



Background On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, triggering the start of World War II. The defeat of Poland was swift, and the occupation of the country that followed became one of the cruelest chapters of the war. After their downfall, many Polish soldiers and citizens were slaughtered by the German army. Surviving Polish political leaders, Jews, and others were later collected and sent to concentration camps to be killed or to work as slaves for the Nazis. By the end of the war, more than five million Poles had died.

There But for the Grace

Poem by Wisława Szymborska

Wisława Szymborska (1923–2012) was born in a small town in western Poland. She was in high school when Germany invaded Poland. Despite the ban on high school education put in place by the Germans, Szymborska continued taking classes. Unlike many Poles, Szymborska was fortunate to avoid imprisonment and death at the hands of the Nazis. Szymborska has published more than a dozen collections of poetry. She has won numerous awards for her poetry, including the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1996.

SETTING A PURPOSE As you read, think about the role that chance plays in a person's life. Write down any questions you have.

