Student worksheet

“In times of war, the laws fall silent”?

Source Materials: Historical photographs and prisoner testimonies
Each of the three groups should select TWO visual sources from the collection below, and TWO prisoner testimonies; and then analyse and evaluate the sources as evidence about the discussion theme for their group.

GROUP 1

Part I
Refer to the text of the Geneva Convention (Articles 9-13) to find information about the rights and obligations of prisoners of war.

Part II
Using your chosen sources, answer these questions:
1. What were the living conditions of prisoners of war in Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf and Stalag 318/VIIIIF (344) Lamsdorf like? How far were prisoners provided with adequate medical care and sanitary conditions?
2. How far did the German military authorities conform to the Geneva Convention concerning assurance of good living conditions of the prisoners of war?

Historical photographs
Stalag 318/VIII F (344) Lamsdorf

Photo 1 [1941-1945] Soviet POWs at Stalag 318/VIII F (344) Lamsdorf
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Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf

Photo 4 [1939-1945] Polish POW clean lice out of uniform at Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf

Photo 5 [1940-1945] The primitive toilets at Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf
Photo 6 [1940-1945] POWs at Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf with primitive stove

Photo 7 [1940-1945] Hospital patients after surgery performed by British physicians-POWs in a camp hospital in Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf
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Photo 8 [1940-1945] Cleaning the camp, Stalag VIIIB (344) Lamsdorf

Photo 9 [1940-1945] Delivery of water in Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf
Testimonies

Dimitrij Trofimowicz Czirow:
We were led by force to a sector at the end of the camp, opposite the main gate. There was no floor but the bare ground covered with withered, autumn grass. The entrance gate to the sector was covered with barbed wire.
- "Look around" – we were told- "and live while you're still alive."
We started to look around. Those of us who have quickly managed to organize fellow-groups immediately began to dig cavities and pits, hoping that they will be warmer. They used everything that was at hand: helmets, knives and spoons. I and Peter Kilganow decided that we will not dig any cavity for now. We were so cold that we could not think of anything else than to lie down and fall asleep.
The frost appeared in the morning of 18 October. We were gathered and counted and then it turned out that about a thousand of our POWs died during the night. Some died while lying on the ground, some were killed by the collapsed earth in the cavities, and others were found in a state of extreme depression. Deprived of hope, they decided to break free from the hellish torments and jumped over the fence-device to find themselves on this wretched patch of the forbidden area ...

Zbigniew Mazurek:
Taking care of a personal hygiene was practically impossible. The prisoners didn't receive any soap or hot water, and even cold was insufficient. The only positive thing was a hairdresser who came once a week. He shaved our beards, but this was the only opportunity to use a real comb and wash our faces with a real soap.
Every day some POWs were interrogated the Gestapo, which lasted from 30 minutes to 2 hours. Germans asked about a family, place of residence, commanders, functions in guerrillas, contacts with civilians, and regarding operations against Germans. Dissatisfaction with the response usually was expressed by slaps in the face, but there were also cases of severe beatings with a whip or stick.
We were put in coal-wagons without a roof. After three days the train wagons with POWs were stopped at the station Gross-Rosen. POWs were escorted by soldiers of the Wehrmacht. There were a lot of people in black uniforms of the SS at the station Gross-Rosen. After a moment, the commander of Gross-Rosen camp, who organized our lies, explained, "You are in a German concentration camp Gross-Rosen. Forget that they were masters, colleagues, comrades. Here are the numbers. The only way to achieve freedom is by the crematorium chimney.

Georgy Ivanovich Danilov:
I was often sick during my stay in the camp: typhoid, dysentery, muscular dystrophy. As a result of poor nutrition, I was swollen many times. Sometimes I worked in a hospital for soviet POWs as a paramedic under the direction of a Russian doctor - I registered information about patients on his request.
All my free time was dedicated to drawings, so I was ignoring the hunger and all horrors of the camp life. I believed that war and all horrors related to it will ever end.

M. N. McKibbin
There are probably more important things than food, but not for a prisoner of war.
Arthur Evans
Even a surgeon wasn't so careful about a surgery as the <<poor wretch>> chosen to share bread, who was intently observed by everyone.
Watery soup was served from a big kettle with long ladle. I have learnt from my experience to wait for my portion at the end of the line with hope to get more thick portion.

Harold G. Scharfe
The most overwhelming descriptions of everyday life in Lamsdorf concerning the camp hygiene:

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Forty holes [in the ground] next to the fourth barrack were our latrines. They were primitive and the excrements were cleared out by workers every day, who used a horse-drawn tank in order to do this. We called it "<Honey Waggon>"

**Josef Almogi**
The parcels of the Red Cross were the only source of better board for the prisoner, but what's more important – a breath of different, better world.

**Michael Hughes**
The parcels were shoebox size, but they kept us alive. They included food, but also a lot of everyday items. Each of them included something different. The conditions in the camp were OK! Especially thank to Red Cross' parcels from Canada, England, France.

**Albert Paice**
We were given 50 cigarettes per week, which we exchanged for a bread with civilians, a bar of chocolate for a slice of bread.
GROUP II

Part I
Refer to the Geneva Convention (Articles 27-34) concerning the work of prisoners of war (types of work, payment conditions, time of work, rest)

Part II
Using the sources you have chosen, answer these following questions:
1. What work was done by prisoners of war from the camps in Lamsdorf work during World War II? What conditions of work and rest for the captives did the camp authorities provide?
2. How far did the German military authorities conform to the Geneva Convention concerning work by the prisoners of war?

Historical photographs
Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf

Photo 1 [1939-1945] Polish POW in Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf at work
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Photo 2 [1940-1945] British POWs from Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf working in a coal mine

Photo 3 [1940-1945] Cleaning the camp, Stalag VIIIB (344) Lamsdorf
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Testimonies

**Viktor Adolfovich Strazdowski:**
They threw us away on a large, empty area near Lamsdorf. An extremely heavy labor and the trial of strong will were waiting for us. You had to stay strong, believe in the bright future and remember about human dignity. Horrible, wearisome days and nights passed slowly. Many prisoners were pushed to physical and moral limits as a result of harassment, hunger and disease.

**Sergei Woropajew:**
A terrible famine. I keep myself alive only with camp food. I went to work in the morning on an empty stomach. Miserable and hungry I worked for eight hours, and generally I didn’t eat anything for 24 hours. About 4 in the morning you can hear a whistle that wakes you up. The breakfast is distributed till 5 am (100-200 grams of water with finely chopped turnips). Lunch is similar to breakfast; the only difference is that the portion of soup is slightly bigger and denser. After a short break we get bread. How to live in such terrible conditions? Start work at 6 am. Coal is thrown slowly, and as the foreman is not looking, we put only half of the shovel. When the walking foreman is near, we start to increase pace of work because we may be punished by a slow pace with a punch in your face, neck or be struck with a baton.
GROUP III

Part I
Refer to the Geneva Convention (Articles 5-6; 35-41; 42-67) to find out about the laws relating to the treatment of prisoners of war, concerning human dignity, cultural activity, religious observance, right of correspondence, and punishments for offences.

Part II
After analysing and evaluating your chosen sources, answer the following questions:
1. In what way did the German camp authorities treat the prisoners of war staying in Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf and Stalag 318/VIIIIF (344) Lamsdorf during World War II? Were the prisoners of war treated equally?
2. How far did the German military authorities conform to the Geneva Convention concerning treatment of the prisoners of war?

Historical photographs
Stalag 318/VIII F (344) Lamsdorf

Photo 1[1941-1945] Barracks of Stalag 318/VIII F (344) Lamsdorf
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Photo 6 [1940-1945] Athletic team of British POWs in Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf

Photo 7 [1940-1945] POWs boxing club at Stalag VIIIIB (344) Lamsdorf
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Photo 10 [1940-1945] POWs together with the representation of the camp authorities during the boxing tournament at Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf

Photo 11 [1940-1945] Orchestra of British POWs at Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf

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Photo 14 [1940-1945] Exhibition of painting Anglo-Saxon POWs at Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf

Photo 15 [1940-1945] Representatives of Boxing and Athletic Club which affiliated POWs from Australia, Canada and the UK at Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf
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Photo 18 [1940-1945] Funeral wreath for the dead allied POWs from Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf funded by the Wehrmacht

Photo 19 [1940-1945] Funeral wreath for the British soldier from the Royal Regiment in Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf
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Photo 24 [1942-1945] Anglo-Saxon POWs (from Scotland, Canada, Australia, England) at Stalag VIII B (344) Lamsdorf
Testimonies

Viktor Adolfovic Strazdowski:
They threw us away on a large, empty area near Lamsdorf. An extremely heavy labor and the trial of strong will were waiting for us. You had to stay strong, believe in the bright future and remember about human dignity. Horrible, wearisome days and nights passed slowly. Many prisoners were pushed to physical and moral limits as a result of harassment, hunger and disease.

Nikolai Bystrov:
I was only 19 years but despite such a young age I noticed a huge difference in treatment between Allied and Soviet prisoners of war. The norms of international law were applied to Allied prisoners. They kept their military ranks, had warm clothes. No force was used against them, no persecution, and no famine. They had a right to send and receive correspondence from relatives. They could also submit a written request to the camp administration. In other words, they were under the full supervision of the International Red Cross. Our situation was different. We were abandoned by our government. Therefore, we were humiliated, harassed and were starving.

Sziriazan Iszbulatow:
The camp commander gave us some orders: “Run, get down." We were forced to physical activities for long hours and were pretty exhausted. All of us were waiting for a death sentence, but as midnight approached, they took us to the barracks. Our return meant that this time the “angel of death” has not fulfilled its mission.

Harold G. Scharfe:
Cigarettes were used to trade with German guards who were given only 3 cigarettes a day. In turn, prisoners of war had even 200 cigarettes sent from home or in parcels. Cigarettes made it easier for the prisoners to get inaccessible products. For example, prisoners of war paid 10 cigarettes for a loaf of bread.

Jim Henry:
Despite being aware of a place where I was, I went to church with a feeling of inner peace and comfort.

Llewellyn Othen Jones:
50 professional musicians. A military band consisted of English and Scottish units gave concerts regularly. Amateurs performed very often.

John Fergus Payne:
A prisoner of Stalag VIII B/344 Lamsdorf – daughter’s statement:
My father was a great pianist. He established his own jazz band in the camp.

Norman A. Leonard:
Breakfast was composed of a black bread and mint tea. Dinner included swede soup. Undercooked pieces of swede were swimming in a kind of dishwatery like bouillon. Middle size jacket potatoes tasted like a soil, some of them were spoiled and we had to mix them with pieces of swede and tinned beef from the Red Cross. The bread was baked from rye and potato flour with sawdust as an additive. This kind of bread was stiff as a brick and, judging on the basis of its taste and must on the crust, it could have been kept for months. A portion of fat was stock cube size, and meat – it was a kind of sausage with an onion odour, German coffee made of burned acorns was more tasteful than ‘mint’ tea.