

THE GIRL IN THE GREEN SWEATER



The Girl in the Green Sweater by Krystyna Chiger (Kristine Keren) is the firsthand account of a young girl who hid with her family in the sewers of Lvov, Poland to escape Nazi persecution. By June 1943, over 100,000 of Lvov's Jews had already been murdered or deported to concentration camps, and the remaining Jews of the ghetto where 7-year-old Krystyna lived were being killed. Krystyna, together with her parents, younger brother, and a small group of other Polish Jews, survived for fourteen months in the rat-infested and fetid sewers with the help of Leopold Socha, a sewer worker and unlikely savior.

Cut apart the book excerpts below and place at four different stations. Have students participate in a "group annotation" by attaching a sticky note with their reactions to the passages and their classmates' comments.



SOCHA'S BACKGROUND

"He had not lived such a happy or noble life, our Socha, before meeting my family. He had been in and out of prison. As a child, he got into all kinds of trouble. He was orphaned at a young age. He was a ruffian. School was not important to him...He ran with a group of young men who did not respect other people. He was never violent, but he was disrespectful. Certainly, he did not respect other people's property; he became a petty thief. His concept of right and wrong seemed to have more to do with what he could get away with, whether or not he would be caught. He was good at stealing, but not so good that he could avoid the police. By the time he had reached his middle twenties, he had served three separate three-year terms for robbery—once for a bank job that had captivated all of Lvov for its brazenness and careful planning, and once more for a petty break-in at an antiques store."

"Somehow, Socha met and married a good woman named Wanda. She convinced him to turn his life around. He took a government job as a sewer inspector...Now that he was married, soon with a young daughter, he was looking to change...He was still a young man when he started meeting with us in Weiss's basement. He had just rediscovered his Catholic roots. With his wife he attended church regularly, something he had not done since he was a child. He prayed. He came to believe deeply that by redeeming himself in his present life, by living in a good, purposeful manner, he might absolve himself of past sins."

FOLLOWING LIBERATION

"[Upon leaving the sewer after liberation by the Russians] The ten of us [emerged], and Leopold Socha, our guardian angel. This was our underground family, and we were fairly surrounded by dozens of Russian soldiers and neighborhood residents and local officials and other workers. We stood in the center of a makeshift circle, and Socha lifted his arms and indicated our group. 'These are my Jews!' he said proudly. 'This is my work.' *To sa moi zydzi, i to jest, moja praca!*

"[After our liberation] Socha...arranged for us to occupy the first floor of [an abandoned] building. He had gathered a full supply of furnishings for us as well. Chairs, tables, beds, and bedding...whatever he could think we might need. We had not thought of these things during our time underground because they were secondary to our survival, but Socha was clever enough to think of them on our behalf. Such was the depth of commitment to us that he would make this extra effort even after our survival had been assured."

"In his memoir, my father wrote that on Leopold Socha's tombstone it should be inscribed, "He who saves one life saves the entire world." *Kto ratuje jedno zycie—ratuje caly swiat.* Such was the strength and character of our beloved Socha. Indeed, every year on the anniversary of his death, I light a *Yahrtzeit* [memorial] candle in his memory and I consider these words as I prepare to chant the mourner's Kaddish [Jewish prayer in memory of the dead]. I think of Socha and the life he lived before he met us, the lives he saved with his protection, the lives we all managed to build for ourselves after the war ...and in this way I honor his memory."

THE PRICE OF RESCUE

"[Socha] said, 'Maybe we can help you. For a price, maybe we can help you.'... Under the right terms, they would consider helping my father and his family...The three sewer workers were asking for 500 zlotys per day, about \$100. It would have been a small fortune in any city in Eastern Europe in the early 1940s, but it was especially so in the Ju-Lag [ghetto] of Lvov in 1943. No Jews had any money anymore. No Jews had a paying job. All we had was what we had managed to save and secret away."

"Some months into our confinement, when our money would finally run out, it would be Socha who would convince his colleagues to continue with their protection. It might have started as an opportunity, but in the end it would become a lifeline. He would come to consider it his life's work, helping us to hide in the sewer, protecting us from the Germans, returning us to the rest of our lives just as he hoped to return himself to the life he had nearly squandered as a young man."

"[When our money ran out] was when Socha finally revealed his true character. He took my father aside one day and gave him some money. He told my father that he was to return the money to him at the end of each visit, at the agreed-upon rate, and that he did not want Wroblewski and Kowalow [the other sewer workers] to know of this arrangement. My father was astonished by this turn. It appeared that Socha was returning the money he had already collected and preparing to redistribute his share to Wroblewski and Kowalow, in exchange for their continued cooperation. It was as if Socha himself were now paying for our protection...The reason for this, we learned later, was that the three sewer workers were in some disagreement over our continued care. Socha wanted to keep coming to look after us for as long as it was necessary; he was committed to us, no matter what."

"There was the time, soon after our money had run out, when Socha and Wroblewski looted a German-run clothing store on our behalf... [and] fenced [the stolen items] on the black market and converted into money to buy our daily supply of bread and other necessities...This was not such an ethical dilemma for Socha, our re-formed Catholic and reformed thief, because the Germans had already taken everything from us and he considered it a kind of justice."

SOCHA'S ATTITUDE TOWARD JEWISH PEOPLE

"He had not counted many Jewish people among his friends prior to this meeting [with the escapees in the sewer], but he did not like how the Germans were treating them. He did not understand it. At the same time, he liked that these Jews were refusing to accept such treatment. He liked their willingness to fight. He wanted to help them because they reminded him of how he used to be when he was up against authority and because he had learned in church that by helping others, you can help yourself."

"Whatever we required, whatever we requested, Socha would endeavor to bring for us. Newspapers, books, paper and pencils, utensils . . . Sabbath candles, even. Every Friday, he would bring a set of candles, and my mother would light them and say the blessings before our evening meal. Socha admired this, he said, that we would keep to our rituals and customs even in such feral conditions...He and Wroblewski even celebrated Rosh Hashanah with us, with a special meal prepared by Weinbergova from our meager provisions, because Socha said he wanted to experience what it was to be Jewish, and we could see that this was as meaningful to him as it was to us."

"Socha used to take [my brother] Pawel into his lap and play with him while the men spoke...He used to bring us a special piece of bread or...some treat we could not get in the ghetto...The other men could not understand how this man they were counting on to save us could spend so much time on foolishness such as playing with my father's two small children. My mother and father liked that Socha showed us this kindness. It meant he could be trusted and that he saw us as human beings instead of as a group of desperate Jews willing to give him some money for protection."
