



TEACHING ABOUT RESISTANCE DURING THE HOLOCAUST WITH PRIMARY SOURCES

TARGET AUDIENCE: GRADES 8-12

ESTIMATED TIME OF LESSON: 150 MINUTES

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How did some Jewish people resist Nazi oppression?
- What forms did resistance take during the Holocaust?
- What is the relationship between resistance and human dignity?
- Why did many choose to resist even when defeat or death was certain?

[CALIFORNIA COMMON CORE STANDARDS ADDRESSED - CLICK HERE](#)

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Define resistance within the context of the Holocaust.
- Describe the various forms of resistance that some Jewish people engaged in during the Holocaust, including spiritual, cultural, and armed resistance.
- Investigate the range of resistance efforts that took place in the Warsaw ghetto. Interpret primary source materials—including clips of visual history testimony—that represent a range of resistance efforts against the Nazi regime in Europe.
- Conduct independent research on an example of resistance during the Holocaust.

MATERIALS

- [Artifacts of Resistance](#)
- [Chain of Resistance](#)
- [Resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto](#)
- [Cultural and Spiritual Resistance](#)
- Helen Fagin [Testimony](#) and [Biography](#)
- Ruth Brand [Testimony](#) and [Biography](#)
- Itka Zygmuntowicz [Testimony](#) and [Biography](#)
- Roman Kent [Testimony](#) and [Biography](#)
- [Testimony Reflection](#) Student Handout
- [Video Toolbox on Resistance](#)
- [Pronouncement by Abba Kover](#)
- [Artifact Reflection Handout](#)

PROCEDURES

PART I: WHAT IS RESISTANCE? (30 MINUTES)

- 1 Post the supporting question above for students as you begin this part of the lesson.
- 2 In pairs or small groups, students discuss the meaning of *resistance* and situations in which resistance is necessary. Based on their discussions, students record their definition of this term.
- 3 Students watch the [Echoes & Reflections Video Toolbox on Resistance](#) from 0:49-1:43 and then view the testimonies of Jewish survivors who participated in resistance activities during the Holocaust: [Helen Fagin \(bio\)](#), [Ruth Brand \(bio\)](#), and [Itka Zygmuntowicz \(bio\)](#). As they watch the clips, students consider how each survivor resisted and take notes on the [Testimony Reflections](#) handout.
- 4 After viewing the testimony clips, students journal and/or participate in a whole group discussion in response to some of the following questions:
 - Do you agree with Abba Kovner’s assertion that “It is better to die as free fighters than to live at the mercy of murderers”? What were Kovner’s arguments in favor of armed resistance?
 - Why were most Jews who participated in armed revolts youth? Why were others less able to resist physically?
 - What are examples of other forms of resistance, as highlighted by Roman Kent and in the written excerpts?
 - What does Roman Kent mean by, “Sometimes the easiest resistance is with a gun and a bullet”? Do you agree with him? Explain.
 - How do you interpret Chaim Kaplan’s statement, “Everything is forbidden to us, and yet we do everything”?
 - Why did Jewish people risk their lives to sustain customs and traditions, such as religious practice?
 - How is cultural expression – such as music and writing – a form of resistance?

PART II: WHAT FORMS DID RESISTANCE TAKE DURING THE HOLOCAUST? (30 MINUTES)

- 5 Post the supporting question above for students as you begin this part of the lesson.
- 6 In their pairs or small groups (formed in step 1), students consider which of the testimonies fit within their original definition of resistance. They revise their definitions to reflect new understandings. The class discusses their insights, including the limitations of thinking of resistance in purely physical terms. The following definitions from the [Echoes & Reflections Audio Glossary](#) are introduced as needed: resistance, armed resistance, spiritual resistance, cultural resistance.
- 7 The [Jewish Resistance](#) handout is distributed. In their small groups, students fill in their definition of resistance at the top. They begin to take notes in response to the other questions based on the testimonies they viewed and their prior knowledge.

8 In their groups, students read and analyze the documents below, representing different forms of resistance. They continue to add information and ideas to the *Jewish Resistance* handout and to refine their definitions of resistance.

Pronouncement by Abba Kovner: This call to armed resistance is among the first to recognize that Hitler was planning to kill all European Jews. Students should think about who Kovner was speaking to and the central rationale of his message – that it is better to die fighting than to live at the mercy of Nazi oppressors.

Cultural and Spiritual Resistance: These excerpts demonstrate the spiritual, cultural, and moral ways in which Jews resisted. Students should reflect on the sense of agency demonstrated by Jewish people, even in the face of unimaginable cruelty and repression.

9 The class gathers to view the testimony of Jewish survivor [Roman Kent \(bio\)](#). Students add information and ideas to their *Jewish Resistance* handout one last time. They then journal and/or participate in a whole group discussion in response to some of the following questions:

- Do you agree with Abba Kovner’s assertion that “It is better to die as free fighters than to live at the mercy of murderers”? What were Kovner’s arguments in favor of armed resistance?
- Why were most Jews who participated in armed revolts youth? Why were others less able to resist physically?
- What are examples of other forms of resistance, as highlighted by Roman Kent and in the written excerpts?
- What does Roman Kent mean by, “Sometimes the easiest resistance is with a gun and a bullet”? Do you agree with him? Explain.

PART III: INDEPENDENT RESEARCH (90 MINUTES)

Students engage in independent research to deepen their understanding of Jewish resistance efforts during the Holocaust. In groups, students examine visual history testimony, primary source texts, and other resources on a topic, and create an artifact that represents what they have learned. Students gather their artifacts into a class exhibit and consider the meaning and impact of the actions taken by Jews to preserve their lives and humanity.

10 Post the supporting question below for students as you begin this part of the lesson: *What are additional ways in which Jews resisted during the Holocaust?*

11 In pairs, students discuss the following prompt: “What is an *artifact*? What is the role of an artifact in studying history?” Pairs share their thoughts with the larger class. The following ideas are highlighted:

- Artifacts are objects made by people that have cultural or historical meaning.
- Artifacts are essential parts of particular times or places that bring memory to life and make history real.
- Artifacts tell stories and provide evidence that can help people to understand the past.

12 Students learn that they will complete an independent research project on a topic related to Jewish resistance and create an artifact that represents what they have learned. The artifacts will be gathered into a class exhibition on Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. The handout [Artifacts of Resistance](#) is distributed and reviewed by the class.

13 Students form small groups and select a research topic from the [Research Topics and Sources](#) handout. In class and/or at home, they review the source material for their topic, record notes, and design their artifact and accompanying object descriptions. Students are encouraged to consult additional sources as needed to better understand their topic.

14 Groups' artifacts are gathered into a class exhibit. The [Artifact Reflection](#) handout is distributed. Students participate in a "gallery walk" as follows: Half of the groups stand by their work and provide a brief tour or explanation of their artifacts to the other half, who circulate and observe; students then switch roles so that the tour guides become the observers. Students observe at least three artifacts in this way, completing the *Artifact Reflection* for each.

15 Students debrief using some or all of the following questions.

- What is one story or example of resistance that made a lasting impression on you? Explain why.
- What was the immediate effect of resistance efforts? What was the long term impact?
- Beyond survival or revenge, what conclusions did you reach about why Jews resisted during the Holocaust?
- Holocaust survivor and scholar, Elie Wiesel, once wrote: "The question is not why all the Jews did not fight, but how so many of them did. Tormented, beaten, starved, where did they find the strength—spiritual and physical—to resist?" How would you answer this question?

16 As a summative task, students imagine they are preparing an informational brochure and write a "Fact" to counter the "Myth" below. Their fact should explain why the statement is false and convey at least three ways in which Jewish people resisted during the Holocaust, drawing upon lesson sources for evidence.

Myth: Jewish people were passive during World War II. They didn't fight back or actively resist their own destruction.

NOTES FOR DIFFERENTIATION

- Videos are short and designed to be played multiple times to assist with student understanding. Captions can be engaged as an additional strategy.
- The lesson includes audio-visual testimony, images and text. Instead of exploring each piece as a whole class, students can also be split into groups with assets assigned to align with students' preferred learning style. Students can share out to class or jigsaw content to further whole class understanding.
- Additional assets can be gleaned from Echoes & Reflections [Unit VII: Jewish Resistance](#) to provide additional options for differentiation.

GLOSSARY Echoes & Reflections has an extensive glossary available [at this link](#).

ASSESSMENTS

Formative Assessments

- Student Discussion
- Resistance Definition Activity
- Testimony Sort (Types of Resistance)
- Artifacts of Resistance Reflection

Summative Assessments:

- IWitness Activity: What is Resistance?
- Independent Research Project
- Fact/Myth Brochure Project



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College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
6. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take. Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
9. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing

9. Draw evidence from literary and/or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening

1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
6. Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language

1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing. Knowledge of Language
3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
6. Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college- and career-readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

College and Career Standards for English Language Arts/History & Social Sciences

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.