

Life and survival in Westerbork and Auschwitz.

Camps for concentrating large numbers of people have existed all through history. Concentration camps are used for prisoners who have not been convicted by an independent judge. The Netherlands ran a concentration camp in New Guinea before the war (the camp Upper-Digoel). The communists in Russia organized concentration camps in which millions alleged adversaries of Stalin were killed. Between 1933 and 1945 the same happened in the Third Reich, Italy and Japan. Between 1939 and 1945 The Netherlands also created concentration camps.

Roosje lived in three of them: camp Westerbork, camp Vught and Auschwitz. She survived them all.

ASSIGNMENT 1

The term concentration camp is a generic term. There are various kinds.

Translation of the Dutch words into English:

werkkamp	labor camp
doorstuurkamp	forward camp
vernietigingskamp	extermination camp
verzamelkamp	assembly camp
doorvoerkamp	transit camp
reserveringskamp	reservation camp
concentratiekamp	concentration camp
interneringskamp	internment camp
Nederland	the Netherlands/ Holland
België	Belgium
periode	period of time
geschat aantal gevangenen	estimated number of prisoners
geschat aantal doden	estimated number of deaths
vallend onder	belonging to

Assignment:

- Use source 1 to find out to which categories camp Westerbork and Auschwitz belonged. Make a note of this.
- Use source 1 to find three more concentration camps in the Netherlands between 1940 and 1945 and write down to which category they belong.
- Are there countries with concentration camps today? Explain your answer.

SOURCE 1

List of concentration camps.

(translation in Teacher's appendix)

Bekijk de video hier: https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lijst_van_naziconcentratiekampen

Life and survival in Westerbork

Camp Westerbork was organised in 1939 to receive Jews who had fled Germany. It was situated in the province of Drenthe and was run by a Dutch administration. When Roosje and her mother arrived in Westerbork in 1942, the camp had just passed into German hands. Westerbork then became a *'Polizeiliches Durchgangslager'*. (a camp run by the police and from which people are moved on). Here, Jews, Sinti and Roma people were kept before they were transported to Germany. Dutch military police continued to guard the camp. The Jews themselves took care of new arrivals, medical care, education etc. in the camp. *The Joodse Ordedienst (OD)* (Jewish officials) was responsible for order in the camp.

Quite a lot is known about life in Westerbork through the diaries of journalist Philip Mechanicus (murdered in Auschwitz on 12 October 1944) and the diaries and letters of student Etty Hillesum (murdered in Auschwitz on 30 November 1943). Roosje also wrote about her experiences.

What was it like to have to live in camp Westerbork during the war?

ASSIGNMENT 2

Roosje and her mother arrive in Westerbork on 14 October 1942 in Westerbork. It is like a miniature town. What is everyday life like?

Assignment:

- Use sources 2-4 (3.1 and 3.2 are two photographs from Westerbork – ca 1942) and make your choice:

According to you: life in Westerbork is.....

1. bad;
2. more bad than good;
3. more good than bad;
4. good
5. I cannot choose.

- Explain your choice. Which three sources were most important for your choice?

SOURCE 2

From letters by Etty Hillesum

December 1942. In just a few months the population of Westerbork has increased from around a thousand to about ten thousand people. The largest growth dates from the gruesome October days when, after a massive hunting down of Jews throughout the Netherlands, Westerbork was stricken by a flood of humans who nearly seemed to devour the camp. (...) And the area surface remains still one half square kilometre (...).

8 June 1943. Tuesday morning. Dear people, not much remains here within the barbed wire, more and more barracks are being erected. There is just a little piece in the farthest corner of the camp where I am sitting now in the sunshine,

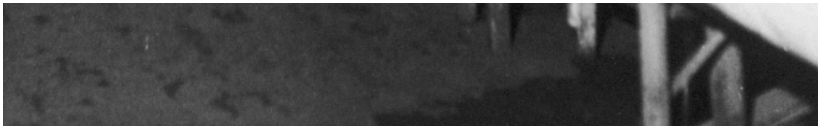
under a wonderful, clear blue sky, among some low shrubs. Straight across and only a few meters removed from me, there is a uniform with a helmet in a sentry box on poles. A military policeman picks purple lupines with a very delighted face, his gun dangling on his back. (...)

Etty Hillesum, *Het denkend hart van de barak*. *Brieven van Etty Hillesum*, (*The thinking heart of the barracks. Letters from Etty Hillesum*) Haarlem, 2^e druk, 22, 40, 54.



Source 3 - 1





Source 3 - 2

SOURCE 4

Spring 1944

Everyday life in Westerbork

Two parts from an original, unedited silent film by two German Jews, Breslauer and Jordan. The film was made in camp Westerbork in 1944, commissioned by the German camp commander Gemmeker. The film is unique in showing daily life in a concentration camp.

- Part one is about sports and games.
- Part two shows the now 'famous' Roma girl Settela standing at the entrance to the train wagon

The Westerbork film was nominated for the Unesco Memory of the World Register of Documentary Heritage.

Bekijk de video hier: <https://vimeo.com/311506970>

ASSIGNMENT 3

Every day the atmosphere in Westerbork is one of fear. Some days it is worse than others. Roosje is afraid as well. In her letter of 27 October 1942 she talks about terrible torture, especially for the soul. Sometimes she manages to smuggle a letter out of the camp.

Assignment:

- Imagine you are a prisoner in Westerbork and you have an opportunity to smuggle a letter out of the camp. Write the letter to a friend outside the camp. Tell him/her about the fear in the camp and try to express what you are afraid of. Write about 250 words and use sources 5-9 for information.

SOURCE 5

Explanation: Etty Hillesum is a prisoner in camp Westerbork in December 1942. The prisoners had often been told that they would be transported to the east to work for the Germans.

December 1942: letter from Etty Hillesum to friends Amsterdam

One morning, bright and early, in the summer I happened upon a man who, quite bewildered, was mumbling to himself: 'Who on earth are these workers for Germany, they have sent us now?' And by the time I had hurried to the entrance of the camp they were just unloaded from the rickety trucks onto our heath: many old people. And there we were, rather dumbfounded to tell you the truth. This was going too far. But after a while we did not know any better and we asked each other after every incoming transport: 'and – were there many old and disabled people this time?'

Etty Hillesum, *Het denkend hart van de barak. Brieven van Etty Hillesum, (The thinking heart of the barracks. Letters from Etty Hillesum)* Haarlem, 2^e druk, 31

SOURCE 6

Explanation: Every Tuesday between 1942 and 1944 a train with prisoners would leave for the east. It was unknown where exactly it went. In order to determine who had to go, the so-called transport lists were made. You were told whether you were on the list only just before the departure of the train. Patients from the hospital were summoned as well. If they did not show up three of the male or female nurses had to leave in their place.

Sunday 4 July 1943, *The Transport list*.

The transport list is on its way again, a shiver of fear goes round and in every nook and cranny, small groups of people are whispering. It was announced that the hospitals have to provide two hundred patients and that for every missing patient three members of the nursing staff will be transported. The last time they demanded four hundred patients, only two hundred and seventy-five were handed over. (...)

Philip Mechanicus, *In Depôt. Dagboeken uit Westerbork, (Diaries from Westerbork)* Amsterdam, 1989, 68

SOURCE 7

Tuesday 6 July 1943, *Departure*

Explanation: Philip Mechanicus was a Jewish journalist who was a prisoner in camp Westerbork. He kept a diary there, describing his life there. He was on the list for 6 July 1943, but sometimes people were taken off the list at the last moment. The reason for this was often not clear. Later he was less fortunate. He was murdered in Auschwitz. His diary was preserved.

Weeping women. Cleaners with their brooms in hand are sobbing. At the open windows women with tears running down their faces. This morning their brothers or sisters, fathers or mothers were transported. Men are overcome with emotion and swallow their tears. The train screams, the poisonous snake is slithering away. Two separate wagons for the convicted prisoners. I escaped through the eye of the needle. This morning at 4 am I found out I had been removed from the list. Congratulations from left and right, neighbours shaking my hand. I receive these expressions of sympathy with a smile. Inside I feel the pain: everywhere men are told to get up from their beds and prepare for the dark transport. The congratulations for me must be whip lashes in the faces of those who have to go.

SOURCE 8

Undated. On the train. Message from E.A. Cohen, a survivor.

Explanation: Cohen survived Auschwitz, his wife, child and parents perished. After the war he wrote about his experiences in Westerbork and Auschwitz.

We had been fooling each other continually. Even on the train to Auschwitz. I was there with my wife, my little boy and my parents-in-law. (...). Yes, well it was a nasty trip. Nobody knew where he was going and everyone was quite scared. Not much was eaten, although food had been brought along. I spoke to my wife. And at some point she said: 'You look the same way you did when we went from Groningen to Amsterdam after the arrest. Do you expect something terrible?' What could I say? I did not know what I expected. Nothing beautiful but nothing really bad either.

E.A. Cohen, *De afgrond, in '40/'45 de Jodenvervolging, van jodenster tot moord* (The Abyss, in '40-'45 the Jewish persecution, van the Star of David to murder.) Joods Historisch Museum (Jewish Historic Museum), Amsterdam, cited in: Paul Vigeveno, Ton van der Meer, *Grenzen aan solidariteit. Een lessenserie over de Holocaust*, (Limits to solidarity. A lesson series on the Holocaust) Malmberg/SLO, 1990, 87.

SOURCE 9

Two last messages.

Explanation: Sometimes people succeeded to send a message from the train, for instance, by throwing a note out of the train.

29 March 1943, last sign of life from Roosje's mother. The next day the train took her parents to Sobibor. Nobody on that train was ever heard of again

Westerbork, 29 March 1943

Dear Roosje

Your father and I will start our journey to the great unknown tomorrow. We do not know what will happen. Pray for us often and try to find your dear brother.

Ardent kisses from your loving mother.

Josina Glaser-Philips

15 September 1943, last message from Etty Hillesum to J.C.J.C. van Nooten (Christien), her former Greek and Latin teacher in Deventer. She threw this card (Front and back) from the train to Auschwitz. This is the text.

15 September 1943

Christien, I am opening the Bible at random and I find this: The Lord is my refuge. I am sitting on my rug sack in the middle of a full goods wagon. Father, mother and Mischa are a few wagons removed. The departure came unexpected after all. Sudden order for us, especially from The Hague. We left the camp singing, father and mother very strong and calm. Mischa as well. We will be travelling for three days. Thank you for all your support. Friends we left behind still write to Amsterdam, perhaps you will hear something? Also my last camp letter?

See you again from the four of us.

15 September 1943

Etty Hillesum, *Het denkend hart van de barak. Brieven van Etty Hillesum* (The thinking heart of the barracks. Letters from Etty Hillesum), 9 Haarlem, 3^e druk, 116

ASSIGNMENT 4

Every prisoner in Westerbork tries to make the best of a bad situation, but each in their own way. There is a difference between the way Roosje makes the best of things and the way Etty Hillesum does this.

Assignment:

- Look for differences in behaviour between Roosje and Etty in sources 10 and 11.
- Which approach do you think is wisest: Etty's or Roosje's? Explain your answer.
- Which approach feels best for you: Etty's or Roosje's? Explain.

SOURCE 10

October/November 1942 – Roosje in the Schreibstube (office)

I quickly found my way, and before long I met a young SS officer, a Dutchman by the name of Jorg de Haan. From the office where I worked – Schreibstube- I was expected to bring him detailed lists of prisoners who were to be transported by train to Poland(...) After a week he asked me inside and told me that starting the following week I was to be his secretary and that he was going to organize a desk for me in his huge office. As a result, we saw each other every day, and because there wasn't much to do in the camp at night, we continued the evenings at his house. Thus we

became lovers in a strange and exceptional world. (...)

During the day we were kept busy with camp administration. He had to assemble a fixed number of prisoners to transport to Poland. It was my job to put together 'draft' lists and make sure he got them on time. (...)

Paul Glaser, Dansen met de Vijand, (Dancing with the Enemy) Amsterdam, 2016, 126, 127

SOURCE 11

Who was Etty Hillesum?

That you have so many sides and that life is so rich and that you always discover something new in yourself. " Etty Hillesum

Born on 15 January 1914 in Middelburg and raised in Deventer, Etty Hillesum, at the age of 27, starts her diary in March 1941. Encouraged by her great inspiration; psychologist and chirologist Julius Spier. Etty lives in Amsterdam and in her room overlooking the Museumplein she writes daily in her diary to 'bring order to inner chaos'. She searches for herself and is mercilessly honest. With humor and self-mockery, she takes a close look at her actions and writes about her sexuality just as frankly as about her spirituality.

Her diary covers the period from March 1941 to mid-October 1942, more than a year and a half in which the war is becoming more and more imperative. The diaries are a representation of her personal growth and liberation against a background of increasing threat and persecution of Jews.

On July 15, 1942 Etty gets an administrative job at the Jewish Council, a Jewish committee that consulted with the Germans about who should and who should not go to Westerbork. She detests the work and volunteered to go to Westerbork as a 'social worker'. She would rather share the suffering with her people and also see it as a test to stay afloat in these circumstances. She arrives at the camp on July 30 when the ruthless rhythm of the deportations to Poland has begun.

From the camp she writes dozens of letters in which her personal development can be followed and she also impressively describes the situation and life in camp Westerbork.

Etty is also deported to Auschwitz on 7 September. The Red Cross reports that she died there on November 30, 1943.

'There is a very deep well within me and there is God in it. Sometimes I can reach it, but usually there are stones and grit in front of that well. Then God is buried, he must be dug up again. "

Life and survival in Auschwitz

On 23 February 1943 Roosje is transferred to camp Vught. This is an awful camp. The female SS- guards are very cruel. Roosje escapes, is caught and sent back to Westerbork, now as a convicted prisoner. Convicted prisoners are transferred to Auschwitz immediately. She arrives there on 16 September 1943.

Auschwitz-Birkenau is a large camp in Poland: an extermination and labour camp in one. An estimated 1,300,000 people lost their lives there. Roosje remains there until 1944.

How does Roosje survive Auschwitz-Birkenau?

ASSIGNMENT 5

When the prisoners leave Westerbork, they have no concrete idea what awaits them.

Assignment:

Imagine you have spent several days and nights on a train and you arrive in Auschwitz in the dark. The door of the goods wagon opens. You think and feel all kinds of emotions.

- What do you think? Why do you think that? Use source 12
- What do you feel? Why do you feel that? Use source 12
- What does Roosje do after she gets off the train in Auschwitz? Use source 13
- How do you feel about that? Explain.

SOURCE 12

Arrival in Auschwitz - fragment from a movie (English)

Bekijk de video hier: <https://vimeo.com/311507018>

SOURCE 13

Roosje's arrival in Auschwitz

There was a big crowd when we got off the train, and a young Polish prisoner passed me and said in German 'Nicht krank werden und keine Angst' (don't get sick and don't be afraid). We had to leave our luggage where it was and weren't even allowed to bring a handbag or a parcel of bread. Men and women were told to stand apart, children in between. Then they started to select people one by one. I stepped out of line to get a better view of what was going on. Most people were being loaded onto trucks, and I thought them lucky to not have to walk; some were old and not steady on their legs. I leaned shortly afterwards that they were gassed immediately. When I had a question I walked up to a tall, handsome Hauptssturmführer (an SS officer), standing at the head of the row and asked him where I should be standing. He looked me up and down and asked in a courteous tone, 'Miss or Mrs?' I smiled and shrugged my shoulders. 'So out with it, hurry up.' When I told him I was divorced, he started to laugh. 'that makes you a Mrs,' and he sent me to a group of about a hundred other good-looking women standing apart from the rest an officer commanded us to follow him. In

or about a hundred other good-looking women standing apart from the rest an officer commanded us to follow him. In the distance I could see barracks, too many to count. After a walk of almost four miles we arrived in Auschwitz (...)

Paul Glaser, *Dansen met de Vijand*, (Dancing with the Enemy Amsterdam 2016, 164-165)

ASSIGNMENT 6

The conditions in Auschwitz are extreme as you can see in source 15. In this situation, Roosje is faced with several difficult choices.

Assignment:

- Study source 14, then answer questions 1-4
- 1. What choice does she have to make in source 15? What choice does she decide? Why, do you think, does she choose this way?
- 2. What choice does she have to make in source 15? What choice does she decide? Why, do you think, does she choose this way?
- 3. What choice does she have to make in source 17? What choice does she decide? Why, do you think, does she choose this way?
- 4. What choice does she have to make in source 18? What choice does she decide? Why, do you think, does she choose this way?
- Explain which of her choices is the most confusing to you.

SOURCE 14

1 day in Auschwitz (in English)

Bekijk de video hier: <https://vimeo.com/311507063>

SOURCE 15

Block 10

Block 10 (Block 10 are the barracks where German doctors such as Joseph Mengele and Carl Clauberg performed medical experiments on prisoners)

As time went by the experiments became more invasive. A few of the women died in terrible pain as a result of the experiments that appeared to go wrong. Once I was sent to Dr Clauberg. I was told to undress immediately and lie down on a stretcher with knee supports that held my legs apart. (...) Clauberg (...) appeared and injected a syrupy fluid into my uterus. (...) Violent stomach cramps followed and persisted. Then it was over, and I was told to step down from the

stretcher. I heard from one of the nurses that Clauberg had sterilized me. (...)

[Sometime later the women were told that new and more invasive experiments were going to be performed. Those who would not participate voluntarily had to go to work at the gas chambers in Birkenau.]

We talked a lot. Why risk your life in Birkenau? The experiments didn't last long.(...) The women signed up one after the other, and the remaining few objectors were made to see sense by friends Blockältesten (leaders in the barracks) Dr Clauberg had won.

I had already decided not to sign up as a 'volunteer'. It was bad enough that I was unable to have children. I didn't know what the consequences of my decision would be. Everyone feared the worst, but the experiments were getting increasingly more invasive and I refused to undergo any more.

Paul Glaser, Dansen met de Vijand, (Dancing with the Enemy) Amsterdam 2016, 168-169.

SOURCE 16

The Gas chambers

When we arrived in Birkenau we were brought to the area where the gas chambers were located and were immediately put to work. Our job was to accompany and reassure the prisoners before they went to a so-called shower. I handed out towels in the dressing room but their fear remained. It was a conveyor belt of murder. You could read the terror in people's faces. There were children too. I remember one boy with dark brown eyes, not much older than ten as far as I could tell, standing alone, a threadbare scarf around his neck. When he caught my eye I smiled at him. He hesitated, and for a moment the distance in his eyes disappeared and he smiled back. After thirty minutes we were ordered to drag the still warm corpses outside. The little boy was among them. I was determined to cut myself off mentally, and I was surprised at how quickly I succeeded. (...)

After six weeks of working at the gas chambers, I discovered a cousin of mine among the warm corpses, and at that moment my armour failed me. It wasn't as impenetrable as I had thought. I realized I couldn't keep this up for much longer. Overcome with anger and desperation, I marched up to the group leader and spoke to him in German. I told him I couldn't do this anymore and that I wanted to go to the 'Union' factory (a nearby facility where shells and grenades were made). He was dumbfounded and to my surprise – acquiesced.

Paul Glaser, Dansen met de Vijand, (Dancing with the Enemy) Amsterdam 2016, 171,172,173

SOURCE 17

Dancing with the Enemy

During one of our 'planning discussion' I learned that the SS-officers met regularly in the evenings to pass the time. After all, they too were stuck in a camp far from home. The nights involved drinking and singing, but after a while that became a bit routine. One day I took the plunge and offered to play the piano and dance during their evening get-togethers. I knew a lot of German songs. Kurt (the SS-officer Roosje got involved with) responded evasively, but after a

few days I was told I should come along to one of the evenings. (...) Prison uniforms weren't exactly appropriate, so he arranged for me to have different clothes and more elegant shoes. (...)

So there I was, spending an evening with the SS. (...) I was expected to dance to the music from the gramophone. I took a moment to decide what record to put on, then Kurt raised his hand. Silence fell as I introduced myself and the dance I was about to perform. It was a mazurka. First slow, then faster. I demonstrated three different dances, and after half an hour it was over. No one clapped but I was given a whole loaf of bread as a reward and was sent back to my barrack.

Paul Glaser, *Dansen met de Vijand, Dancing with the Enemy*, Amsterdam 2016, 178, 179, 180

SOURCE 18

A question

Roosje is involved with an SS-officer in Auschwitz. When he spoke with his aunt in Stockholm after the war, Paul Glaser asked her: 'How could you sleep with a German in Auschwitz?' Her answer was: 'If you only knew: after the medical experiments in block 10, after working in the gas chambers, I thought it was wonderful that a man spoke sweet words to me, put his arms around me, made love to me. I felt I was becoming human again.'

Paul Glaser, *Dansen met de Vijand*, Amsterdam 2016

‘Life and survival Westerbork and Auschwitz’

ASSIGNMENT 7

Final assignment

The title of this theme is ‘Life and survival Westerbork and Auschwitz’. The title is a word play in Dutch, however, this is not the case in English so this assignment cannot be done. The Dutch assignment is included in the Teacher’s answers list.

Review your first choice.

- In the introduction lesson you formulated an answer to the question: Could you be friends with someone whom you know could cause you to end up in serious trouble.

Has your point of view changed or not? Explain what made you change/ not change your mind?

REVIEW YOUR FIRST CHOICE.

- In the introduction lesson you formulated an answer to the question: Could you be friends with someone whom you know could cause you to end up in serious trouble.

Has your point of view changed or not? Explain what made you change/ not change your mind?