**Children at Work:**

**Opening**

Despite their young age, children in most ghettos had to work at various jobs. There were several reasons for this: sometimes their father had been sent away to forced labor, sometimes their parents were unable to find work, and often, even if both parents were working, they did not earn enough to feed the whole family, so the children had to help out. In some ghettos all the children were forced to work.

**Opening photo**

**A boy selling newspapers and armbands in the Warsaw Ghetto**

From: Yad Vashem Photo Archive

**Photo section**

Look at these photos: What kind of work did children in the ghettos do?

**A Boy Selling Newspapers in the Ghetto**

**A Boy Selling Pots in the Lublin Ghetto**

**Children Working in a Shoemaking Workshop, Lodz Ghetto, Poland**

**A Child Selling Armbands in the Warsaw Ghetto**

**Children Selling Pretzels in the Warsaw Ghetto**

As we have seen, children in the ghettos worked at various jobs to help support their families. Have a look at this photo – **Children in a Shoemaking Workshop, Lodz Ghetto, Poland**.

The photo shows young children working in a shoemaking workshop, just like the adults who worked in various workshops. How do you think these children felt about having to work to help their families? How do you think they felt about the work itself?

**Written testimony section**

[1]

**Sarah learns to sew**

“I started to work. I placed one piece of cloth on top of another as instructed. I pulled the wheels of the machine and pressed the pedal with my foot. Surprisingly, the machine began to sew. It made a pleasant noise. The cloth kept ‘riding’ forward and I took two more pieces, then two more, then two more. I was happy. My uncle was right. I can sew without any problem. Too bad my father cannot see me now. He doesn’t even know that I got this job.

But then what happened? I moved the ‘finished’ pieces and everything fell apart, as if they hadn’t been sewn together. I didn’t understand why – after all the machine had been sewing … I tried again and again, then stopped. There was no point in continuing. My joy had been in vain. My poor uncle had indeed shown me the motions of sewing, but he didn’t tell me that you have to thread the needle.”

Sara Plager-Zyskind, *Stolen Years in the Lodz Ghetto and the Camps*  (Tel Aviv: Ghetto Fighters’ House and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1978), pp. 56-57 [Hebrew]

Read the testimony and answer these questions:

* How does Sara view her work as a seamstress? Highlight the sentences that describe Sara’s feelings. (Points for every correct choice; no need to highlight all of them)
* Why do you think Sara was happy to have a job?

<Glossary>

- in vain – for nothing

- seamstress – someone who sews for work

[2]

**“The most important thing was to find work…”**

Read this testimony by Menachem, a boy from the Stanislavov Ghetto, who took advantage of his young age to get food for his family and for adults in his work group.

**“We moved to a ghetto in the city of Stanislavov. The most important thing was to find work. Those who worked could get food. My uncle, my mother’s brother, was a well-known upholsterer in the city, and the Germans took him and had him work in upholstering and sewing curtains for a hotel outside the ghetto. After a few days at the job my uncle told the German work supervisor that there’s a Jewish boy who always helped him and it would be good to work with him. He meant me…**

**Every morning at 04:00 a group of us, fifty Jews, would go to work on the Aryan side. We would walk to the other side of the city. Members of the group would give me jewelry or small valuables, and I would sneak out of work and trade these valuables for a few potatoes and vegetables. This was their only hope for getting more food for their families in the ghetto. I received a small portion of the ‘produce’ that I brought, which I gave to my family. Nobody was allowed to leave the workplace. German soldiers guarded the entrances to the building. I used to sneak out to the street through an opening that I found in the cellar and come back the same way with food…”**

Menachem, in *Grownup Children*, p. 42

**Read the following questions and highlight the answers in the text.**

1. Why was it so important to work, according to Menachem’s testimony?
2. What role did the group give Menachem because he was a boy?
3. What words tell us that Menachem understood the importance of his role?

<Glossary>

- upholsterer – someone whose work is to add padding and covering to furniture

- supervisor – a person in charge

**Drawing section**

**The Legend of the Lodz Ghetto Children**

In the Lodz Ghetto in Poland, many factories and workshops – called “resorts” – were established. Adults and children from the age of 10 worked in these factories, making products for the Germans. The work in these resorts was very hard, and in exchange they received a little food.

This drawing comes from an album of children’s legends that was created in a clothing workshop in the Lodz Ghetto, where children also had to work. The album was meant to make the work easier for children, so it is written as a legend about children who learned how to sew. The album included many drawings, illustrating a story in rhymes.

Look at the drawing and make it bigger using the magnifying glass.

**The Legend of the Lodz Ghetto Children**

Notice how, on the one hand, the objects in the drawing are very large, bigger than the children. On the other hand, the spool of thread has a pleasant, smiling face.

Why do you think the objects in the drawing are so big, and what can we say about the smiling face on the spool of thread?