



THE Doll Maker's GIFT

Important Historical Context For Our Young Audience

This document explains the pogroms and provides additional resources and information for your reference. Please note that while a pogrom was a violent event, violence will not be portrayed onstage during *A Doll Makers Gift*. These resources are provided purely for context.

***The Doll Maker's Gift* • The Story behind the Story**

Where does *The Doll Maker's Gift* take place?

Our story takes place in 1903 in a small Russian village called a *shtetl*.

What is a *shtetl*?

Shtetl rhymes with “kettle”. The word *shtetl* means “little town” in Yiddish, the language of Eastern European Jews. These were small, poor towns in Russia and Poland in the 19th and 20th centuries. ¹

Who lived in these *shtetls*?

The people who lived there were mostly of the Jewish faith. ²

Why did Jews live in these *shtetls*?

The Jews’ religion and cultural traditions were different from their neighbors. The surrounding population, mostly Christians of the Russian Orthodox Church, viewed these differences with hatred. Over a period of years, the Russian government put strict regulations on what jobs the Jewish people could have and not have, and where they could live. They could only get out by converting to Christianity, but this was not an option for the devoted Jewish population. The *shtetl* became an isolated ghetto-like place. The Jews were a minority that suffered hatred and discrimination from the Russian majority. ³



What is a pogrom?

Pogrom means “to destroy—to demolish violently”. Pogroms were coordinated violent attacks where non-Jewish mobs would ride into the *shtetl* to burn and destroy property, and beat, injure and murder Jews. This sort of violence occurred from the 1880s until World War I, about sixty years. Over 100,000 Jewish people were murdered in the pogroms.

Where did the word “pogrom” come from?

The word pogrom comes from the Russian language and was used to describe these acts of anti-Jewish violence by non-Jewish mobs.

Who started these attacks?

There are many different theories on this question. Was it mobs of people from the neighboring town, or did the Russian government actually get involved? In many cases it was both. Some say that the pogrom of our story was “instigated” or brought about by the Russian government. ⁴

Did people escape?

The Jews knew about pogroms from friends and relatives in surrounding *shtetls* and became fearful. A few lucky ones had enough money to make the difficult journey to America. Some escaped by running away, hiding, or trying to defend themselves. Most, including the children, did not escape but suffered injury and even death.

How does this story connect to America?

Immigration

This historical period of Jewish persecution is also the period when America was open to immigrants. Over 12 million immigrants entered America through Ellis Island located in New York Harbor next to the Statue of Liberty. Many Jewish people, fleeing the persecution of Russia and Eastern Europe, came to America. Today, one out of every two Americans has an ancestor that came here through Ellis Island. America has always been considered a beacon of hope and freedom to people everywhere. Ask your Jewish friends if they have great grandparents who fled the pogroms.

Hatred in America

We can draw a parallel between the Jewish experience in Eastern Europe and the African American experience in the United States, especially in the South. After the Civil War, freed slaves lived segregated in poorer communities than their white neighbors. They were often the victims of violence, and law enforcement often didn't protect them. From 1882 to 1968, on American soil, 3448 African Americans were murdered by lynching.⁵ Americans must be on the lookout for hatred and discrimination.

Another connection to our show

Deborah Denenberg is a producer of our show. Her Grandma Riuka survived a pogrom. The name of her *shtetl* was Chan. During the pogrom, most of the young men of the village were shot, but Deborah's great uncle was young, and his mother begged for his life, and he was spared. The family met outside of town in the cemetery and watched their home and village burn down. They mourned the murder of their friends. This family was lucky. They had cousins in Omaha, NE who sent them \$1200, a fortune at that time, to escape Russia. They left the next day to begin their journey to America. Like the people in our story, they didn't have enough money to buy passage for everyone, but they were able to earn the difference while still in Europe. Deborah's family has lived in Omaha ever since her Grandma came here through Ellis Island in 1921.



¹ My Jewish Learning

² YIVO Encyclopedia

³ Easter in Kishinev: Anatomy of a Pogrom

⁴ YIVO—Jews of Eastern Europe

⁵ NAACP.com

Koydenov in 1920 • Memories of a Witness

by Eyda Aynbinder Liberman

Translated by Lillian Leavitt

There was only one window in the room where my mother and sister were sleeping. I woke them. I lifted the curtain and showed them the fire outside. They were stunned. We began collecting our things. We even found things we had hidden and bundled them with the neighbor's possessions. The flames lit the courtyard so brightly that we couldn't tell whether it was day or night. We took all the things we had collected and brought them into the field. On the way there, two soldiers stopped my brother shouting "hands in the air" and they took whatever money he had on him.

All the neighbors took their things to the field. All around you could hear the screams and cries of people as the fire continued to burn nonstop. Now and again Polish soldiers came by; some with carts. They just took whatever they wanted from us and destroyed what they didn't want. We Jews were left with nothing. They only took from Jewish families. Our things, however, were with our neighbor Ingolya and we kept to ourselves. The soldiers never bothered Ingolye because he was a farmer. Shortly after that, we had to leave because the fire was growing closer to us.

At night, things settled down. For a moment we thought our troubles were over, but in the morning another part of town was ablaze. They had already poured kerosene on our house and lit a match, but thanks to one of our neighbors, a Polish farmer, it never got to the point of fire. He assured the soldiers that he was the owner of the house, and he even put "icons" on all the windows. That, however, didn't help. They beat him mercilessly and he suffered from that beating for a long time to come.

Suddenly the soldiers arrived at our neighbor Ingolye's to tell him they had been notified that he had Jewish goods. He denied it. They let him know that if they found any Jewish items among his things, they'd shoot him. They started rummaging through the pile of goods and found household items like candlesticks, religious books, and other items that were clearly Jewish. One of them wanted to shoot him immediately, but Ingolye pleaded

that he cared not for his own life; his only concern was for his young daughter, whom he loved dearly. He wrapped his arms around her and held her to his chest as his wife began kissing the soldiers' hands and pleading that they release her husband. The soldier did not shoot Ingolye. But they took all the things they had found including things that belonged to him. We watched the entire scene from afar.



My mother fainted. What was I to do? I sat there with the children and thought about getting water for them, but there were flames all around us. There was a well nearby but you couldn't get through the flames to get there. The children started crying. Little Sonya started screaming "Grandma, grandma!" I quieted her down as best I could. I was afraid that the soldiers would hear us. My sister Fanya was not with us. Totally frightened, she had run off into the woods earlier in the morning. My father and brother were hidden somewhere else....Again as evening fell we hoped things would settle down, that the Polish military would leave. The more they set aflame and robbed, the sooner they would be done.

Suddenly I saw my brother and three Jewish boys who were our neighbors with him. The soldiers went over to him and ordered him to go with them. My brother began to plead with them, showing his arms "See these muscles. They're from work that I did for you." Somehow he got through to them. Then they started on the three other boys. They killed one of them. They shot another one in the legs. When he fell, they thought he was dead. The third one, a young, agile boy about 18 years old, fled into the tall corn stalks. They shot after him but didn't hit their mark. He was found three days later, passed out.

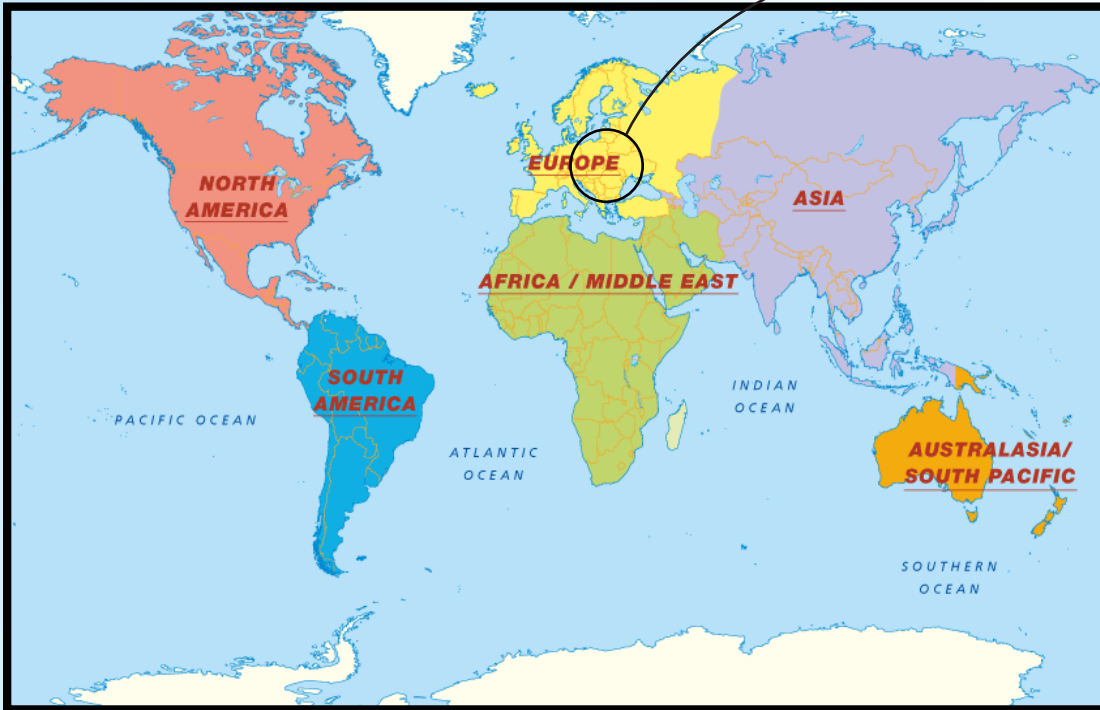


Now it was night time and the children hadn't eaten. None of us had had a drop of water during all this time. My mother had a small piece of bread which she had been saving for the children. Exhausted, we could no longer stand up. When we approached farmers, they chased us away, saying they would suffer consequences because of us...

We had thought these people were our friends. The only person who remained loyal was our neighbor Ingolya. My mother, little Sonya and I spread out on the grass; Ingolya and his wife on the other side. We all were covered by one blanket. My nephew Lioueh was so exhausted and terrified that he fell right into the tall grasses and fell asleep where we were. Suddenly, a neighbor woman came along and told us that she had recently spoken with a commander who told her that they were planning to murder all the Jews and throw them into a boiler. She had always been a bit of a hooligan, but the way things were going then, everything seemed possible. I didn't respond. My mother heard it too. Our neighbor Ingolye was terrified. He said "Where can I hide you now?" I just lay there and thought the end had come...

(The witness describes another day of the pogrom. Her family survives. She concludes) On the way out we met my friend Channah who told us, amidst her tears, that she was looking for her mother. She had been told that her mother had been killed. Approaching our house, I saw my parents, my sister, and brother. They were in the field cooking potatoes. We sat ourselves down in a circle, quietly without words; tears and heavy heartedness choking us as we looked at what the Polish monsters had done to our dear town, Koydinou.

Pogroms



Map of the World



Map of Central and Eastern Europe

(Locations of Pogroms highlighted in red, including Ukraine, Belarus, and parts of Lithuania, Poland and Moldova)



***Doll Maker's Gift
opens at The Rose***
2019

2020

2000

1980

1960

World War II
1939-1945

1940

World War I
1914-1918

1920

1900

Pogroms
1881-1917

Civil War
1861-1865

1880

1860

U.S.A.

**Eastern
Europe**

***A timeline of events
in the U.S.A. and
Eastern Europe***



THE Doll Maker's GIFT

Feb 22 - Mar 10, 2019

