**Jewish Decisions to Resist—Teacher Guide**

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| **This document is meant to guide teachers through this lesson—and “answer key” of sorts.**  **The first section—What is Jewish Resistance?—contains content that should be taught in a short lesson to the entire class.**  **The remaining three sections provide teachers with some of the key ideas students should produce as they work in small groups, then share with the whole class for further discussion.** |

**What is Jewish Resistance?**

Ask students what the verb *to resist* means.

resist (v) 1) to exert force in opposition

2) to exert oneself as to counteract or defeat

3) to withstand the force or effect of

*Merriam-Webster Dictionary* online

Ask them to think about what *resistance* means in the context of the Holocaust. Record ideas.

At its most fundamental, resistance was any behavior that counteracted the Nazis’ goal of destroying Jewish life in Europe. Therefore, any actions that preserved hope, restored humanity, and protected LIFE—individual lives, the lives of family members, friends, communities, and the survival of Jewish culture—may be classified as resistance.

The Nazis used intentional strategies to make it difficult for citizens of the countries they occupied and Jews to resist. These are four important **Obstacles to Resistance** (from USHMM):

1) The superior, armed power of the Nazis prevented the effective resistance of the mostly unarmed civilians in the areas Germany controlled.

2) Jewish individuals who had the opportunity, physical stamina, and initiative to escape Nazi imprisonment faced enormous difficulties finding hiding places, food, and support from local residents who were living under the brutal conditions of Nazi occupation themselves. Civilians who helped Jews did so under penalty of death. Particularly in Eastern Europe, most Jews—especially men—could not easily blend into non-Jewish communities because of differences in language, dress, and physical appearance.

3) The speed, secrecy, and deception that the Nazis used to carry out arrests, deportations, and killings prevented resistance.

4) The Nazi tactic of “**collective responsibility**” held entire families and communities—both Jewish and non-Jewish—responsible for individual acts of armed and unarmed resistance.

* There is a scene in the film *Escape from Sobibor* that effectively illustrates collective responsibility. Watch the clip from 1:04 to 1:11:45  
  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQLQ1DrnvO0>
* Example of collective responsibility: the Czech town of Lidice  
  <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/lidice>

Holocaust scholars classify acts of resistance in different ways. For our purposes, we will use two categories. These lists provide examples; they are not all-inclusive.

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| **Unarmed Resistance** | **Armed Resistance** |
| * Working to stay alive. * Smuggling food—often by children; crucial for survival. * Maintaining the will to live. * Helping a friend – lifting someone else’s morale. * Small actions to feel human:   + keeping clean (preserves health)   + maintaining personal appearance   + “tailoring” clothes   + giving a gift   + sharing food * Maintaining belief in God; practicing religion. * Creative expression: singing/ playing music/ writing/ drawing/ painting. * Social gatherings: theater, poetry readings, music performances. * Documenting the experience: diaries/ drawing/ the Oneg Shabbat archive in Warsaw Ghetto. * Keeping something of emotional value—photo, trinket, coin, jewelry. * Teaching children: academic, artistic, or religious. * Organizing or volunteering: soup kitchens/ orphanages/ hospitals. * Participating in youth groups. * Printing & distributing newspapers & leaflets. * Couriers: sharing information between communities, with the underground, and with contacts in the non-Jewish community; smuggling food and other valuables. * Sabotage: purposefully damaging products in slave labor factories in the ghettos & camps. | * Collecting arms—often by making connections with the underground and non-Jewish allies. * Smuggling ingredients or components needed to make weapons. * Printing & distributing newspapers & leaflets—especially to coordinate plans of attack. * Digging bunkers & tunnels. * Making improvised weapons—ex. Molotov cocktails. * Physically fighting back—usually with the knowledge that they would not survive; choosing the terms of their own deaths. |

Sources:

*Resistance during the Holocaust*. Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, (no date). Print.

Examples of Collective Responsibility:

*Escape from Sobibor*. Directed by Jack Gold. TV Movie. 1987.

“Lidice: The Annihilation of a Czech Town.” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. 9 June 2021. Accessed 18 November 2022.

**The Decision to Emigrate**

**Essential Question: What would it have taken to emigrate during the Holocaust?**

**Documents:**

1. USHMM. Holocaust Encyclopedia. “German Jewish Refugees, 1933-1939.”  
   <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/german-jewish-refugees-1933-1939>
2. USHMM. Online Exhibition. Americans and the Holocaust. “The Refugee Crisis.” Video.  
   <https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/storage/539/c24fa256-43e5-11e8-8182-0a8fdb86ecba.mp4>
3. USHMM. Online Exhibition. Americans and the Holocaust. “The Challenges of Escape.”  
   <https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/americans-and-the-holocaust/main/us-immigration>
4. USHMM. Online Exhibition. Americans and the Holocaust. “What did Refugees Need to Obtain a US Visa in the 1930’s?”  
   <https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/americans-and-the-holocaust/what-did-refugees-need-to-obtain-a-us-visa-in-the-1930s>

**Important Ideas:**

1. Money
   1. must have a certain amount to be allowed into the receiving country
   2. must leave a certain amount in Germany
   3. needed to pay bribes
   4. sometimes used to purchase false papers
2. A place to go
3. Required Papers: such as a visa application, birth certificate, tax documents, medical clearance, police certificate, inventory of personal property, and documents from an American sponsor
4. Willingness to Leave
   1. must overcome strong feelings of loyalty to home country; generations of family history; for men—possible service in the military during WWI
   2. leaving career/livelihood/family business
   3. language barriers in receiving country
   4. potential barriers to practicing religion in the receiving country
   5. Who in the immediate and extended family is going? Who is staying?
5. Foresight!

**Notes:** The option to emigrate ends 9/1/39 with the beginning of war. Nazi policy then shifts away from emigration, but not immediately to murder.

**Profiles of Jews Considering Emigration**

**Friedrich:** A 30 year old business owner with a wife and two young children. Your elderly parents rely on you for financial and physical support.

**Alfons:** A retired WWI veteran who was decorated by the German military for your service. You and your wife are very proud of being Germans. Your children are grown and living on their own.

**Hans:** An 18 year old recent graduate of the Gymnasium (high school), you have recently finished an apprenticeship with a tailor and are eager to start work. You are unmarried and your parents are self-sufficient and able-bodied.

**Gretl:** A 23 year old mother of two. Your husband is a successful lawyer with substantial assets. You have an uncle you have never met living in New York City.

**The Decision to Hide**

**Essential Question: What would it have taken to hide during the Holocaust?**

**Documents:**

1. Facing History and Ourselves. Reading 15. “Survival in Hiding.”  
   <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/survival-hiding>
2. Yad Vashem. I Am My Brother’s Keeper. “In Cellars, Pits, and Attics.”  
   <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/righteous/hiding.asp>
3. Read at least two of the following stories of hiding:
4. <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/righteous/seduls.asp>
5. <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/righteous/dyuk.asp>
6. <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/righteous/gerasimchik.asp>
7. <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/righteous/puchalski.asp>
8. <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/righteous/radlinskas.asp>
9. <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/righteous/schouten.asp>

**Important Ideas:**

1. Money
   1. pay the person offering the hiding place
   2. pay bribes
   3. buy food, clothes, other supplies on the black market food
2. A place to go
   1. a safe location – much harder to find in eastern Europe than western Europe
   2. access to water, food, air, sanitation, other necessities
3. Endurance
   1. tolerance for boredom
   2. ability to contend with confined spaces
   3. ability to get along with others in hiding
4. Person/People to help
   1. assuming risk of death—and death of family/community—for harboring Jews
   2. giving up financial rewards for betraying Jews
   3. willing to buy/ smuggle/ share food—for and with Jews—in times of rationing
   4. provide medical care when needed; can’t risk a doctor or dentist
5. Ability to be proactive in rescue
6. Foresight. Do you wait until you are under direct threat or do you act preemptively?

**Notes:** This option occurs in the context of Nazi (or Axis) occupation—the dates differ by country.

**Profiles of Jews Considering Going into Hiding**

**Litzi:** A mother of 3 who fled to Holland with her family after Kristallnacht. Your kids have learned Dutch, but you still don’t speak it well. Your friends are all fellow immigrants.

**Remy:** A French business owner who lost his business after the occupation. Your wife’s family is limitedly intermarried and you know several French Catholics very well.

**Jan** (pronounced Yahn)**:** A Polish father of 5. You have no financial resources.

**Tulga:** A German mother with a large extended family. You have resources enough to provide for your immediate family in hiding, but will not be able to assist your parents, siblings, or nieces and nephews.

**The Decision to Resist with Weapons**

**Essential Question: What would it have taken to mount an armed resistance during the Holocaust?**

**Documents:**

1. USHMM. Holocaust Encyclopedia. “Armed Jewish Resistance: Partisans.”  
   <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/armed-jewish-resistance-partisans>
2. Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation. “Every Day the Impossible: Jewish Women in the Partisans.” Video. (16:26 mins)  
   <https://youtu.be/V9i5Hp2nVb8?si=0oR5IHLgob3nKYxR>   
   **Preview! Some material in this video may not be appropriate for younger students.**
3. Yad Vashem. Documents. “The Discussion on Fighting Aims by the Activists of the Bialystok Members of the Dror Movement, February 27, 1943.”  
   <https://www.yadvashem.org/docs/bialystok-dror-movement-fighting.html>
4. USHMM. Holocaust Encyclopedia. “Bialystok.”  
   <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/bialystok>

**Important Ideas:**

1. Leaders—the ability to rally people across political groups to a common cause
2. Contacts with underground or partisan groups
3. Money
   1. pay bribes
   2. acquire false papers
   3. purchase weapons or the supplies to make them
4. Weapons and the knowledge/skill to use them
5. Tactical planning
6. Willingness to die personally
7. Willingness to risk the lives of other because of collective responsibility
8. Ability to endure torture
9. Belief in the value of what you are doing

Notes: Most armed resistors were young and politically active. Many women worked in resistance movements.

This option generally was exercised at “the end” when the situation in a ghetto or camp was most desperate. Also, after young people had already lost—through deportation/murder—the older and younger members of their families. They had nothing else to lose. People who made the decision to resist with arms were not necessarily expecting to live, but they wanted to decide how and when they would die.

**Profiles of Jews Considering Armed Resistance**

**Natan:** A 20 year old man whose middle-aged mother lives with him in the ghetto. The rest of the family was deported during earlier actions. You have a work permit, your mother does not.

**Ryka:** A mother of 2 teenagers whose husband fled to the Soviet Union before the ghetto was formed. You and your children all have work permits.

**Uri:** A member of the Jewish ghetto police. In exchange for your service, you have been promised an exemption from deportation for you and your immediate family.

**Ira:** A 40 year old man with a work permit. Your wife and daughter were deported during an earlier action, but your young son is still in the ghetto with you.

**Dina:** A young, unmarried woman who was active in the Zionist youth movement before the war and is part of the underground in the ghetto. You have served as a courier for the resistance for the last year. You have no relatives left in the ghetto.