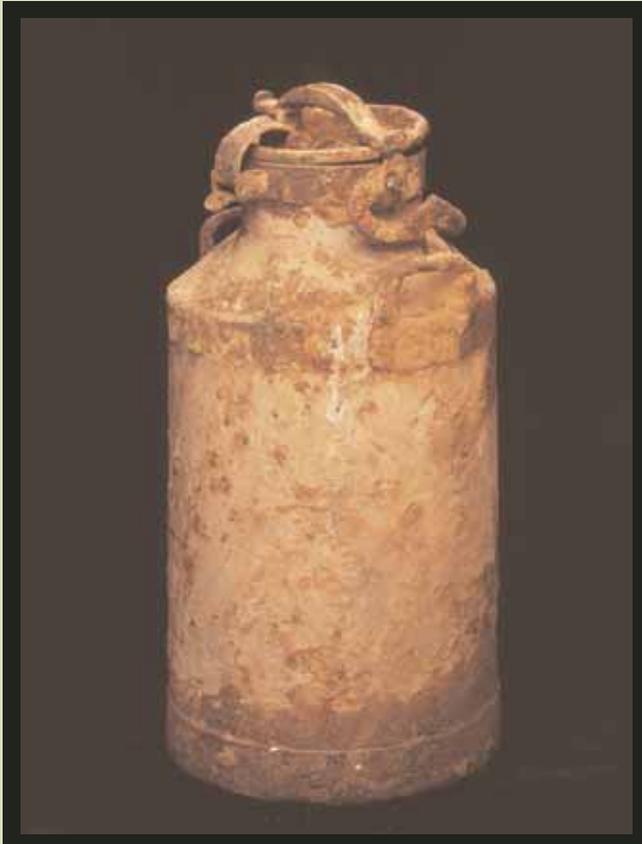


ARTHUR AND ROCHELLE BELFER

Exemplary LESSONS

i n i t i a t i v e

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY AND RESISTANCE DURING THE HOLOCAUST



OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

This lesson aims to engage students in an understanding of the nature of resistance during the Holocaust. Many students approach this history with misconceptions: that the Jews went like “sheep to slaughter”; that resistance means solely physical resistance; and that the Nazis were so powerful no one could resist them. These misconceptions must be addressed so students may gain a meaningful and accurate understanding.

The lesson encourages students to think about what obstacles hinder resistance, what types of resistance are possible, and how different individuals resisted Nazi oppression. The project gives students the opportunity to research the actions

of an individual who resisted and made a difference—whether a man or a woman, a Jew in a ghetto or a German college student. It prompts students to deal with and appreciate the broad scope of the history and to raise serious questions about the actions of individuals and groups, whose roles were not minor.

My tenth-grade English class focuses on world literature, and I teach a six-week unit on the Holocaust in the context of this yearlong literature course. The Holocaust unit occurs in December and January, and culminates with a trip to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. The lesson on “Individual Responsibility and Resistance during the Holocaust” takes place toward the end of the unit and usually covers approximately three 55-minute class periods.

There are several prerequisites for student success in this lesson. Students need basic computer skills. They must have learned skills for basic research in libraries and on the Internet. Students

LESSON BY

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GRADE LEVEL

10

GRADE-LEVEL APPLICABILITY

10–12

SUBJECT

ENGLISH, HISTORY,
HOLOCAUST ELECTIVE

TIME REQUIRED

THREE DAYS

Photo: One of the three milk cans used by Warsaw ghetto historian Emanuel Ringelblum to store and preserve the secret Oneg Shabbat ghetto archives. *Zydowski Instytut Historyczny Instytut Naukowo-Badawczy*

need to have experience in interpreting primary source documents and in analyzing (and drawing conclusions from) various sources of information. The students need to be familiar with the basic events and timeline of the Holocaust. They need a general familiarity with the geography of the areas being studied and must know how to write an annotated bibliography.

I teach at a suburban independent college preparatory school. My students have studied world geography and ancient world civilizations in history and have explored a variety of literary works and genres in their English classes. In the Holocaust unit within my English class, I combine the teaching of history and literature. This is the first time many of the students have encountered such a combination. My approach in the unit as a whole is to show them that literature has a historical context. I want them to see that connections exist between history and literature and themselves, and that people create literature as a response to their experiences. This particular lesson relates more to history: it incorporates researching, reading, analyzing, and interpreting a variety of materials to create a presentation on an individual involved in resistance. I want my students to see that individuals, not just nameless groups of dead people, make history. I want my students to know that individuals can make a difference, and that they can be those individuals.

PURPOSE OF LESSON

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to research an individual involved in resistance during World War II. In small groups, students explore various resources in order to make a thoughtful presentation about an individual's actions.

GOALS FOR STUDENT UNDERSTANDING

- Students will develop an understanding of what resistance is and the different forms it can take. They will become "experts" on their individual and his or her role in the resistance during World War II.
- Students will develop an understanding that history is made of individual stories, and that individuals do make a difference.

WHAT STUDENTS WILL DO TO BUILD THEIR UNDERSTANDING

- Students will become experts on an individual who resisted during the Holocaust, learning about his or her role and the form of his or her resistance.
- Students will identify, collect, and synthesize information from various sources about resistance and individuals who resisted. Students will analyze the information for specific details.
- In small groups, students will create and present a brief report on resistance and their individual. They will self-assess and peer-assess the presentations.

STATE STANDARDS

Relative to the Virginia Standards of Learning, this lesson meets

- Oral language/communication standards: presenting an oral presentation and evaluating one's own role and the group's effectiveness in achieving the objectives

- Research standards: collecting, evaluating, and organizing information
- Reading standards: reading and analyzing a variety of print materials, evaluating clarity and accuracy of information, and synthesizing information from sources and applying it in written and oral presentations
- World History standards: demonstrating knowledge of World War II and the worldwide impact of World War II and the Holocaust

RESOURCES AND HANDOUTS: BACKGROUND MATERIALS

Aretha, David, ed. *Holocaust Chronicle*. Lincolnwood, Ill.: Publications International, 2000.

Contains an enormous amount of information about resistance movements and individuals, along with many pictures and timelines.

Bauer, Yehuda. *A History of the Holocaust*. Danbury, Conn.: Franklin Watts, 1982. Includes a chapter on resistance covering armed resistance, resistance in the ghettos, resistance in the camps, resistance in western Europe, and partisans. Also includes a map of Jewish revolts from 1942 to 1945.

Berenbaum, Michael. *The World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust as Told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1993. Provides information on resistance in general as well as about the Warsaw ghetto uprising, the uprisings in Sobibór and Auschwitz, the White Rose movement, Mordecai Anielewicz, Janusz Korczak, Abba Kovner, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Emanuel Ringelblum, and Hannah Szenes.

Brown, Jean E., Elaine C. Stephens, and Janet E. Rubin. *Images of the Holocaust*. Lincolnwood, Ill.: NCT Publishing Group, 1997. Includes excerpts of Vladka Meed's autobiography (*On Both Sides of the Wall*), which tells of her experiences in the Warsaw ghetto and her involvement in the resistance, diary entries and poem of Jewish parachutist Hannah Szenes, and a poem by Hirsh Glik of the Vilna partisans, among other works.

Eliach, Yaffa, ed. *We Were Children Just Like You*. New York: Center for Holocaust Studies, 1990. Includes photographs and brief stories of children and young adults who were partisans (including Hannah Szenes and Stanislaw Szmajzner, one of the organizers and leaders of the revolt at Sobibór).

Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior. Brookline, Mass.: 1994. Provides information on the Warsaw ghetto uprising, resistance in the camps, and bystanders and resisters.

Gilbert, Martin. *Never Again: A History of the Holocaust*. New York: Universe, 2000. Includes chapters on resistance and uprisings.

Rise Up and Fight! Songs of Jewish Partisans. CD. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Washington, D.C., 1996. This CD has 18 songs. The booklet has some background information on Jewish partisans, background information for each song, the lyrics of the songs in the original language and in English, and some photographs.

Rozett, Robert. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2000. Includes both essays and encyclopedia entries, and information on partisans and Jewish resistance.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. *Historical Atlas of the Holocaust*, New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1996. Includes information on Jewish resistance.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. *Resistance in the Holocaust*. Provides useful information on obstacles to resistance, resistance in ghettos and Nazi camps, selected partisan groups, and resistance in Nazi Germany. Photographs, maps, and primary source documents (the *Vilna Partisan Manifesto* and Mordecai Anielewicz's last letter) are also included. It has a timeline and an annotated bibliography of other useful sources. The publication is available in print and on the Museum's Web site, from which it can be downloaded.

RESOURCES AND HANDOUTS: SPECIFIC RESOURCES

(Note: This list is NOT all-inclusive.)

- Mordecai Anielewicz: Anielewicz's letter: excerpt can be found at http://english.gfh.org.il/mordechai_anielewicz.htm; additional biographical information can be found at <http://www.jdl.org/misc/heroes/>
- Vladka Meed's memoir *On Both Sides of the Wall*, excerpt "The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising" in *Images from the Holocaust*; a personal history and video <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/phistories/>
- Hirsh Glik's *Song of the Partisans*, a recording, can be found at <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/music/never.php> and his poem "Silence, and a Starry Night" in *Images from the Holocaust*
- *Vilna Partisan Manifesto* in USHMM publication *Resistance during the Holocaust*
- Abba Kovner: a quotation (scroll down) <http://www.ushmm.org/research/library/index.utp?content=faq/right.htm>
- Sobibór: photograph of survivors at <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005192>
- Information on Rosa Robota can be found at <http://www.interlog.com/%7Emighty/special/rosa.htm>
- The story of the White Rose and their leaflets and court testimony can be found at <http://www.historyplace.com/pointsofview/white-rose1.htm> and <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~afilreis/Holocaust/gill-white-rose.htm>
- Information on Dietrich Bonhoeffer can be found at <http://www.gospelcom.net/chi/GLIMPSEF/Glimpses/glmps063.shtml>
<http://www.dbonhoeffer.org/who-was-db2.htm>
<http://www.ushmm.org/bonhoeffer/b1.htm>
- Spiritual resistance in ghettos at <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/index.php?ModuleId=10005416>

- Document on life in the Warsaw ghetto
<http://fcit.coedu.usf.edu/holocaust/resource/document/DocRing1.htm>
- Information on Emanuel Ringelblum can be found at
<http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/buchach/buc212.html> (scroll down to find two articles)
- Information on Janusz Korczak can be found at
<http://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/people/korczak.htm>
- Information on Hannah Szenes (Senesh) can be found at <http://www.jdl.org/misc/heroes/> and Szenes's *I Gambled on What Mattered Most* in *Images from the Holocaust*; a quotation (scroll down) <http://www.ushmm.org/research/library/index.utp?content=faq/right.htm>
- Information on Haviva Reik can be found at
<http://www.interlog.com/%7Emighty/valor/bios6.htm>
- Brief profile and photograph of Ella Gartner can be found at
<http://www.ushmm.org/outreach/08518.htm>
- USHMM map animation on resistance <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/maps/> (scroll down to "Resistance" animation)

RESOURCES AND HANDOUTS: MATERIALS FOR STUDENTS

- Project assignment sheet giving instructions for each step of the project (attached)
- Library
- The following books are also useful for students (see **Background Materials** for full citations):
 - *Resistance in the Holocaust*
 - *Images of the Holocaust*
 - *We Were Children Just Like You*
 - *The World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust as Told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*
 - *Holocaust Chronicle*
 - *Never Again: A History of the Holocaust*
- Computers with Internet access
 - <http://www.ushmm.org>: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Web site: Personal Histories, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies—The Miles Lerman Center for the Study of Jewish Resistance, Holocaust Learning Center
 - <http://motlc.wiesenthal.com>: Museum of Tolerance Online Multimedia Learning Center
 - <http://fcit.coedu.usf.edu/holocaust>: Information for teachers and students with a special section on resistance
 - <http://english.gfh.org.il/index0.htm>: Web site of the Ghetto Fighters' House

LESSON NARRATIVE

Day 1: Introduce topic and project; begin research

In this first class, students participate in general brainstorming about ways people can resist those in authority. List their ideas on the board. Students typically focus on physical resistance.

Read the poem "There Were Those" by Susan Dambroff (found in *Images of the Holocaust*) to the class. This poem explores some of the ways individuals resisted the Nazis. The focus of this poem is not physical resistance. The poem opens up the idea of different forms of resistance.

Discuss with the class:

- Obstacles to resistance
- Different types of resistance (spiritual, physical)
- Where resistance took place (ghettos and camps, Nazi Germany)
- How different people resisted the Nazis

(The USHMM publication *Resistance in the Holocaust* is very helpful.)

Track the ideas on the board.

At this point, I introduce the assignment to students. I tell the class they will explore a topic related to resistance during the Holocaust and individuals who resisted. They will then have the opportunity to present their findings to the class. Divide the class into groups of two to four students (depending on class size). Hand out the project instructions (see Student Assignment Sheet Handout). Let them choose (or assign for them) topics, and let them spend the rest of class working on the project with classroom resources. The class could also spend the rest of the period in the library and/or use computers to access information. Students are encouraged to work outside class.

Day 2: Continue research

Ask students for some feedback on what they have found so far. The teacher may need to guide students to information and resources, so it is important for the teacher to be familiar with the topic and available books and Internet resources.

The students need to print out or photocopy photographs, maps, and other documents (letters, diaries, memoirs, poems, songs) to help them with their presentation. Remind students to keep track of the information so they can complete an annotated bibliography.

Students need to decide before they leave class who is going to say what during the presentation, and what the visual is going to be. For homework, each student should complete the part for which he or she is responsible.

Day 3: Student presentation, concluding discussion, and self-evaluation

Before the students begin their presentations, I go over the rubric I will be using to evaluate them (see Teacher's Rubric for Grading Presentations). I also tell them they will be evaluating themselves after the presentations (see Student Self-Evaluation Sheet).

Students make their presentations. Visuals may be posted in the room on a chalkboard, bulletin board, or wall.

During the presentations, the teacher uses the evaluation rubric to assess the students' work.

For the concluding discussion the students need to think about their presentation as well as their classmates' presentations for a minute or two. Students should reflect upon what they thought about resistance at the beginning of the lesson and what they now know. For example, some students probably believed that most Jews "went like sheep to slaughter" and that there was little anyone could do against the Nazis.

Discuss (including, but not limited to):

- The importance of the individual and how an individual can make a difference
- The different forms of resistance
- Defining success in regard to individual resistance to the Nazis
- The importance of standing up for what is right, even if you know your chances of winning are slight (for teachers of *To Kill a Mockingbird*—make a connection—Atticus says "Simply because we were licked a hundred years before we started is no reason for us not to try to win.")

After assessing the students' understanding of the project through the discussion, have them consider the relatively small number of people who resisted: What would have happened if more people had done something? What is an individual's responsibility to society? To his/her family? Personal beliefs? Community? Religious group? Nation? To doing what is right even if there are terrific risks and terrible consequences? What can the students do in their own lives to make a difference? Is there anything they believe is worth dying for?

This discussion is done informally. It should conclude with a newfound understanding and respect for the few individuals who risked so much during these horrific years.

For homework, students should fill out their self- and group evaluations to turn in to the teacher the next day.

The teacher begins to fill out the rubric for the presentations while the students are presenting and completes them after looking through the annotated bibliographies and the student self-evaluations.

STUDENT WORK SAMPLES

Excerpt from a project on Rosa Robota and the Auschwitz Uprising

Notes for the presentation:

- In Nov. 1942 at age 21, Rosa Robota was deported from Ciechaow, Poland and was sent to Auschwitz.
- She worked in a clothing supply section of the camp where she was approached by Noah Zabladowicz, a member of the Jewish underground at the camp.
- Zabladowicz asked Rosa to help smuggle *schwartzpulver*, which was the explosive they planned to use to blow up the crematoria and gas chambers with the help of outside partisans.
- Rosa had friends working in the Union Munitions Plant, and she had them help smuggle the explosive out through secret compartments in their dresses.
- Before the planned explosion occurred, a group called the *sonderkommando* (the men who handled the corpses) staged their own revolt, blowing up one of the four crematoria at Birkenau on Oct. 7, 1944. Many prisoners escaped, but they were caught, shot, and killed.
- The explosives were traced back to Rosa and three other women. After much torture to try to get information from her (unsuccessfully), Rosa at age 23 was hanged with the three other women in front of the camp. Before her death she told a friend, "I know what I did and I know what is coming. It's easier to die when you know that there is a continuation of your actions."
- Her last message was "Hazak v'ematz"—"Be strong, have courage."
- Although the gas chambers and crematoria kept working, Rosa and the others brought hope to the other prisoners that they could stand up and resist the Nazis.

Bibliography of *Rosa Robota and the Auschwitz Uprising*:

"Auschwitz-Birkenau." *The American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise*. 19 May 2003. <http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/Holocaust/auschbirk.html>

This is the Jewish Virtual Library, and it has information on the camps of Auschwitz and Birkenau.

Bulow, Louis. "Gate to Hell: Auschwitz." 15 May 2003. <http://auschwitz.dk/auschwitz.htm>

This site has information on Auschwitz.

Cohen, Judy. "Rosa Robota: Heroine of Auschwitz." 15 May 2003.

<http://www.interlog.com/~mighty/special/rosa.htm>

This article told about Rosa Robota and the others who were involved in the uprising at Auschwitz.

Jacobs, Alan. "The Camps, photos by Alan Jacobs." 15 May 2003. <http://www.remember.org>

This site, a cybrary for the Holocaust, has many photos of Auschwitz.

"Prewar portrait of Ella Gartner." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. 15 May 2003.

<http://www.ushmm.org/outreach/08518.htm>

This is a picture of Ella Gartner that we used for the poster.

"Rosa Robota: Heroine of Auschwitz." 15 May 2003. <http://datasync.com/~davidg59/rosa.html>

This article also told about Rosa Robota and the others who were involved in the uprising at Auschwitz.

"Rosa Robota, the Holy Heroine of Auschwitz." From *Ciechanow Yizkor Book*. Trans. by Rhonda and Ephraim Epstein. 15 May 2003. www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/Ciechanow/Robota.htm

This article focused on Rosa Robota, beginning with her life in her hometown in Poland and going through her deportations, acts of resistance, and death.

Excerpt from a presentation on “The White Rose”

Notes for the presentation:

- The White Rose stands for resistance to tyranny.
- In 1942 German students and teachers wrote seven leaflets going against Hitler.
- Hans and Sophie Scholl (brother and sister), Christoph Probst, Willi Graf, Alexander Schmorell, and Kurt Huber (professor)
- First leaflet, “Leaflets of the White Rose,” talked about Germans who did not do anything but go with Hitler; they criticized the Germans. Summer/fall 1942
- Three more were written; each one made a bigger impact.
- Two more were written in Jan. 1943.
- The last was written in Feb. 1943.
- The last three were known as “Leaflets of the Resistance.”
- They were sent all over Germany through a network of students and medics in Hamburg, Freiburg, Berlin, and Vienna.
- Hans and Alex were the founding members and wrote the first four leaflets.
- Willi wrote the fifth and got supplies for the documents (they were mimeographed).
- Sophie got stamps and took care of financial affairs.
- Kurt Huber wrote the sixth and seventh. (Hans helped with the seventh.)
- In Feb. 1943 Hans, Alex, and Willi painted “Down with Hitler,” “Hitler Mass Murder,” and “Freedom” on buildings.
- Feb. 18, 1943, Hans and Sophie went to the University to distribute more leaflets, but the two were caught by Jakob Schmidt, a janitor.
- They were executed Feb. 22, 1943. Sophie left behind the word “freedom” in her cell, and Hans said, “Hold out in defiance of despotism.”
- Other members were arrested and executed too.

Students also summarized each leaflet.

Bibliography of “*The White Rose*”:

“Hans Scholl.” *Leaflets of the White Rose*. 15 May 2003. <http://www.jlrweb.com/whiterose/hans.html>

This article has information on Hans Scholl.

"Leaflets of the White Rose 1-6." May 13, 2003. <http://www.jlrweb.com/whiterose/leaflets.html>

This Web site has the pamphlets of the White Rose.

Resistance during the Holocaust. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

This booklet had a lot of information on all resistance during the Holocaust, and it has a section on the White Rose.

Scholl, Inge. *The White Rose.* Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, 1983.

This book, written by Hans and Sophie Scholl's sister, tells the whole story of the White Rose, plus it also includes copies of the White Rose pamphlets and the transcripts of their trials.

"Sophie Scholl." 15 May 2003. <http://www.jlrweb.com/whiterose/sophie.html>

This article has information on Sophie Scholl.

"The White Rose." 15 May 2003. <http://www.jlrweb.com/whiterose/>

This Web site has information and pictures on the White Rose.

TEACHER REFLECTION

I have found this project to be very effective in prompting students to reflect upon what people did or did not do during World War II and the Holocaust. The lesson engages students in a manner that makes the learning enjoyable. They focus intently on the other student presentations. They ask questions that always lead to quite a few animated discussions. The compelling nature of this new subject material seems to ignite student interest. Even when I have done this project at the end of the year, the students remain actively involved.

The most common trouble spot for the students seems to be in analyzing the resources they used to decide whether the resisters were successful or not. Students may need some additional guidance from the teacher in those areas.

Using books and Internet resources, all of my students have been able to complete the project successfully. One interesting challenge has been that most students find so much information they have trouble deciding what to include and what to omit.