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## Lesson Two

### FOCUS: Culture and History

Cultural and historical contexts give birth to the dilemmas and themes at the heart of a work of fiction. Studying these contexts and appreciating the intricate details of the time and place can assist us in comprehending the motivations of the characters. In this lesson, use cultural and historical contexts to begin to explore the book.

Though the exact location is never mentioned, the book's opening story takes place in a Nazi death camp during World War II. In the novella, we learn that Rosa comes from a well-educated and highly assimilated family of Polish Jews. Home to Europe's largest Jewish population prior to World War II, Poland served as a center of learning and culture for the Jewish community worldwide. After the Nazi invasion in 1939, all Jews were forced to live in restricted areas, known as ghettos. Rosa recounts some of her experiences in the Warsaw ghetto. Despite a brave rebellion, most of the Jews detained in the Warsaw ghetto were eventually sent to Treblinka—an extermination camp fifty miles outside the city.

### Discussion Activities

Copy and distribute Teacher's Guide Handout One, "Jewish Life in Pre-World War II Poland," Handout Two, "The Warsaw Ghetto," and the Reader's Guide essay, "The Holocaust." Divide your class into three groups. Assign each group an essay. Starting with "Jewish Life," ask groups to present what they learned to the class.

Using the adjectives collected for homework, what emotions are captured through Ozick's vivid language? Why is Magda like a "tiger"? Near the end of the story, we read about "green meadows" and "innocent tiger lilies." Does this glimpse to the green meadows imply hope or hopelessness for Rosa, Stella and Magda? Why would Ozick provide us with a glimpse of beauty before a horrific event takes place?

### Writing Exercise

Ask your students to write a two-page essay considering whether or not a genocide such as the Holocaust can take place today. What, if any, responsibility would an average person bear? How can we, as a humane society, prevent or stop racial prejudice and genocide?

### Homework

Read from page 13 until the break on page 39. Ask students to pay close attention to the way Rosa perceives her surroundings. What does she mean when she says, "Once I thought the worst was the worst, after that nothing could be the worst. But now I see, even after the worst there's still more"?