

# ALMEIDA THEATRE

## 'Give Me Your Children' by Chaim Rumkowski

### The Speech

- Watch the speech, delivered by Tobias Menzies

<https://www.speech.almeida.co.uk/speech/give-me-your-children>

Duration: 10 minutes

- Discuss students' initial responses.

### Context

Chaim Rumkowski was a Polish Jew and businessman. He was appointed by the Nazis as the head of the Jewish Council of Elders in the Łódź Ghetto, Poland.

Łódź was Poland's second biggest city and main centre of industry. The ghetto was established on 30 April 1940 and remained in use for over 4 years. Approximately 164,000 Jews were incarcerated in the ghetto and those able to work were used as a labour force by the Germans.

In 1942 deportations began from Łódź to the extermination camp in Chelmno. Chaim Rumkowski was responsible for preparing the list of people to be sent to the camps.

- Rumkowski thought of himself as a Jewish 'saviour'. Others perceived him as a Jewish counterpart to the Nazis.
- Ask students to discuss their opinion of him and how they would respond if they found themselves in Rumkowski's position.

### Content

- Watch the speech again.
- Assign students one of the following areas to make notes on while listening to the speech:
  - The details of the sacrifice.
  - Efforts to use statistics to deliver the logic of the solution.
  - Expressions of doubt.
  - The alternative to sacrificing as requested.
  - The extended metaphor of the body and its limbs.
- Discuss the impact of each area and the speech as a whole.

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## Language and Structure

- Ask students to read a copy of the speech and explore the persuasive techniques used. **A transcript of the speech is included at the end of this document.**
- This exercise encourages students to identify examples of different types of persuasive appeal, and more importantly to comment on their effect.
- Provide students with the chart below. This exercise could be done individually with each student completing the full table or by splitting the class in to groups and allocating each group one of the persuasive techniques to examine. Students should try to find three examples of each technique.

<b>Persuasive Technique</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Effect</b>
Logos – structure of speech, use of logic, facts and figures	1.  2.  3.	1.  2.  3.
Ethos – a demonstration of the speaker’s credibility or strength of character	1.  2.  3.	
Pathos – the emotional appeal of the speech	1.  2.  3.	1.  2.  3.

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## Discussion

- Ask students how they feel it would be best to address an audience with a speech that has no real solutions or hope.

## Extension Task

- Ask students to imagine themselves as an inhabitant of the ghetto listening to Rumkowski's speech and write a diary entry expressing their reaction and the reactions of others in the ghetto.
- Students can compare their entry to the excerpt from Jozef Zelkowicz's *The Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto* [here](#).

## Useful Links

### Websites

[Chaim Rumkowski](#) – Information on his role in the ghetto

[The Łódź Ghetto](#) – Information on the ghetto from the Holocaust Remembrance Centre

[Jewish Saviour or Nazi Collaborator](#) – Article exploring Rumkowski as a controversial figure

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## GIVE ME YOUR CHILDREN Chaim Rumkowski | 4 September 1942

*This is an edited version of the speech given by Chaim Rumkowski to the Jews imprisoned in the Łódź Ghetto by the Nazis.*

A grievous blow has struck the ghetto. They are asking us to give up the best we possess - the children and the elderly.

I was unworthy of having a child of my own, so I gave the best years of my life to children. I've lived and breathed with children, I never imagined I would be forced to deliver this sacrifice to the altar with my own hands. In my old age, I must stretch out my hands and beg: brothers and sisters - hand them over to me. Fathers and mothers: give me your children.

Yesterday afternoon, they gave me the order to send more than 20,000 Jews out of the ghetto, and if not - "We will do it!" So the question became, 'Should we take it upon ourselves, do it ourselves, or leave it to others to do?'

Well, we - that is, I and my closest associates - thought first not about "How many will perish?" but "How many is it possible to save?" And we reached the conclusion that, however hard it would be for us, we should take the implementation of this order into our own hands.

I must perform this difficult and bloody operation - I must cut off limbs in order to save the body itself. I must take children because, if not, others may be taken as well - God forbid.

I have no thought of consoling you today. Nor do I wish to calm you. I must lay bare your full anguish and pain.

I come to you like a bandit, to take from you what you treasure most in your hearts. I have tried, using every possible means, to get the order revoked. I tried - when that proved to be impossible - to soften the order. Just yesterday, I ordered a list of children aged nine - I wanted at least to save this one age-group: the nine to ten year olds. But I was not granted this concession.

On only one point did I succeed: in saving the ten year olds and up. Let this be a consolation to our profound grief.

There are, in the ghetto, many patients who can expect to live only a few days more, maybe a few weeks. I don't know if the idea is diabolical or not, but I must say it: "Give me the sick. In their place we can save the healthy."

Common sense dictates that the saved must be those who can be saved and those who have a chance of being rescued, not those who cannot be saved in any case.

We live in the ghetto. We live with so much restriction that we do not have enough even for the healthy, let alone for the sick. Each of us feeds the sick at the expense of our own health: we give our bread to the sick. We give them our meagre ration of sugar, our little piece of meat. And what's the result? Not enough to cure the sick, and we ourselves become ill. Of course, such sacrifices are the most beautiful and noble. But there are times when one has to choose: sacrifice the sick, who haven't the slightest chance of recovery and who also may make others ill, or rescue the healthy.

I could not deliberate over this problem for long; I had to resolve it in favour of the healthy.

In this spirit, I gave the appropriate instructions to the doctors, and they will be expected to deliver all incurable patients, so that the healthy, who want and are able to live, will be saved in their place.

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I must tell you a secret: they requested 24,000 victims, 3,000 a day for eight days. I succeeded in reducing the number to 20,000, but only on the condition that these be children under the age of ten. Children ten and older are safe. Since the children and the aged together equal only some 13,000 souls, the gap will have to be filled with the sick.

I understand you, mothers; I see your tears, alright. I also feel what you feel in your hearts, you fathers who will have to go to work in the morning after your children have been taken from you, when just yesterday you were playing with your dear little ones. All this I know and feel.

Since four o'clock yesterday, when I first found out about the order, I have been utterly broken. I share your pain. I suffer because of your anguish, and I don't know how I'll survive this - where I'll find the strength to do so.

I can barely speak.

Help me carry out this action. I am trembling.

A broken Jew stands before you.

This is the most difficult of all orders I have ever had to carry out at any time. I reach out to you with my broken, trembling hands and beg: give into my hands the victims. So that we can avoid having further victims, and a population of 100,000 Jews can be preserved.

So, they promised me: If we deliver our victims by ourselves, there will be peace.

I understand what it means to tear off a part of the body.

So which is better?

What do you want?

That 80,000 to 90,000 Jews remain, or God forbid, that the whole population be annihilated?

You may judge as you please; my duty is to preserve the Jews who remain.

I do not speak to hot-heads. I speak to your reason and conscience.

One needs the heart of a bandit to ask from you what I am asking. But put yourself in my place, think logically, and you'll reach the conclusion that I cannot proceed any other way.

The part that can be saved is much larger than the part that must be given away.