

Activity 1: Character Sketches

Task: Write character sketches of Władysław Szpilman and Wilm Hosenfeld, highlighting their personalities, emotions, and the bond they develop. Use evidence from the text to support your descriptions.

Sample Response:

Character Sketch of Władysław Szpilman

Władysław Szpilman, a Polish Jewish pianist, emerges as a resilient and introspective figure in "In the Attic." His survival amidst the Holocaust showcases his courage and determination. Physically weakened by starvation and emotionally scarred by isolation, Szpilman's initial response to the German officer—"I slumped on the chair by the larder door"—reveals his exhaustion and fear. Yet, his refusal to leave Warsaw, stating, "I can't leave this place," demonstrates his acute awareness of the dangers he faces as a Jew and his resolve to endure. Music is central to his identity; despite unpracticed, dirty hands, his performance of Chopin's Nocturne rekindles his sense of self and humanizes him to the officer. Szpilman's gratitude is evident when he offers future help, saying, "Remember my name: Szpilman, Polish Radio," reflecting his hope and desire to repay kindness. His loneliness during the 1945 Christmas, spent "listening to the stormy wind" and rats, underscores his emotional resilience. Szpilman's bond with the officer is built on trust, as he accepts food and advice, illustrating his ability to find hope in humanity despite immense suffering.

Character Sketch of Wilm Hosenfeld

Wilm Hosenfeld, the German officer, is a compassionate and morally courageous figure who defies the Nazi regime's brutality. His initial reassurance, "I've no intention of doing anything to you," sets a tone of empathy, contrasting with the expected hostility of a German soldier. Hosenfeld's curiosity about Szpilman's profession and his request to hear him play the piano suggest a respect for culture and humanity. His practical assistance—providing bread, jam, an eiderdown, and suggesting the loft as a hiding place—demonstrates his kindness and resourcefulness. Hosenfeld's shame, expressed as, "Yes, I am [German]! And ashamed of it, after everything that's been happening," reveals his rejection of Nazi atrocities and personal guilt. His optimism about the war's end, urging Szpilman to "hang on a few more weeks," reflects his hope and belief in justice. The bond with Szpilman is mutual; Hosenfeld's shy smile at Szpilman's offer of help indicates genuine appreciation. Hosenfeld's actions, risking his own safety, highlight his loyalty to human values, making him a symbol of compassion in a time of cruelty.

Activity 2: Conversation

Task: Imagine a conversation between Szpilman and Hosenfeld during the officer's final visit on December 12. Write a dialogue that captures their emotions, trust, and the significance of their farewell.

Sample Response:

Setting: The dark attic, December 12, 1944. Hosenfeld has just brought bread and an eiderdown.

Szpilman: (whispering) You're back... I didn't think you'd come again. Thank you for this. (touches the eiderdown) It's more than I could hope for.

Hosenfeld: (softly) You need it. The winter's harsh, and you must stay strong. My detachment's leaving Warsaw soon, so this might be the last time.

Szpilman: (anxiously) Leaving? But... what about the street fighting? How will I survive it alone?

Hosenfeld: (firmly) You've made it through five years of this inferno, Szpilman. If we've both survived this long, it's God's will for us to live. Just hold on.

Szpilman: (pausing, emotional) You've risked so much for me—a stranger, a Jew. Why? You don't even know my name.

Hosenfeld: (sighing) Names don't matter when it's about doing what's right. But... tell me, if it means so much.

Szpilman: (urgently) It's Władysław Szpilman. I worked at Polish Radio before the war. If I survive, I'll be there again. If you ever need help, find me. Please, remember my name.

Hosenfeld: (smiling faintly) Szpilman, Polish Radio. I'll remember. You've given me something too—hope that there's still good to come. Stay safe, my friend.

Szpilman: (voice breaking) Thank you... for everything.

Hosenfeld: (whispering) Keep hiding. The war's almost over. (exits quietly)

Activity 3: Diary Entry

Task: Write a diary entry from Szpilman's perspective on January 15, 1945, after hearing the radio announcements about Warsaw's liberation. Reflect on his emotions, memories, and hopes for the future.

Sample Response:

January 15, 1945

Dear Diary,

Today, the silence of the attic was shattered—not by bombs, but by the most unexpected sound: Polish voices on a radio loudspeaker, proclaiming Germany's defeat and Warsaw's liberation. My heart races as I write this, torn between disbelief and overwhelming relief. After years of hiding, of fearing every creak and shadow, am I truly free? The war that stole my family, my home, and nearly my life seems to be ending.

Last night, I lay awake, trembling at the thought of street fighting. I imagined death at the hands of my own countrymen, mistaking me for a German in this cursed overcoat. But this morning, the Germans fled without a fight, and the city fell quiet. Then came the announcements—words of victory that felt like a dream. I wanted to run outside, to see the sky without fear, but caution held me back. Tomorrow, I'll venture out, wrapped in the officer's coat but shouting my Polish identity.

I think of the officer, Wilm Hosenfeld, who saved me with bread, warmth, and hope. His words, "Just hang on a few more weeks," echo in my mind. Did he survive? I owe him my life and pray I can repay his kindness. My thoughts drift to my family, lost in the ghetto's horrors. The north of Warsaw, where they perished, is now a void. How will I begin anew with only death behind me?

Yet, I feel a spark of hope. I'll return to Polish Radio, to music, to life. This attic, my prison, has also been my refuge. Tomorrow, I step into freedom, carrying the weight of loss but also the strength of survival.

Władysław Szpilman

Activity 4: Letter

Task: Write a letter from Szpilman to Wilm Hosenfeld, written in 1946 after Szpilman learns of Hosenfeld's capture by the Red Army. Express gratitude, regret, and a desire to help.

Sample Response:

**Warsaw,
March 10, 1946**

Poland

Dear Captain Hosenfeld,

I write to you with a heavy heart, having learned of your capture by the Soviet forces. My name is Władysław Szpilman, the pianist you found hiding in that Warsaw attic in 1944. I am alive today because of your compassion, and words cannot express my gratitude.

In those dark days, when I was starving and alone, you saw me not as a fugitive but as a human being. You brought me bread, jam, and an eiderdown, but more than that, you gave me hope. Your words, "The war will be over by spring," kept me going through the coldest nights. Your shame at being German, your refusal to embrace the horrors around us, showed me that kindness can survive even in war.

I am tormented by the thought that you are now a prisoner, unable to reach out. I promised to help you if I survived, and I meant it. I've returned to Polish Radio, as I said I would, and I'm searching for ways to advocate for your release. If this letter reaches you, please know I am trying. If it does not, I will honor your memory by living fully, playing music, and telling the world of the German officer who saved a Jew's life at great risk.

You gave me a future, and I pray I can offer you some measure of justice. May you find strength, as you once urged me to.

With
Władysław Szpilman

deepest

gratitude,

Activity 5: Email

Task: Imagine Szpilman is alive in 2025 and sends an email to the director of a Holocaust museum, proposing an exhibit about Wilm Hosenfeld's actions. Include details from the chapter and explain the significance.

Sample Response:

Subject: Proposal for Exhibit Honoring Wilm Hosenfeld

Dear Director,

I am Władysław Szpilman, a Holocaust survivor and author of *The Pianist*. I write to propose an exhibit at your museum to honor Captain Wilm Hosenfeld, a German officer who saved my life during World War II.

In late 1944, I was hiding in a Warsaw attic, starving and alone, when Hosenfeld found me. Instead of turning me in, he asked about my profession as a pianist and requested I play Chopin's Nocturne. Moved by the music, he provided me with food—bread and jam—a warm eiderdown, and a safer hiding place in the attic's loft. He risked his life, visiting multiple times, urging me to "hang on" as the war neared its end. His shame at Nazi atrocities and his compassion for a Jewish fugitive were extraordinary acts of humanity.

Hosenfeld died in a Soviet prison in 1952, unable to contact me. An exhibit showcasing his story—through letters, photographs, and perhaps a replica of the attic—would highlight the power of individual kindness amidst genocide. It would also educate visitors about the complexities of human behavior during the Holocaust, honoring a man who defied his uniform's expectations.

I am available to provide further details or contribute to the exhibit's development. Thank you for considering this tribute to a forgotten hero.

Sincerely,

Władysław

Polish

w.szpilman@polishradio.pl

Radio,

Szpilman

Warsaw

Activity 6: News Report

Task: Write a news report from January 16, 1945, published in a Polish newspaper, covering Szpilman's emergence from hiding and the liberation of Warsaw. Include quotes from Szpilman and a Polish soldier.

Sample Response:

Polish Pianist Survives Holocaust in Warsaw Attic

Warsaw, January 16, 1945 – Amidst the jubilation of Warsaw's liberation from Nazi occupation, a remarkable story of survival has emerged. Władysław Szpilman, a renowned pianist and former Polish Radio artist, was found alive yesterday after hiding in an attic for months.

Szpilman, 33, endured starvation and isolation in a ruined building, evading Nazi patrols. "I thought I'd die in that attic," Szpilman told reporters, his voice trembling. "But the silence of the guns and the radio announcing our freedom gave me hope. I owe my life to a German officer who brought me food and urged me to hold on."

The liberation nearly ended in tragedy when Szpilman, wearing a German military overcoat for warmth, was mistaken for an enemy soldier. "I shouted, 'I'm Polish!' as bullets hit the wall," he recounted. Lieutenant Jan Kowalski, who encountered Szpilman, said, "We nearly lost a national treasure. Once we confirmed his identity, we took him to safety."

Szpilman plans to return to Polish Radio, vowing to rebuild his life through music. His survival underscores the resilience of Warsaw's citizens as the city begins its recovery from years of devastation.

By Anna Nowak, Warsaw Daily

Activity 7: Speech

Task: Write a speech delivered by Szpilman at a 2002 event celebrating the release of the film *The Pianist*. Address the audience about the importance of remembering the Holocaust and honoring Hosenfeld's legacy.

Sample Response:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for joining me tonight to celebrate the release of *The Pianist*, a film that brings my wartime experiences to the world. As a survivor of the Holocaust, I stand before you with a heart full of gratitude and a duty to remember.

In 1944, I was a shadow of myself, hiding in a Warsaw attic, expecting death. The Nazis had taken my family, my home, and nearly my hope. Yet, in that darkness, a German officer, Captain Wilm Hosenfeld, found me. He didn't see a Jew to betray but a pianist to save. He asked me to play Chopin, and that music bridged our souls. He brought me food, a blanket, and words of hope: "The war will be over by spring." His kindness, at great personal risk, gave me the strength to survive until Warsaw's liberation in January 1945.

This film is not just my story—it's a testament to the millions who suffered and perished in the Holocaust. We must remember their pain to prevent such horrors from recurring. We must also honor those like Hosenfeld, who chose humanity over hatred. He died in a Soviet prison in 1952, unable to know the life he saved. Tonight, I dedicate this moment to him and to all who resisted evil with compassion.

Let us carry these lessons forward, teaching our children to value every human life. Through music, stories, and memory, we can build a world of peace.

Thank you, and may we never forget.

Władysław Szpilman