

Teacher Answers – Auschwitz – Source A



Photographs taken of a Polish girl named Czeslawa Kwoka. According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Czeslawa arrived with her family at Auschwitz on Dec. 13, 1942, and died on March 12, 1943. She was 14.

Auschwitz Museum

Supplementary Material



Here, the photographs have been colourised by Brazilian artist Marina Amaral. Note that the red triangle on her uniform means that Czeslawa was a political prisoner. Jews had yellow triangles on their uniforms. The sign indicates she is a Pole.

Questions about Source A

1. What evidence does Source A give about where these photographs were taken?
 The sign in the bottom left corner reads 'KL Auschwitz'. This means *Konzentrationslager*, or Concentration Camp.
 Students may note that the striped uniform indicates the wearer is a prisoner in a camp.
2. What was the purpose of these photographs?
 This was part of the registration process, for record keeping. One purpose of the record may have been to identify any escapees.
3. What do you notice about Czeslawa's appearance in these photographs? Does this reveal anything about *dehumanisation*?
 She has had her head shaved, and her clothes replaced with a uniform, which are elements of dehumanisation.
 Her bleeding lip suggests she may have been beaten.
4. Does the supplementary material affect the way you feel about Source A? If so, how?
 Take student reflections.

Handout – Auschwitz – Source B

“Prominent guests from Berlin were present at the inauguration of the first crematorium in March 1943. The “program” consisted of the gassing and burning of 8,000 Kracow Jews. The guests, both officers and civilians, were extremely satisfied with the results and the special peep-hole fitted into the door of the gas chamber was in constant use. They were lavish in their praise of this newly erected installation.”

Excerpt from the Vrba-Wetzler Report

Supplementary Information

Two Slovakian Jewish prisoners of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler, escaped the camp in April 1944. They co-wrote a report (in Slovak) in late April 1944 describing the geography and functioning of the camps, the daily lives of prisoners, numbers, origin, categories of prisoners and who was selected for “work” or death. Vrba and Wetzler hoped to prevent further deportations of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz.

Questions about Source B

1. What is the origin of Source B?
Source B was written by two Jewish prisoners who escaped from Auschwitz. It was written in the same month they escaped – April 1944.
2. What is the perspective of the source?
This is the perspective of the victims, as people who had seen the atrocities first hand.
3. What was the purpose of Source B?
The purpose was to spread information about what was happening at Auschwitz, and possibly to prevent further deportations.
4. What does Source B reveal about German attitudes towards Jews in Auschwitz?
It reveals that Germans had no respect for Jews or Jewish life. It was an attitude that dehumanised Jews, seeing them as less than human.

Handout – Auschwitz – Source C

“Listen to me, kid. Don't forget that you are in a concentration camp. In this place, it is every man for himself, and you cannot think of others. Not even you father. In this place, there is no such thing as father, brother, friend. Each of us lives and dies alone. Let me give you good advice: stop giving your ration of bread and soup to your old father. You cannot help him anymore. And you are hurting yourself. In fact, you should be getting his rations...”

Excerpt from Elie Wiesel's memoir, *Night*, written in 1960. It relates to Wiesel's time as a prisoner in Auschwitz. He is the “kid” being given advice by an older inmate.

Supplementary Information

Many years later Wiesel explained why he wrote *Night*, saying “... I believe that we may use words to break the prison, to break the walls around the prison. That is why I wrote that book. And that is why I wrote the others. First of all, to establish the prison. That there was a time when everything was a prison. Time itself was a prison. Afterwards, other words had to be found to break down the walls...”

Do not see in *Night* as a prison which is sealed from within, seven times. *Night* is a foundation to say look, this is what happened. Can we continue? Even if the answer is no, I would say we must continue. We must invoke a meaning, even when there is no meaning. We must formulate a prayer for hope, even if there is no hope.”

Questions about Source C

1. What does Source C reveal about living conditions in Auschwitz?
There was insufficient food. It was an atmosphere where every person had to protect themselves, or potentially die.
2. What aspects of *dehumanisation* are revealed by this excerpt?
Prisoners were not being given enough food to live properly – their lives are not considered valuable.
3. What is the perspective of Source C?
The perspective of a Jewish victim and survivor.
4. What is the purpose of Source C? Use the Supplementary Information in your response.
To tell people what occurred in Auschwitz, and find meaning and hope. Wiesel was also using his writing to ‘break the walls’ of his personal ‘prison’.

Handout – Auschwitz – Source D

“Seventy years after the Nuremberg trials, something truly extraordinary happened in a German courtroom last week. Reinhold Hanning, a 94-year-old former Auschwitz guard who will go down in history as one of the last of Hitler’s perpetrators to be charged for his role in the Third Reich, offered an apology.

Hanning declared he was “sincerely sorry” and “ashamed” that he had belonged to a criminal organization that committed mass murder and countless atrocities, and that he had never done anything to prevent such actions.”

This quote is from a news article published by Reuters on May 5, 2016, titled “Commentary: Long overdue, a Nazi finally says sorry”. By Andrew Nagorski.
<https://www.reuters.com/article/sustainability/commentary-long-overdue-a-nazi-finally-says-sorry-idUSKCN0XV1MW/>

Questions about Source D

1. Who is Reinhold Hanning?
 He was a Nazi and an Auschwitz guard.
2. What does he apologise for? What does he not apologise for?
 He apologises for being part of the organisation that committed atrocities, and for not preventing them. But he doesn’t apologise for doing anything cruel himself. He doesn’t acknowledge any specific actions that he took (or failed to take) as a guard.
3. Why do you think he made an apology?
 It’s possible that he genuinely felt attrition. However, he made the apology in the context of being on trial for war crimes, so it is more likely he made the apology in the hopes of being treated more leniently by the court.
4. Assess the reliability of:
 - a. Source D. (Can you trust this source to be telling the truth?)
 As a newspaper article, we hope that it is reliable, and Reuters is a respected news source. However, newspapers are known to skew the truth sometimes.
 - b. Henning and his apology. (Can you trust Henning to be telling the truth?)
 Not very reliable as he may be apologising to influence his legal outcome. The apology would have been more reliable if he had made it years earlier, without being on trial.

Handout – Auschwitz – Source E

"Once a day we were given a dish of watery soup to share between five people. So I always say that the greatest pain, besides the longing for parents, was the pain of hunger. For youngsters you don't have a solution, only hunger. Hunger was on our minds the whole time. Sometimes we got a piece of bread to share between five people. There was always a fight for a piece of the bread, and we youngest always lost – we were not strong enough. I don't know how I survived. We only existed there, and many died. In the morning, in the cold, almost frozen to death, we stood for roll call. I don't know how or why but we continued to live. It was absolute torture."

Testimony of Zwi Bacharach, who was 15 when he arrived in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

<https://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/ceremonies/witness-testimony.html>

Questions about Source E

1. What type of source is this?

Primary source evidence from a witness/victim.

- a. What is the value of this type of source for a historian studying life in Auschwitz-Birkenau?

It is valuable to hear from the victims, especially because so many were silenced by the Holocaust.

2. What is the perspective of Source E?

The perspective of a victim and survivor of the Holocaust.

3. What does Source E reveal about *dehumanisation* in Auschwitz.

Prisoners were not valued as human beings – their lives had no worth. They were tortured and many died from the poor conditions. They were not given enough food to sustain or nourish human beings.