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Dancing Against the Oppression: The Theatre of the Holocaust

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DANCING AGAINST THE OPPRESSION: THE THEATRE OF THE HOLOCAUST

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" I thought at first that the excess of happiness would make me explode like an over-filled balloon. I could not contain it. I jumped, threw myself on the beds, kicked my legs in the air and laughed aloud, and still the unbearable joy mounted inside... It was indescribable. One could only shout and dance about it."¹ Such was a young girl's response to the discovery there would be a theatrical performance in Theresienstadt, the Nazi transit camp where she was interred. At a time of desperation and despair the inhabitants of the ghettos and concentration camps turned to theatre as a source of sustenance. It was used to educate, preserve traditions, escape, and resist. An examination of these theatrical activities and the plays dealing with these events allows us a greater understanding of this dark time in our history that is so difficult to comprehend. It shows us that theatrical arts do play an important role in society and in history. Even in an impossible situation we can maintain our individuality and dignity, and that even the weakest of voices can never be silenced.

¹Eisen, George. Children and Play in the Holocaust. Games Among the Shadows. University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst, Mass., 1988, pgs. 73-4.