

## «Collaboration, conformism, confrontation» - introductory remarks

author: Miroslav Šašić, Vladimir Prelog Natural Sciences School, Zagreb, Croatia

---

- This teaching unit is intended for year 4 of secondary school and for other years of vocational schools for **revision work**, on the topic **CROATIA AND THE WORLD DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR (1930-1945)**
- The unit may be covered in **one period** (the shorter version), in which collaboration, conformism and confrontation are discussed: the students are asked to recognize these phenomena in the testimonies of surviving witnesses, and are given short texts describing their suffering. The longer, preferable, version can be covered in two periods. The second part of this version, consisting of the testimonies of the witnesses and of texts, deals at greater length with the suffering of the witnesses through their own testimonies and texts.
- The teaching aids needed for presenting this unit are a DVD player and a TV set or a computer with an LCD projector with the software for the DVD format (Power DVD or its equivalent).
- The video testimony has been chosen for several reasons. We have tried to present the period in a vivid way and create a feeling of immediacy. This will be enhanced by the experiences, thoughts, feelings and attitudes of those who were directly involved in the events of the period we are discussing.
- Enclosures:
  1. Map – a comparison of the two world wars
  2. Table with explanations of the terms
  3. Diagram in which the students are expected to write the different kinds of behaviour they have identified
  4. The transcripts of the testimonies of the four witnesses
  5. Biographies of three Holocaust survivors (based on their statements)
  6. DVD with statements of the witnesses and their short biographies
  7. DVD outlining the presentation of the teaching unit

## Organization of the lesson – articulation of the teaching unit

### *Collaboration, conformism, confrontation*

---

#### **Objectives:**

The horrors and consequences of the Second World War impose the question: how could members of civilized twentieth century societies commit such atrocities? The questions that are considered in this unit (the Holocaust, pogroms, war crimes collaboration with the enemy, people's conduct in extraordinary situations) are controversial and sensitive, but since one of the purposes of history teaching is to help students understand the world in which they live, they cannot be avoided.

The video testimonies and other historical sources are expected to help students understand the causes of the inhumane actions that resulted in violence and identify the dimensions of the Holocaust as organized systematic persecution - an attempt to exterminate a whole people and its culture.

#### **Tasks:**

Educational – on the basis of the video testimonies recognize the complexity of human behaviour in the difficult period of the Second World War; an insight into the complexity of the historical process will help students to understand the world in which they live.

Functional– by analyzing and evaluating the sources of information (audio-visual documents, video testimonies) the students will learn how to form their own judgments and opinions based on arguments.

Ethical – students are encouraged to adopt a critical attitude to prejudice (racism, anti-Semitism) and critical thinking in general. As regards their personal conduct, they should realize that there is always the possibility of choice. It is also hoped that the unit will enhance their interest in history and show them what lessons can be learned from history.

#### **Key words:**

- Holocaust, genocide, anti-Semitism, collaboration, conformism, confrontation

#### **Organization of the lesson**

##### I. Introduction (5-10 min)

With the help of the intelligent map (Enclosure 1), compare the two world wars and identify to what extent the students are aware of scale of human suffering and material destruction during the Second World War. This will also serve as revision work, reminding students of the horrors of the war (the Holocaust, destruction, the dead and wounded).

##### II. New material (25 min)

Distribute the prepared table (Enclosure 2)

Tell the students that we are going to watch the testimonies of four witnesses, three Holocaust survivors and one military investigator. Ask the students to:

- listen carefully to what these people say, i.e. what kind of conduct they describe
- to define the kind of conduct with the help of the descriptions in the table (Enclosure 2)
- Write the name of the witness in the appropriate box in the table.

Announce the testimony of Zlata Švabenić, Vojdrag Berčić, Alfred Pal and Branko Polić. Check whether the students have filled in the table.

a) If they have, discuss briefly the testimonies with the students – the aim is to encourage them to think about what they have seen and heard and make their own conclusions. Ask the students how they would react in that situation.

b) If they have not:

- establish the differences, ask for and listen to their arguments; explain that differences exist because there are no clear boundaries between the different kinds of conduct and that they may be interpreted from different viewpoints (for example, the reactions of the young people at the Maksimir football stadium show elements of confrontation, but in that concrete case, because of participation in the mass, we interpret it as positive conformism). After discussing the different opinions, ask the students how they would react in that situation.

The discussion will produce Croatian equivalents for the terms collaboration, conformism and confrontation; the students are asked to add them to the prepared material.

In the longer version (two periods in succession): Learning about the lot of the witnesses through their testimonies (Alfred Pal's testimony, Branko Polić's testimony, Zlata Švabenić's testimony, Vojdrag Berčić's testimony. If a PWP presentation is used, an analysis of the original illustrations and photographs may be included. Discuss it with the students – ask the students to comment

### III Conclusion (10 min)

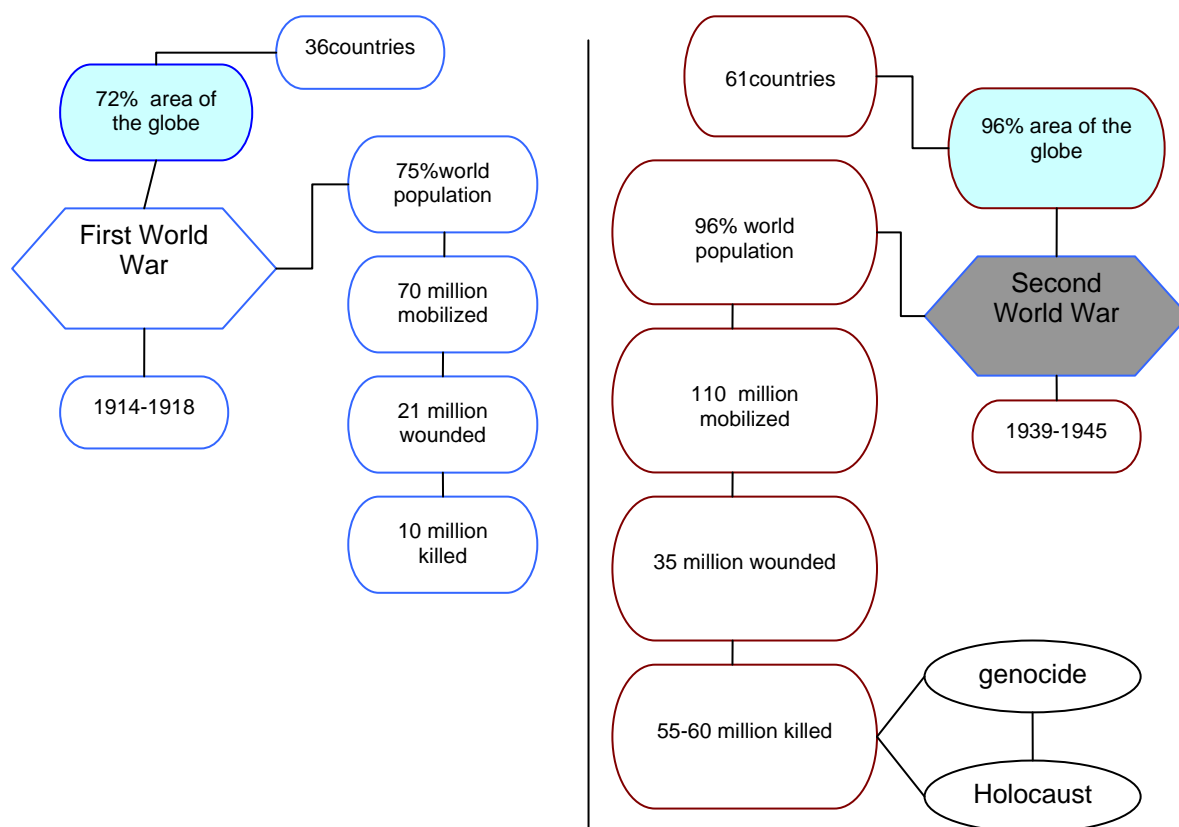
Ask the students to write the name of the witness with the type of conduct in the corresponding box (Enclosure 3). Discuss it with the students – ask the students to comment.

Questions for discussion

- Who wants to explain the diagram (if there is a volunteer, let him/her express his/her opinion, taking into account the answers to the main questions)
- Why an umbrella? Conformist behaviour implies the protection of the individual by keeping a low profile, drowning in the mass; it is the soft option – conformism is the easiest form of action, but often not the best - what is more, it does not guarantee safety
- Hiding in the mass does not necessarily mean safety from danger (a case in point is Zlata Švabenić and her husband, who are mentioned in the testimony)
- Refusing to hide in the mass implies personal involvement - exposure.
- Exposure implies insecurity/danger
- Insecurity /danger does not necessarily mean death (the example of survivors), but it may have fatal consequences(Zlata Švabenić's younger sister), but it is important to know that there is a possibility of choice
- Why have we chosen the symbols of the sun and clouds?
- Can you think of examples of the kinds of conduct described above in the recent or more distant past?
- Can you think of some examples of the conduct described above in your own environment?
- What kind of society should we develop so that the Holocaust never happens again?
- Provide your own definition of tolerance!

## Enclosure 1 – the two world wars compared

(Source: ENCIKLOPEDIJA LEKSIKOGRAFSKOG ZAVODA, Vol..6, Zagreb 1969, p. 226)



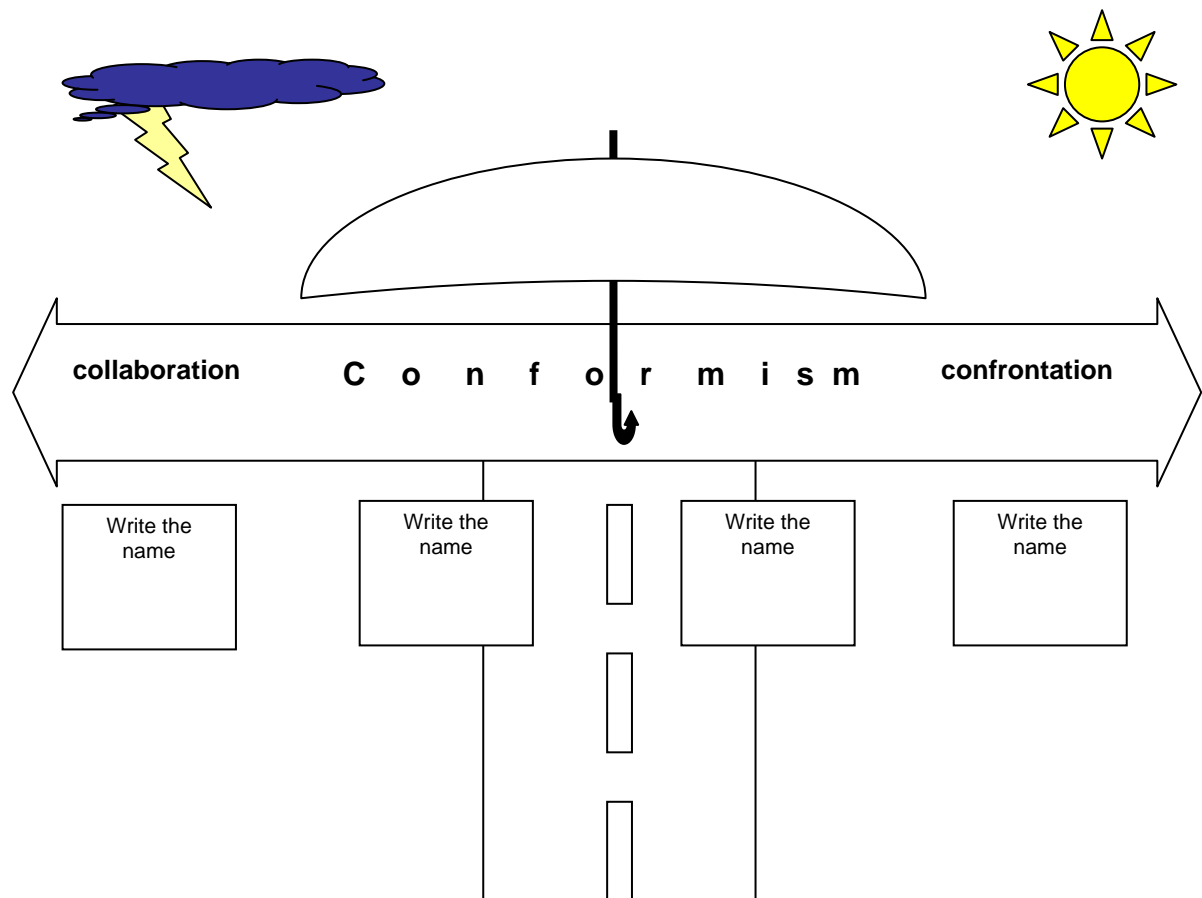
## Enclosure 2

### Collaboration, conformism, confrontation

Term	Definition	Statement by
Collaboration	<i>Cooperation with any authority, regardless of whether it is in harmony or in conflict with one's own worldview and whether the authority is imposed or not. Most frequently collaboration with the enemy. Active.</i>	
Conformism	<i>Adapt one's conduct to the negative and bad conduct of the majority and the environment. Not to stand out. Do what others do. Take the soft option. Passive.</i>	
	<i>Adapt one's conduct to the positive and good conduct of the majority and the environment. Not to stand out. Do what others do. Take the soft option. Passive.</i>	
Confrontation	<i>Face, stand opposite, rebel, oppose, resist, stick one's neck out. Active participation.</i>	

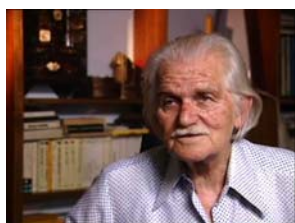
### Enclosure 3

When writing the name of the witness in the corresponding box defines the nature of the conduct he/she describes



			
Alfred Pal	Branko Polić	Zlata Švabenic	Vojdrag Berčić

**Enclosure 4a) Transcript of Alfred Pal' testimony** (duration: 3 min and 18 sec)



...Well, when I came to Vukovar, I knew what I would find there. It was a tremendous disappointment. Firstly, there were no Jews. Secondly – I had come home. Nothing was left. All of it...I went to a house that was still standing, a neighbour's house. As I was entering his yard, I immediately saw the complete bathroom from the house in which I had lived, because the boiler was a special patent for bathrooms. So I saw I there was nothing doing there. Those were Germans who pretended to be Croats. He had two sons. One had joined the partisans, the other was with the SS at Stalingrad. He fled from Stalingrad and was hiding in the cellar for two years. He fled from the Germans. What was I to do? Report him? I would never do it, I'm not vindictive, nor would it have done any good. I went to see another neighbour. He greeted me warmly. Oh, Mr Pal, how good to see you, where is Mrs... Him asking about her! She had been taken away, he saw it. After that, all the houses in Vukovar were broken into and everything was auctioned. All that was in the house was auctioned – whoever wanted to buy. They grabbed it all. The Persian carpet, the paintings. There was a gallery of my ancestors. There was my grandfather and my grandmother on my grandmother's side, my grand-grandfather and grand grandmother on my grandfather's side. For which I am most sorry because I lost those things. I have no picture of my father, my mother, my brother. All gone. Not to mention my things. I had a stamp collection. It was all taken away. There's no one you can turn to... So here I was, sitting with that other neighbour, who ...you see.. «would you like a cup of coffee», this kind of thing, I thought he'd tell me what had happened, but then, from behind my back, I heard the clock strike the hour. It was a clock with a wonderful chime, every fifteen minutes. It used to hang above my bed. I didn't even have to turn around, I knew that chime so well....So I look at my neighbour...Say, how did that clock get into your house? Well, you see, I took it to remind me of MrsX.... I said to him, very politely, would you ... I'd like to take it as the only memento, there's nothing in our house. Oh no, I can't give it back. It's a souvenir, it reminds of my neighbour, Mrs...It made me sick. I simply couldn't talk to him. What could I have done, taken the clock by force, put it under my arm, left the house with it? It was laughable. What would I do with it? It had been sullied in a way. So I told him: You know what? Wonderful! I like it! Let it remind you of your neighbour every fifteen minutes. That she was taken away and killed, so think about it. I stood up and left.

**Enclosure 4b) Transcript of Vojdrag Berčić's testimony** (duration: 56 sec)



I remember Ademaga Mešić's summation – I can still hear his high-pitched, slightly feminine voice. Your Honours, I faithfully served Sultan Abdul Hamid, I faithfully served Emperor Francis Joseph, I faithfully served King Peter, the one who died, then King Alexander, God rest his soul, then I faithfully served King Peter, the little one who is now in London, I faithfully served the President (of the NDH), and I would be the happiest man in the world if I could now serve him faithfully, too – Marshal Tito, because he is a true man of the people. As I said, it was interesting, Vignjević was grinning like the devil....

**Enclosure 4c) Transcript of Branko Polić's testimony (5 min 7 sec)**



...The most interesting situation was at school. I went to the 2nd Grammar School where ...we had two Jewish teachers, who, unfortunately, perished. Alexander Semnic taught natural science. A highly educated man. As far as I know, he was a Zionist and was taken away among the first. Teodora Dežma was our chemistry teacher... The teachers never made any comments about a teacher being Jewish. That never existed. The best evidence of this came in 1941. I am now skipping that fateful fact when the independent, quasi independent state of Croatia was established.. All secondary- school students had training, a thing that is rarely mentioned, we had assignments.... There was pre-military training at the stadium in Maksimir. All of us had to march and train there. That's all we did anyway – throughout April, May and June 1941. Then one day we all had to assemble at the stadium. We were told we would get cards as some sort of civilian guard. Although it was not a military formation, I tried to dodge it but there was no way. My only objective in life was to finish school, to graduate – it was my imperative. Here's what happened there. Before the cards were issued, we were all there, they were distributing them to us. All of a sudden we heard an order - that all Serbs and Jews should go and stand on one side. Then it was whispered that they would be sent to work on the marshlands of Lonjsko Polje, like a work brigade. There was a lot of commotion. I said, my dear colleagues, comrades, I've got to go – what else can I do. They said – if you go, we all go with you! We saw that where students were asked to step to one side, entire classes stepped to that side out of solidarity. The Ustasha police came, we thought they could start shooting and we fled. And now I ...my father was in prison, my mother said – listen, you've got to try and get out of it. How? With a medical certificate. I went to see a doctor, I didn't know his wife was Jewish, he wrote what was in fact true – that I suffered from some kind of hay fever and I got that certificate. The day after the stadium burnt down. They said it was the leftists, young groups of leftists, who did it, it was sabotage. I think that is a very important fact, which took place in Zagreb like in very few other places in the world – that young people, with rare exceptions, in 1941 in Zagreb showed solidarity and were against fascism.

#### 4d) Transcript of Zlata Švabenić's testimony (duration: 5 min i 40 sec)



**Interviewer:** When you are twenty, you can see some things very clearly.

Did you think that joining the partisans was the only option if you wanted to survive?

**Zlata:** Or emigrating, some people crossed into the Italian zone, via Gorski Kotar, or joined the partisans. We chose the latter.

**I:** What influenced it?

**Z:** I really don't know. Courage, youth. The fact that when someone does evil things, you have to pay him back. I had always had guts and I can tell you that I organized that departure. It was better than waiting for them to take us away. Then we also evacuated my mother. We took her to a village at Petrova Gora, she had a room there and lived there. We brought her food and the peasants gave her food, too. Those two children, my eldest sister's children, who were spending their holidays with us when father and mother left. They were taken away. The boy was killed in Bosnia.

**I:** How old was he?

**Z:** Thirteen.

**I:** He was with you and the partisans?

**Z:** He was with us, but then he left and was in that whirlwind of the fourth offensive for Bosnia. With the central hospital. My youngest sister was there, she was three years younger than me, and the elder sister, who was married in Zagreb. She was seven years older than me. They all perished in the fourth offensive. We heard immediately about our eldest sister – that she had been wounded and died of typhoid fever near Bosanski Petrovac. The younger sister, the one who was three years younger than me, she was with the hospital and the typhoid patients. An acquaintance from Zagreb saw her there, he was in the unit that accompanied the hospital. He recognized her and asked her whether she was from the Švabenić family from Dubranec. He said she was feverish, she was on horseback, she only nodded. He said he was happy to have met someone from home. Because he was down in Serbia with his unit. He had to flee from Zagreb as a student. She was killed – he said they had escorted the hospital to Majeвица and that hospital was slaughtered by the Chetniks. Not by the Ustasha – by the Chetniks. They killed that whole hospital. That's where she ended. I heard it from a reliable source, that man who had known our whole family. So she was slaughtered by the Chetniks. Yes. She was nineteen. Unfortunately, they all had their turn, all the armies. Nobody felt sorry for us.

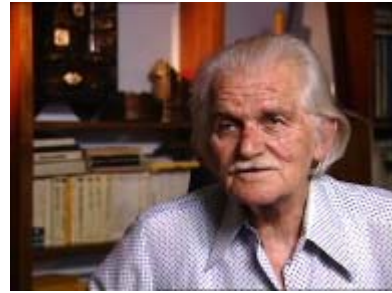
**I:** It's interesting, you say you yourself organized the people who went to join the partisans. You realized you had to do something rather than wait for them to deport you, for them to do it to you... That was impossible in the Jewish tradition for two thousand years. What I mean is that the Jews never took up arms. Do you think that this tradition of being a people of the book had its consequences in the Second World War, that that is why so many Jews were killed. That they were too passive.

**Z:** Yes, I do. Many were passive. People could have saved themselves but were too indecisive. Take my elder sister and her husband. My sister wanted to visit her children, who were with us in the country. My brother was in Zagreb with his car. She was about to leave the house when the detective came. He said, get ready, we have come to take you away, but we will come in an hour. It was as if he had told them – "escape" in not so many words. He said "in an hour" – they could have taken their things and got away, even on foot. But people hesitated, they couldn't imagine they would end up in a camp and never come back – nobody thought it!



## Enclosure 5 - short biographies of the surviving Holocaust witnesses

### 5a) **ALFRED PAL**



- Alfred Pal was born in Vienna in 1920. His father, Samuel Polak, who “Hungarized” his name into Štefan Pal, and his mother, Terzija Deutsch, got divorced when he was three years old. He first lived in Krakow in Poland, where he went to a Protestant school. From 1928 until 1931 he lived in Vienna with his father. When his father died in 1931, he and his brother Alexander moved to live with their aunts in Srijemski Čakovci. He graduated from secondary school in Vukovar in 1940. His brother Alexander decided to seek refuge in Hungary and swam across the Danube. He was caught by the Hungarian gendarmes, who interned him in camp near Budapest, after which all trace is lost of him. Alfred lived in Crikvenica until November 1940. After that he was interned for six months in the Kraljevica camp and was then transferred to the camp on the island of Rab, where he stayed until the capitulation of Italy (8 September 1943) .
- As a fighter of the “Rab Jewish battalion”, later the 7<sup>th</sup> Banija division, he fought in the People’s Liberation War. From October 1944 until the end of the war he worked as caricaturist in the war editorial office of Vjesnik.
- After the war he worked as technical editor of Illustrated Vjesnik and from 1947 in Kerempuh as caricaturist and editor. From 1949 until 1954 (with a short interruption in 1950) he was in prison on Goli Otok
- When he was discharged he worked as interior decorator and graphic designer. From 1970 until 1985 he was the art director of Nakladni zavod Matice Hrvatske. Today he works as a free lance painter in Zagreb. He has two children – a daughter, Alexandra, and a son, Samuel Peter.

### 5b) Branko Polić



- Branko Polić was born in Zagreb on 24 April 1924 into (as he himself says) a wealthy Jewish family. He still lives in the family house at Krležin Gvozd 15. In 1919 his father changed his name from Polak into Polić.
- His father's parents were merchants and lived in Našice
- His grandfather on his mother's side, Alexander Freljić, was a member of many charities and sat on many committees, so that he was known as "the king of the poor".
- At the beginning of the war Branko Polić was at secondary school and participated in the well-known events at Maksimir stadium, where, as he himself states, the solidarity of secondary school students of Zagreb manifested itself in a way that was rather exceptional in Europe .
- His father was sent to prison at Petrinjska in Zagreb in May 1941; in August Branko went to Kraljevica. He was eventually interned in the Kraljevica camp, from where he was transferred to Rab.
- When Italy capitulated, he joined the partisans. He organized Musical Youth at Slunj, Topusko and Petrova Gora.
- When the war ended, he went back to school and graduated. He went to university in France.
- He worked for many years as editor for Zagreb Radio. He is now retired.

### 5c) Vojdrag Berčić



- Vojdrag Berčić was born in Šibenik on 18 April 1918. After the Second World War he worked as an investigating judge. He investigated the crimes committed in the NDH and examined the main indictes. In his testimony he speaks about the people who were part of the NDH regime. He mentions Ademaga Mešić – deputy president, and Ivan Vignjević, president of the court martial in the NDH.

## 5d) Zlata Švabenic



- Zlata Švabenic was born in 1920 in Dubranec near Velika Gorica. Her father was a shopkeeper and her mother a housewife. She had six sisters and one brother. Her father died in 1934, after which she lived with her mother, sisters and brother.
- They had a good and quiet life, working in their own shop and inn. The brother, who was eleven years her senior, had to look after the family after his father's death. Although her parents were religious, there were problems with religious education of the children because they did not live in a town.
- When the war started, Zlata lived in Dubranec. One of her older sisters lived in Kustošija in Zagreb and worked in the garment industry. She was the first member of the family to be taken to a camp. From the prison in Savska cesta she was transferred to the Kruščica camp in Bosnia and then to the Loborgrad camp. Her husband was taken to the camp on the island of Pag, where he was probably killed.
- One sister lived in Podravska Slatina. Her whole family was deported to a camp and there their trace is lost.
- Zlata organized for the rest of the family to join the partisans; she joined the Kordun unit, where she worked as a nurse.
- Zlata's younger sister, who had also joined the partisans, was killed by the Chetniks at Majevisa. She was nineteen years old.
- The elder sister, Berta Švabenic, was also in the partisans; she survived the war and died in 1993.
- Zlata got married right before the end of the war and had a son.
- After the war she worked as a clerk first in Belgrade and from 1962 in Zagreb. She had another son. She and her husband divorced in 1965.
- She lives in Zagreb.