

Jewish Responses to the Holocaust

Jewish responses to the Holocaust are best described as “choiceless choices.” They were put in positions to make judgments and decisions without there being real, viable alternatives to their situation. Despite this, many decisions were made and responses generally fell into the categories below.

Students often have a difficult time understanding why Jews did not “just leave or just shoot a Nazi.” This critical thinking exercise is designed to help them understand the dilemmas and decisions faced by Jews during the Holocaust and to put that into the context of real people’s lives.

Materials:

White board to record student brainstorming answers

Handouts—available at <http://www.mchekc.org/JewishResponses2.htm>

- ⇒ Bialystock Resistance Debate in *Documents on the Holocaust* by Yitzhak Arad.
- ⇒ Obstacles to Immigration handout
- ⇒ Excerpt from *Anne Frank* by Melissa Muller.
- ⇒ Jewish Responses Profiles
- ⇒ Timeline and Teacher Answer Sheets

Instructions for Classroom Exercise:

1. Pose the question: “How do we make decisions?” on the board. Have each student compile a list of what they consider when making an important decision. After giving students time for this step put some of their ideas up on the board.
2. As a class brainstorm what the word resistance means in the context of the Holocaust. What forms could resistance take?
3. Isolate three possibilities (Emigration, Hiding, Armed Resistance) and ask the students to offer specific ideas about what was necessary, within the context of the Holocaust, to accomplish each one.
4. Divide students into three groups. Assign each group one of the readings above and provide each student with a profiles correspond to their topic. Allow them time to read and re-evaluate the question “What is necessary to immigrate/hide/resist during the Holocaust?”
5. Reconvene the class as a single group and ask each group in turn to report on how their perceptions of “What is necessary to immigrate/hide/resist during the Holocaust?” has changed. Record their responses in the appropriate sections on the board. Conclude this segment by asking **WHEN** emigration/hiding/resisting was possible during the Holocaust?
6. At the conclusion of each topic ask the students responsible for the scenario to stand and read the profiles of the people they received earlier. As the teacher reads a timeline of events ask the student to sit down when they believe their person might have reached the point attempting their form of resistance. Discuss as you go along. Repeat the process for each group.

Special Notes for Teachers:

This is **NOT** a role playing exercise. It asks students to analyze and consider the circumstances of a European Jew and how those circumstances play a role in the decision making process. The students should not become the character or otherwise engage in role playing as per the USHMM guidelines.