

Chapter IX

# THE MOST IMPORTANT MOMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLAND

Agnieszka Słomian



## Get to know about Poland – Training Materials for Trainers and Teachers

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Cover photo: The Battle of Grunwald – 1410 / Jan Matejko / Source: Wikimedia Commons

## 1. WORKSHOP SCENARIO

**AIMS**

- To learn about the most important dates, events and figures of Polish history.
- To describe the influence of the most important events and the activity of Polish historical figures on the functioning of contemporary Poland and Central Europe.
- To interest non-Poles in the history of Poland – the past and the contemporary.



**DURATION:** 180 minutes.



**PARTICIPANTS:** 20 people.

**TEACHING METHODS**

- Expository methods – talk.
- Demonstration methods – film.
- Practical methods – guiding text method.

**TEACHING MATERIALS, AIDS AND WORK**

- Computer and projector to display video.
- Board or flipchart to write down associations.
- 4 stations in different parts of the room which are marked: Chapter 1. Chronicles: 10th-15th century, Chapter 2. Chronicles: 16th-18th century, Chapter 3. Chronicles: years 1795-1939, Chapter 4. Chronicles: years 1939-2012.
- At each station: 1 flipchart or card sheets, colourful A4 sheets and sticky notes, glue, scissors, crayons, markers and envelopes with educational texts and instructions for each group.
- Additionally, for diversification, printed photos, drawings, symbols and maps relating to a given period may be placed at each station.
- Across the room, a string with 12 pegs to hang the results of the project.

## 1. WORKSHOP SCENARIO

### Plan of the workshop



#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The participants are asked which events they associate with Polish history. The associations are written down on the board or flipchart in the form of a mind map (*Auxiliary material no. 1*). The educational film *Get to know about Poland: The Most Important Moments in History* (*Auxiliary material no. 2*) is shown. The movie is discussed together – the information contained therein as well as the visual material. The group verifies if the information provided in the film corresponds to the mind map – if so, this is indicated with a coloured marker or highlighter. The participants are asked which of the events mentioned in the film should be put on the mind map and to add them. The participants are informed that during the workshop they will learn about the history of Poland and will create their own “Chronicles of Poland” consisting of 4 chapters.



#### 2. EXPLAINING AND CONDUCTING AN EXERCISE

The participants are divided into 4 groups of 5 people: a box with crumpled pieces of paper in 4 different colours (yellow, red, green, blue) is placed in the middle of the room. The participants randomly select the colourful pieces of paper and are invited to get together into groups according to the colours. Each group receives an envelope containing instructions of the tasks to be performed at each station (*Auxiliary material no. 3*).

An explanation is given that in different parts of the room there are 4 stations where the groups will create chapters for the “Chronicles of Poland”. Each station corresponds to one period of Polish history (*Auxiliary material no. 4*). After reaching the station, the group opens the envelope marked with colour of the group. The envelope contains an educational text related to a given period (*Educational material no. 1, 2, 3, 4*) and one of the tasks (*Auxiliary material no. 5*). At each station, a given group should perform a different type of task (events, figures, culture and monuments, economy and science). The groups approach the stations according to chronological order. The group attaches a performed task to the flipchart in a given place. The flipchart paper constitutes a chapter of the Chronicles. Each time when the participants develop a given chapter of the Chronicle, the historical information contained therein should be summarised.

Comprehension of the instructions should be checked and each group monitored as they perform the relevant type of the task at a given station. After 10 and then 20 minutes, each group is informed individually that they have 15 and then 5 minutes remaining to complete the task. Each group is offered help in completing the tasks should they so require. After 24 minutes, everyone is informed that they have one minute left and they should attach the completed task to the flipchart.



#### 3. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The participants are invited to hang the chapters of the “Chronicles of Poland” (the completed flipcharts) on the string suspended across the room with the help of the pegs, to “read” the Chronicles at the end of the workshop and to familiarise themselves with the content of each “page”. Then, the groups are asked how they liked the work, what posed the greatest difficulties and which events in the history of Poland were the most interesting for them. Finally, Tomasz Bagiński’s film entitled *The Animated History of Poland* (*Auxiliary material no. 2*) is shown.

## I. WORKSHOP SCENARIO



### 5. THE TIME FRAME OF THE WORKSHOP

Introduction to the topic and the presentation of the film: 20 minutes.

Explaining the exercise and dividing into groups: 5 minutes.

Conducting the exercise: 140 minutes, including:

- Time to prepare 1 chapter of the Chronicles: 25 minutes.
- Time to discuss 1 chapter of the Chronicles: 8-10 minutes.
- Time to swap stations: 1,5-2 minutes.

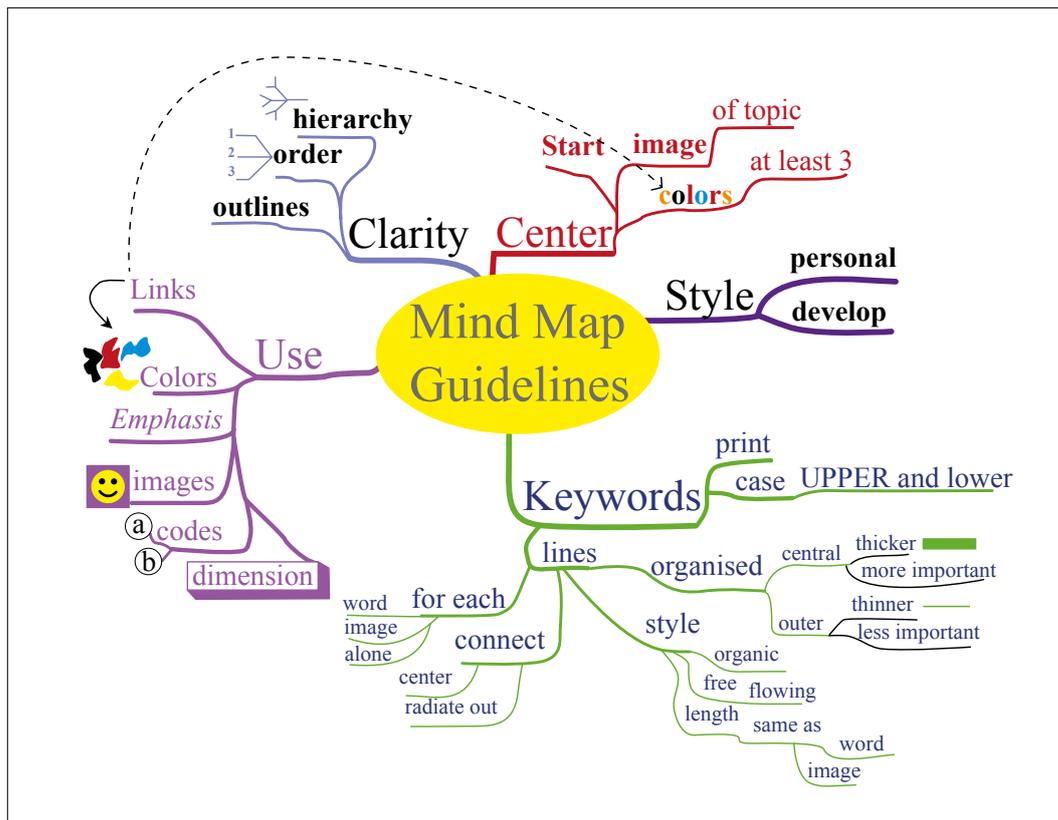
Discussing the exercise and summarising the workshop: 15 minutes.

## 2. AUXILIARY MATERIALS

### Auxiliary material no. 1



#### A mind map



Author of design: Nicoguaro / Source: Wikipedia,  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind\\_map#/media/File:MindMapGuidelines.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind_map#/media/File:MindMapGuidelines.svg)

### Auxiliary material no. 2

#### Educational films



The films are available on You Tube at:

- *Get to know about Poland: The Most Important Moments in History*  
 (EN): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ku-kl2vgSRE>  
 (RU): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SzOYFYZE4NI>
- *The Animated History of Poland*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stEuQamTLXw>

## 2. AUXILIARY MATERIALS



## Auxiliary material no. 3

**The type of a task to be performed at each station****Yellow group:**

- Chapter 1. Chronicles: 10th-15th century » events
- Chapter 2. Chronicles: 16th-18th century » figures
- Chapter 3. Chronicles: years 1795-1939 » culture and monuments
- Chapter 4. Chronicles: years 1939-2012 » economy and science

**Red group:**

- Chapter 1. Chronicles: 10th-15th century » figures
- Chapter 2. Chronicles: 16th-18th century » events
- Chapter 3. Chronicles: years 1795-1939 » economy and science
- Chapter 4. Chronicles: years 1939-2012 » culture and monuments

**Green group:**

- Chapter 1. Chronicles: 10th-15th century » economy and science
- Chapter 2. Chronicles: 16th-18th century » culture and monuments
- Chapter 3. Chronicles: years 1795-1939 » figures
- Chapter 4. Chronicles: years 1939-2012 » events

**Blue group:**

- Chapter 1. Chronicles: 10th-15th century » culture and monuments
- Chapter 2. Chronicles: 16th-18th century » economy and science
- Chapter 3. Chronicles: years 1795-1939 » events
- Chapter 4. Chronicles: years 1939-2012 » figures

## Auxiliary material no. 4

**Name of the stations**

Chapter 1.	Chronicles: 10th-15th century
Chapter 2.	Chronicles: 16th-18th century
Chapter 3.	Chronicles: years 1795-1939
Chapter 4.	Chronicles: years 1939-2012

## 2. AUXILIARY MATERIALS



### Auxiliary material no. 5

#### Tasks for the groups

##### EVENTS:

Read the educational text. Write in chronological order the most important dates and events of the discussed period. You may also illustrate them graphically. Think about and write why these events played an important role in the history of Poland. After completing the task, attach the paper/papers to the large flipchart which will become one chapter of the Chronicles.

##### FIGURES:

Read the educational text. Write chronologically the most important figures of the discussed period along with a brief summary of their personas. You may also illustrate them graphically. Think about and write why a given figure played an important role in the history of Poland and what the Poles owe to him. After completing the task, attach the paper/papers to the large flipchart which will become one chapter of the Chronicles.

##### CULTURE AND MONUMENTS:

Read the educational text. Note down any information concerning the culture and monuments of a given period. You may also illustrate it graphically. Think about and write what role literature, architecture, music, etc. played in contemporary Poland. After completing the task, attach the paper/papers to the large flipchart which will become one chapter of the Chronicles.

##### ECONOMY AND SCIENCE:

Read the educational text. Note down any information concerning the broadly defined economy and science of a given period. You may also illustrate it graphically. Think about and write how the development of the economy influenced the subsequent geopolitical situation of the Polish state. After completing the task, attach the paper/papers to the large flipchart which will become one chapter of the Chronicles.

### 3. EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

#### Educational material no.1



#### Chapter 1. Chronicles: 10th-15th century

The Slavs inhabited the lands of present-day Poland since the 5th century AD. In the 10th century the Polan tribe, from which the name of the country derives, managed to establish strong state structures. The christianisation of Poland took place in 966 during the reign of Prince Mieszko I from the Piast dynasty and was held in Gniezno, the first capital of Poland. In later centuries a cathedral with the famous "Gniezno Doors" which depicted the life of Saint Adalbert of Prague – the first Polish saint – was founded there.

The son of Mieszko I, Bolesław I Chrobry, was crowned in 1025 the first king of Poland. According to the legend, during his military expeditions he used a sword that got chipped while conquering Kiev, hence the name of the sword "Jagged Sword" ("Szczerbiec"). In reality though the "Jagged Sword" was made at the turn of the 12th and 13th century and was the coronation sword of the kings of Poland.

From the 12th century, Poland went through a period of feudal fragmentation - as a result of the will of King Bolesław Wrymouth ("Krzywousty"), the country was split into provinces ruled by his sons and then by their descendants. In the course of time the provinces were turned into principalities which were ruled as independent states. They were, however, quite weak. In the 13th century, the Tatar invasion devastated the lands of southern Poland. The combined forces of Polish, Czech and German princes fought them – these troops were defeated at the Battle of Legnica in 1241. The invasion of the Tatars is associated with the legend of the trumpeter from the Tower of St. Mary's Church ("Mariacki") in Cracow who, when he saw enemies approaching the city, sounded the alarm and was shot by a Tatar arrow. That is why the current trumpet call played from the tower of St. Mary's Church has a characteristic unfinished melody.

The reunification of the country was conducted by King Władysław Elbow-high ("Łokietek") at the beginning of the 14th century. He was short in stature – that is why people called him "Elbow". He managed to unite a strip of land from Gdansk Pomerania to Małopolska Voivodeship and Wielkopolska Voivodeship. Cracow became the capital of the newly united kingdom. A new, ferocious Polish enemy grew in East Prussia – the Teutonic Order with its capital in Malbork – the Teutonic Knights constructed a huge castle there which is one of the largest medieval castles in Europe.

The son of Władysław Elbow-high, Casimir, was named the Great as he strengthened and modernised the Kingdom of Poland. During his reign, new castles and towns were founded. He developed and secured trade routes to Hungary, Russia and Silesia. In 1364 Casimir the Great founded a university in Cracow, the first in Poland and the second in this part of Europe, later called the Jagiellonian University. A famous Polish proverb says that when Casimir the Great ascended, Poland was wooden and when he left us, it was made of stone ("Został Polskę drewnianą a zostawił murowaną"). The times of Casimir the Great reign coincided with intense development of the economy. Cities situated near trade routes started to acquire wealth and in villages estates were formed which were owned by the king, the clergy and monasteries as well as the knighthood, which in Poland was great in number.

### 3. EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

In 1386 Władysław Jagiełło, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, became the king of Poland. He began a new dynasty on the Polish throne – the Jagiellonian dynasty and the union of two states: Poland and Lithuania, which had a common enemy – the Teutonic Order. In 1410 at the Battle of Grunwald, Władysław Jagiełło at the head of the Polish-Lithuanian army defeated the army of the Order. It was one of the greatest battles of medieval Europe. Before the battle, the Polish knighthood sang the religious hymn “Bogurodzica”, which is the oldest known hymn recorded in the Polish language. One of the most famous Polish painters, Jan Matejko, immortalised the Battle of Grunwald in his 19th century monumental painting.

*Development of texts: Agnieszka Słomian, Tomasz Mazurek*

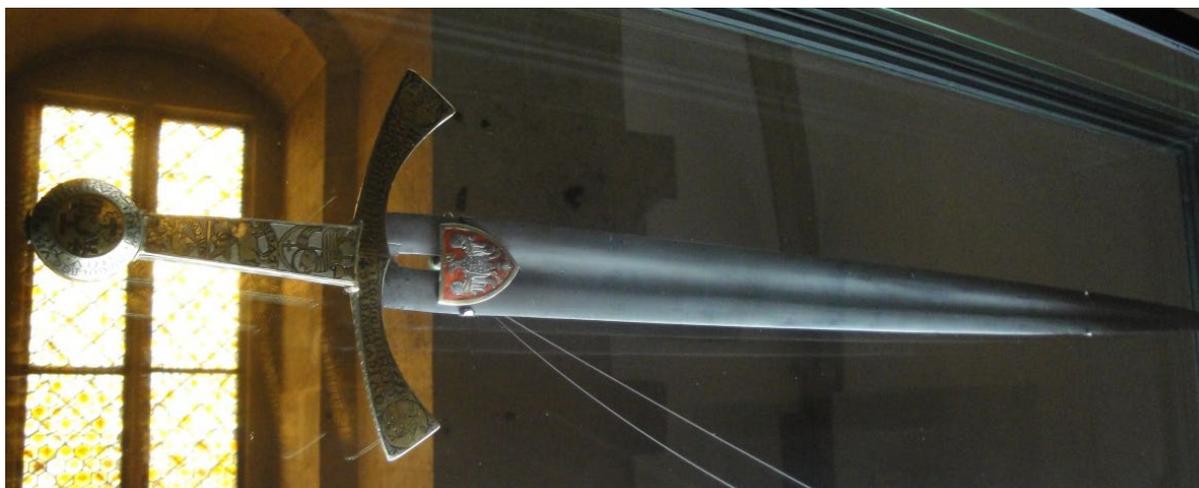


Photo: The "Jagged Sword" (Polish coronation sword) as displayed in the Wawel Castle / metal.beast / Source: Flickr.com



Photo: Saint Adalbert of Prague / Source: Wikimedia Commons

# Chapter IX THE MOST IMPORTANT MOMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLAND



Map: Poland and Lithuania Jagiello's reign / Poznaniak / Source: Wikimedia Commons



Photo: The Battle of Grunwald – 1410 / Jan Matejko / Source: Wikimedia Commons

### 3. EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

## Educational material no. 2



### Chapter 2. Chronicles: 16th-18th century

The 16th century is called the Golden Age in the history of Poland. Poland was then rich and strong. The ideas of the Renaissance had penetrated into scientific and cultural life and there was religious tolerance. In 1569 Poland and Lithuania entered into a union and became practically one country. The union was called the Union of Lublin since the treaty was signed in Lublin. The state which was formed as a result of the union was named the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

At the end of the 16th century, King Sigismund III Vasa relocated the Polish capital from Cracow to Warsaw. In his honour, in front of the Royal Castle in Warsaw a column was built on which stands the monument of King Sigismund III.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, a highly original culture called Sarmatism developed among the Polish nobility ("szlachta"). It was a mixture of European Baroque and Oriental influences from the Ottoman Empire (contemporary Turkey).

Throughout the 17th century, the Commonwealth waged war with Russia, Sweden and Turkey. In 1648 in today's Ukraine, Cossack uprisings broke out, led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky – the rebellious Hetman of the Ukrainian Cossacks. The Uprising was extremely bloody, and in its wake the entire east of Ukraine up to the Dnieper River was incorporated into Russia.

In 1655 the Sweden army invaded Poland and occupied almost its entire territory. Only a few strongholds held out, including the Jasna Góra Monastery in Częstochowa – nowadays the national sanctuary of the Poles. The invasion, later called the Deluge, was repelled, yet it devastated the country.

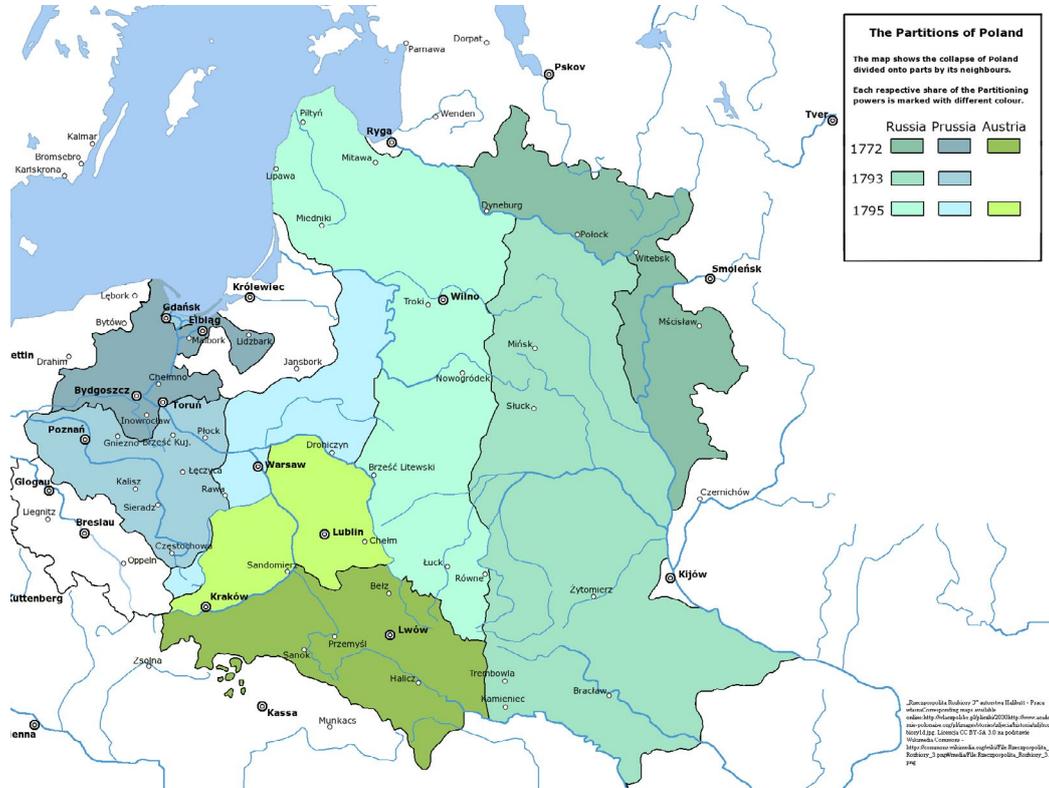
In 1683 king John III Sobieski came to the rescue of Vienna when it was besieged by the Turks. During the Battle of Vienna a charge from the Polish armoured cavalry – the hussars – broke the ranks of the Turkish forces and decided the victory.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Poland was called the bread basket of Europe ("spichlerz Europy"). Through the port of Gdansk great amounts of grain, wood, leather, and fabric were exported to Western Europe. This was possible thanks to the developing folwarks – great farms belonging to the nobility. Unfortunately, this was at the expense of the peasants whose rights were limited, while increasing the socage – the number of weekdays the peasant had to work for his master.

In the 18th century, Poland, weakened by wars and the degradation of its political system, no longer had the strength to face increasingly powerful neighbours – Austria, Prussia and Russia. In the middle of the 18th century there were three partitions of Poland conducted by these countries. Groups of reformists attempted to heal the crumbling state. On 3 May 1791, members of the Great Sejm passed a constitution which was the first such legal act in Europe and the second in the world – after the United States Constitution. The constitution was supported by Stanisław August Poniatowski. Regrettably, a year later the king joined the ranks of opponents of the constitution who, with the help of Russian armies, took control of the country. The last partition of Poland took place in 1795 – Stanisław August Poniatowski, the last king of Poland abdicated and Poland was erased from the map of Europe.

*Development of texts: Agnieszka Słomian, Tomasz Mazurek*

# Chapter IX THE MOST IMPORTANT MOMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLAND



Map: The Partitions of Poland / Halibutt / Source: Wikimedia Commons



Photo: The battle of Viena – 1683 / Jan Matejko / Source: Wikimedia Commons



Photo: Polish forces in Częstochowa / Anonimus plate / Source: Wikimedia Commons



Photo: Portrait of King Sigismund III Vasa / Source: Wikimedia Commons



Photo: Portrait of Sarmatian / Stanislaw Antoni Szczuka / Source: Wikimedia Commons



## Educational material no. 3

### Chapter 3. Chronicles: years 1795-1939

In the 19th century, the Poles repeatedly struggled to regain independence. The Napoleonic Wars brought the first chance. The Duchy of Warsaw existed in the years 1807-1815, created by Napoleon – it was a substitute for a Polish state. Commander-in-chief of Duchy of Warsaw was prince Józef Poniąstowski – the nephew of Stanisław August Poniąstowski, the last king of Poland. Unfortunately, after the fall of Napoleon, the territory of the Duchy was occupied by Russia.

The greatest national uprisings always broke out in the territories of the Russian Partition. In 1830 regular Polish troops took part in the November Uprising. They rebelled against their commander – the Russian governor. The Generals of the Uprising and the national government resided in the Presidential Palace (“Pałac Namiestnikowski”) which had previously been occupied by the representatives of the Russian authorities. The January Uprising broke out in 1863, and was purely partisan. The two uprisings were suppressed by Russian troops.

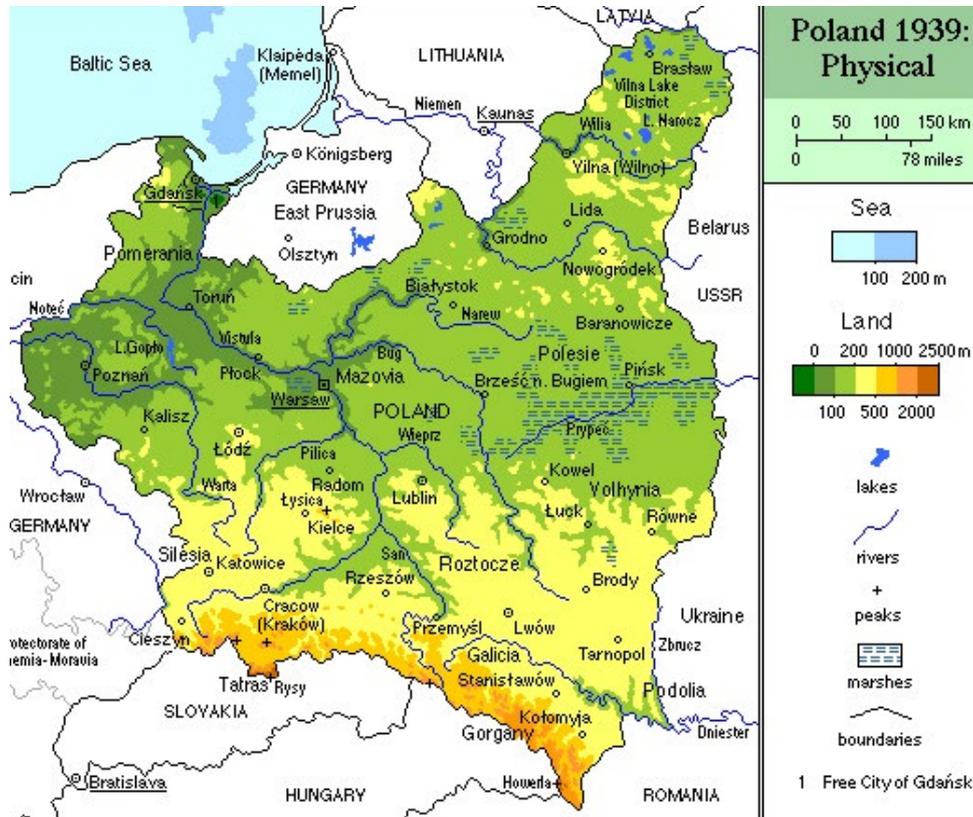
Under occupation, the Poles did not forget their identity and history. Jan Matejko, the most famous Polish painter, created many patriotic paintings in the 19th century. Henryk Sienkiewicz, Nobel Prize Winner, wrote historical novels which raised the morale of the nation.

Under occupation, certain branches of industry and trade developed in the Polish lands. Warsaw became an important centre of trade on the western borders of the Russian Empire. In Łódź a textile industry developed on a massive scale. In the 1840s, a railway connection from Warsaw to the border of Austrian Partition was built which was called the Warsaw-Vienna Railway.

The outbreak of World War I brought the Poles hope for independence. On 11 November 1918 Józef Piłsudski, commander-in-chief of the reborn Polish army, proclaimed the independence of Poland – called the Second Polish Republic. In August 1920 at the Battle of Warsaw the Polish armed forces defeated the Bolshevik army. This victory saved Polish independence and, presumably, stopped the march of the communist revolution towards Western Europe.

For twenty years, this independent Poland arduously build its statehood. One of the symbols of the II Republic was the port in Gdynia – built to open a sea route since the port in the Free City of Danzig was inaccessible for Poland. The symbol of free Poland was the Central Industrial District which was to ensure Poland a safe economic and military position in Central Europe.

*Development of texts: Agnieszka Słomian, Tomasz Mazurek*



Map: Poland1939 physical / Mariusz Paździora / Source: Wikimedia Commons



Photo: Gdynia / Source: Wikimedia Commons



Photo: Governor's Palace in Warsaw / Fryderyk Dietrich / Source: Wikimedia Commons



Photo: Prince Józef Poniatowski - Lithography / Source: Wikimedia Commons

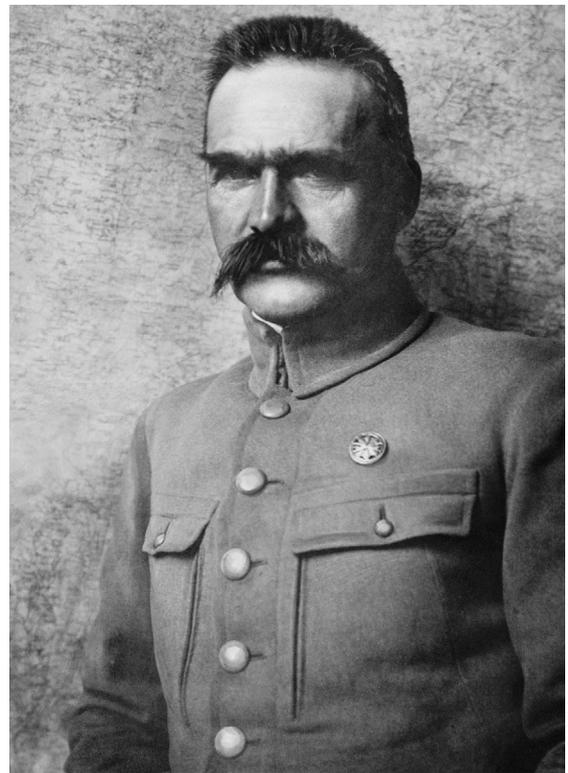


Photo: Józef Piłsudski / Source: Wikimedia Commons

### 3. EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

#### Educational material no. 4



#### Chapter 4. Chronicles: years 1939-2012

At the end of the 1930s, both Hitler and Stalin believed that Poland should again disappear from the map of Europe, and the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop pact sealed its fate. On 1 September 1939 Nazi Germany invaded Poland. On 17 September the Red Army entered Poland. Poland was plunged into the darkness of bloody occupation. On the occupied territories, the Nazis established concentration camps, where the mass extermination of Jews and other nationalities, among others, Polish and Roma, took place. The largest camp was Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Soviets, however, deported tens of thousands of Poles, mainly to Siberia and Kazakhstan.

The Poles continued their struggle – an underground movement in their own country and bearing arms on all fronts of World War II. In 1944, the Warsaw Uprising broke out in the occupied capital, which proved to be fatal – more than 200 thousand inhabitants of Warsaw died, and the city was completely destroyed, although it demonstrated the determination and bravery of the young Poles. After the Yalta Conference in 1945 Poland was reborn, but stripped down, shifted geographically to the west and dependent on the Soviet Union.

A period of communist rule took place. The whole nation rebuilt the ruined Warsaw, and at that time the Palace of Culture was built – an example of sociorealistic architecture. In 1978, Polish Cardinal Karol Wojtyła was elected pope and took the name of John Paul II. In 1980, the “Solidarity” (“Solidarność”) was founded – the democratic opposition led by Lech Wałęsa, which led to the Round Table talks in 1989 and ended in a peaceful transformation of the political system. In communist times, the authorities emphasised the development of heavy industry which, after 1989, had to be expensively modernised, but thanks to this Poland today is considered a highly industrialised country.

Thanks to various political, economic and social reforms only 10 years later, Poland became a member of NATO and in 2004 was admitted to the European Union where it now plays an important role.

On 10 April 2010 the greatest tragedy in the history of contemporary Poland took place – when the Polish government plane crashed in Smolensk, the presidential couple died tragically together along with representatives of the parliament, ministries, the armed forces, clergy, community organisations and others.

In 2011, Poland led the Council of the European Union, and in 2012, along with Ukraine, organised the European Football Championship. National Stadium built for this occasion in Warsaw is a symbol of transformation and Poland’s success in the last 25 years.

*Development of texts: Agnieszka Słomian, Tomasz Mazurek*



Photo: Auschwitz / Source: Pixabay



Photo: Mass with the Pope John Paul III, 12 June 1987 in Gdańsk / Sławomir Fiebig / Source: ECS

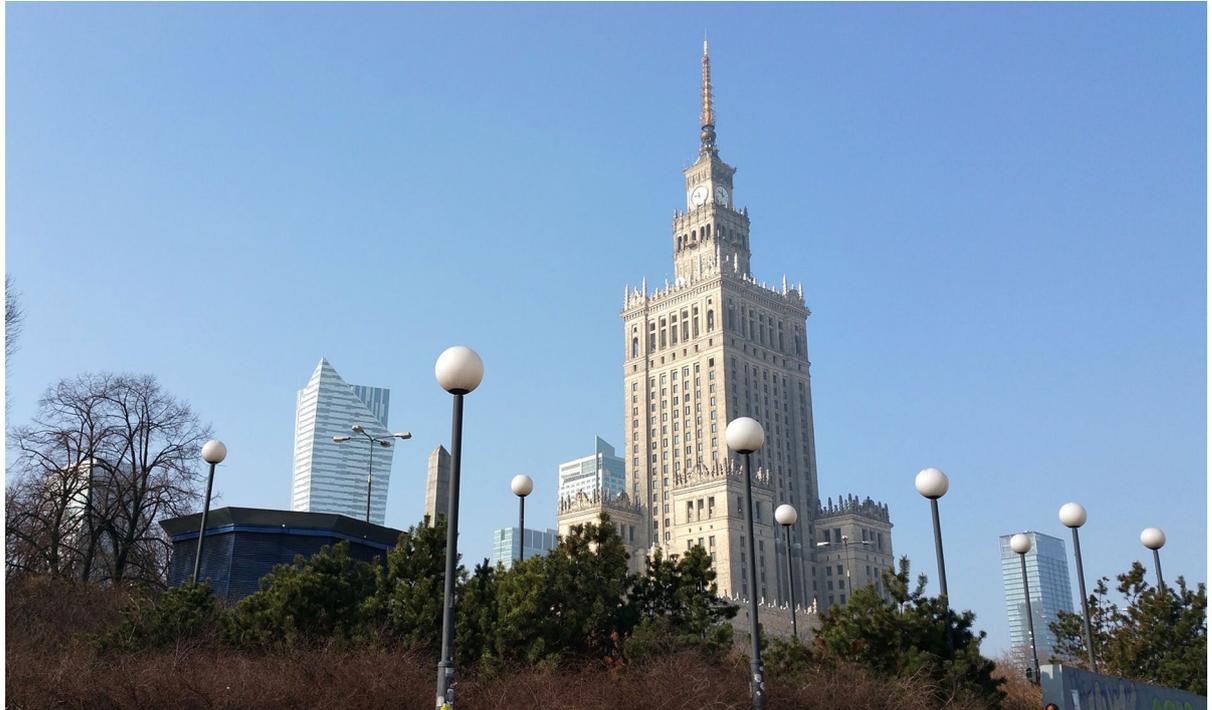
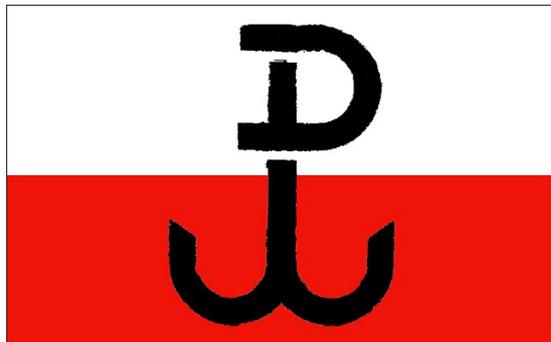


Photo: Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw / Source: Pixabay



(1)



(3)



(2)



(4)

Graphic: symbol of Fighting Poland (1), Solidarity (2) / Source: Wikimedia Commons

Graphic: symbol of Communism (3), Polish United Workers' Party (4) / Source: Wikimedia Commons

## 4. THE PROPOSED LITERATURE AND FILMS

### Websites:

- Historical Museum of Kraków (PL, EN): <http://www.mhk.pl/>
- Historical portal "Polish history", (PL, EN): <http://www.polishhistory.pl/>
- Historical Portal "Dzieje.pl" (PL): <http://dzieje.pl/>
- Institute of National Remembrance (PL): <http://ipn.gov.pl/>
- Museum of Polish History (PL, EN): <http://muzhp.pl>
- Museum of World War II (PL, EN): <http://www.muzeum1939.pl/>
- Museum of the History of Polish Jews (PL, EN): <http://www.polin.pl/>
- National Heritage Board of Poland (PL, EN): <http://www.nid.pl/>
- Oral History Archive (PL): <http://www.audiohistoria.pl/web/>
- Portal "Curiosities of the history" (PL): <http://ciekawostkihistoryczne.pl/>
- Scientific Archive Portal (PL): <http://www.archiwa.net/>
- The Karta Center Foundation (PL): <http://www.karta.org.pl/>
- Warsaw Uprising Museum (PL, EN): <http://www.1944.pl/>

### Books:

- Biskupski Mieczysław B., *The History of Poland*, Greenwood Publishing Group, Westport 2000.
- Davies Norman, *God's Playground A History of Poland*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005.
- Kloczowski Jerzy, *A History of Polish Christianity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000.
- Lerski Jerzy J., *Historical Dictionary of Poland: 966-1945*, Greenwood Publishing Group, Westport 1996.

### Films:

- *Get to know about Poland: The Most Important Moments in History*  
(EN): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kU-KL2vgSRE>  
(RU): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SzOYFYZE4NI>
- *History of Poland 1635 – 2009*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQ8T4oWxe1g>
- *Legenda Polskie. Film SMOK. Allegro* (PL): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1J\\_Y12RqeLM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1J_Y12RqeLM)
- Museum of the History of Polish Jews YouTube channel  
(PL, EN): <https://www.youtube.com/user/mhzp2013>
- Norman Davies YouTube channel (PL, EN): <https://www.youtube.com/user/DaviesNorman>
- Polish History Museum TV YouTube channel (PL, EN): <https://www.youtube.com/user/MuzHPtv>
- *The Animated History of Poland*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stEuQamTLXw>