Events in Poland	Events in Esther's Life	Major Events: WWII Europe	Events in Anne Frank's Life
1927		1927- February 8: Esther Nisenthal is born in the village of Mniszek in Central Poland		1929-June 12 Anne Frank is born in Frankfurt Germany
1933			1933-January 30: Adolf Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany	1934-Anne's family leaves Germany for Amsterdam
1938			1938- November 9/10: Kristellnacht- The Night of Broken Glass	
1939	1939- September 1: Nazis invade Poland	1939-September: Nazi's arrive in Rachow and Mniszek and occupy Esther's village.		
	1939 -October 26: Forced labor decree issued for Polish Jews aged 14-60.			

Discuss similarities between the journey of Esther and Anne Frank (or the subject of another autobiography), how the geography influenced events, how the Germans and Allied powers influenced events.

Sample Questions:

- In 1942, both Anne and Esther went into hiding. What were some of the political events taking place that caused them to have to go into hiding?
- In which year was the Netherlands overtaken by the Germans?
- In which year were Jews required to wear armbands in Poland? In the Netherlands?
- Students working with *Night* by Elie Wiesel can [use this timeline resource](#) from United States Holocaust Museum.

ESTHER'S JOURNEY MAPPED:

Activity Setting: Classroom collaboration (Grades 5-12)

Materials: *Memories of Survival* (book) and/or [Fabric of Survival: An Interactive Gallery](#) (Sutori) and/or [“Meet Esther” close read](#) (PDF), the Timeline Spreadsheet - [Google Doc](#) or [PDF](#) completed by your class, a blank map of Poland and Germany (note that the spelling of some of the names of towns vary). Print out a map of Poland/Germany or use Google Maps or Scribble Maps to trace Esther's Journey.

Duration: 60-90 minutes

Esther and her sister Mania were forced to leave their home, and it took them several weeks to find a place willing to take them in under their assumed identities. After the war, their journeys continued. Using Google Maps and the locations mentioned in the film or the book, trace Esther's journey through the Polish countryside and then into Germany after liberation.

Sample question: Esther mentions that she saw a labor camp near her village. What clues do her story cloths give about the geography and location of her village?

To learn more about Esther, with primary sources and other resources, visit [Esther in Her Own Words and Images](#) (Sutori).

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