**Lesson Plan: Teaching Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust using Literature Excerpts**

Grade Level: 7-12. Modify as needed by changing the literature excerpts.

Subject/Course: ELA or History

Time Required: 2-3 periods (45 mins); class time could be reduced if students read excerpts for homework.

**Essential Questions:** **In the face of the Nazi government’s goal—first to remove and then to murder—all of Europe’s Jews, how did Jews resist this effort? What effect did actions of resistance have on the individuals who performed or witnessed them?** (NOTE: This lesson will focus on unarmed resistance.)

**Learning Objectives:**

1. Learners will describe what *resistance* means in the context of Jewish resistance to the Nazis.
2. Learners will explain the obstacles Jews and their helpers faced in resisting.
3. Learners will describe the difference between armed and unarmed resistance and provide examples of each.
4. Learners will examine and select examples of unarmed resistance from excerpts of survivor biographies, memoirs, and diaries.
5. Learners will infer—from evidence in the provided texts—the effects of unarmed resistance on those who perform and witness the actions.

**PART ONE  
Using methods of direct instruction, teach the following background information. Pause frequently. Ask students to summarize key points with shoulder partners. Check for understanding. Answer questions.**

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

The historian Raul Hilberg described the transition from religious to secular to racial antisemitism in the following way:

“The missionaries of Christianity had said in effect: You have no right to live among us as Jews. The secular rulers who followed had proclaimed: You have no right to live among us. The German Nazis at last decreed: You have no right to live.”

Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*

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 may be classified as resistance.

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) 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 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>

For the sake of simplicity, forms of resistance may be sorted into two broad categories—armed and unarmed. Acts of unarmed resistance are sometimes further classified as spiritual resistance.

Some Forms of Unarmed Resistance:

* Clandestine political organizations and meetings.
* Underground newspapers and radios.
* Acts of sabotage.
* Underground couriers.
* Smuggling.
* Attempts to inform the outside world.
* Underground schools and libraries.
* Cultural and social activities.
* Clandestine prayer and religious observances.
* Collecting documents, artifacts, and photographs as historical evidence.
* Personal self-expression and preservation of memory (i.e. diaries, artwork, poetry, composing music, making toys, building models).
* Survival itself.

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.

Continue to PART TWO

**Suggestion:** Assign the reading as homework. There should be time to start reading the excerpt toward the end of the first class period.

**PART TWO**

**Using a cooperative learning JIGSAW METHOD, ask students to 1) read excerpts from biographies,**

**memoirs, and diaries of Holocaust survivors, and 2) identify examples of unarmed resistance.**

**The Excerpts: L = Lexile** (See <https://lexile.com/> for more information.)

Klein, Gerda Weissmann. *All But My Life: A Memoir*. Hill and Wang, 1995.   
Excerpt pp. 140 “Then May came…” to 141 (end of last full paragraph) “…help them forget.”

Excerpt pp. 173 “As the hot…” to 177. **(780L)**

Perl, Lila and Marion Blumenthal Lazan. *Four Perfect Pebbles: A Holocaust Story*. Greenwillow Books, 1996.   
Excerpt pp. 70 “By the early…” to 73. **(1080L)**

Toll, Nelly S. *Behind the Secret Window: A Memoir of a Hidden Childhood During World War Two*. Dial Books, 1993.   
Excerpt pp. 93 “*Pani* Krysia…” to 99. **(910L)**

“The Unknown Brother and Sister of Lodz Ghetto.” *Children in the Holocaust and World War II: Their Secret Diaries*, edited by Laurel Holliday, Pocket Books, 1995, pp. 395-401.

Warren, Andrea. *Surviving Hitler: A Boy in the Nazi Death Camps*. Harper Collins, 2001.

Excerpt pp. 87 “All these horrors…” to 91. **(820L)**  
Excerpt pp. 94 “Jack could feel…” to 97 (end of last full paragraph) “…that was why.”

Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. Translated by Marion Wiesel, Hill and Wang, 2006.  
Excerpt pp. 69 “YOM KIPPUR.” to 73 at break. **(570L)**

Note: When available, the Lexile text measure for the book has been given. Please do not choose excerpts or entire books to use for your students based on Lexile alone. For example, *Four Perfect Pebbles* has the highest Lexile of the books listed above. However, its content is most appropriate for younger students. *Night* has the lowest Lexile score, yet its themes are sophisticated and better tackled by older students. Please consider the appropriateness of content and themes for your students when selecting texts.

**Prior Planning:**

1. Choose which and how many of the eight excerpts you will use for your students.
2. Decide whether you will randomly assign excerpts to students or conscientiously assign excerpts to individuals based on reading level and the length of the excerpt.

**Process:**

1. Distribute paper or digital copies of the excerpts to learners.
2. Distribute paper or digital copies of resistance worksheets to learners.
3. Give learners time to read their assigned excerpt and take notes about the examples of resistance they notice within it.
4. Allow learners to meet briefly with homogeneous partners to discuss the excerpt and complete notes with examples missed when working individually.
5. Shuffle the learners into heterogeneous groups. Ask learners to share within the group 1) a summary of the excerpt, and 2) the examples of resistance found in the excerpt. Learners should add these additional examples of resistance to their worksheets.
6. Allow time for written reflection: What effect did these actions of unarmed resistance have on the individuals who performed or witnessed them? After writing, ask students to discuss in small groups or as a whole class.

**Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust Name:**

**Student Note Sheet Course:**

**Resistance Basics Hour: Date:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **resist (v)**  definition |  |
| historian **Raul Hilberg**,  *The Destruction of the European Jew* |  |
| obstacles to resistance  (four) |  |
| two broad categories of resistance |  |
| forms of unarmed resistance |  |

**Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust Name:**

**Student Note Sheet Course:**

**Examples from Literature Excerpts Hour: Date:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Excerpt** | **Example(s) of Unarmed Resistance / Effect on Actors & Witnesses** |
| Klein, Gerda Weissman.  *All But My Life* | pp. 140 “Then May came…” to 141 (end of last full paragraph) “…help them forget.” |
| Klein, Gerda Weissman.  *All But My Life* | pp. 173 “As the hot…” to 177. |
| Perl, Lila and Marion Blumenthal Lazan.  *Four Perfect Pebbles* | pp. 70 “By the early…” to 73. |
| Toll, Nelly S.  *Behind the Secret Window* | pp. 93 “*Pani* Krysia…” to 99. |
| “The Unknown Brother  and Sister of Lodz Ghetto.” | pp. 395-401. |
| Warren, Andrea.  *Surviving Hitler* | pp. 87 “All these horrors…” to 91. |
| Warren, Andrea.  *Surviving Hitler* | pp. 94 “Jack could feel…” to 97 (end of last full paragraph) “…that was why.” |
| Wiesel, Elie.  *Night* | pp. 69 “YOM KIPPUR” to 73 at break. |

**Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust KEY  
Examples from Literature Excerpts**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Excerpt** | **Example(s) of Unarmed Resistance** |
| Klein, Gerda Weissman.  *All But My Life* | pp. 140 “Then May came…” to 141 (end of last full paragraph) “…help them forget.”   * Female prisoners gave birthday presents that they crafted or scavenged from their meager resources: “shoelaces made from factory yarn; three bobby pins made from the wire on which spools were suspended over the loom; a pair of stockings not too badly darned…” * Gerda repaid their kindness by writing a skit and organizing a performance involving the other girls. This became a regular Sunday distraction – “an hour of fun, to help them forget.” |
| Klein, Gerda Weissman.  *All But My Life* | pp. 173 “As the hot…” to 177.   * Using imagination to escape from reality temporarily: which coat to wear, the tastes of an apple, going to an appointment with the dressmaker. * Gerda’s friend happens to bring her a raspberry just after she has suffered a vicious beating. * Gerda imagines her return home and reunion with her family. |
| Perl, Lila and Marion Blumenthal Lazan.  *Four Perfect Pebbles* | pp. 70 “By the early…” to 73.   * April 1945, Marion’s mother—who worked in the kitchen—was making soup in the barracks using some vegetables she smuggled from the kitchen. When a guard arrived for a surprise inspection, the can of boiling soup was accidentally tipped over, burning Marion’s leg. Although she was only 10, Marion knew that if she cried out in pain, they would be caught. She endured the burn in silence. |
| Toll, Nelly S.  *Behind the Secret Window* | pp. 93 “*Pani* Krysia…” to 99.   * Nelly was a young child, hiding with her mother. She drew, painted, wrote stories, and read books to pass the time. Her mother also provided academic lessons. Nelly’s mother knitted with scrap yarn to make Nelly clothes. |
| “The Unknown Brother  and Sister of Lodz Ghetto.” | pp. 395-401.   * Keeping this diary is an act of resistance. It is clear that the primary author was an intelligent, educated, religious young man who cared deeply for his younger sister. We would have no evidence of their lives and their suffering without tis diary. |
| Warren, Andrea.  *Surviving Hitler* | pp. 87 “All these horrors…” to 91.   * Jack and his friend decide to steal butter and jam from a food storeroom they are assigned to clean. * Prisoners stuffed paper in their cheeks and rubbed them to try to survive selections. * Jack’s friend stole biscuits and bones from a dog kennel so that he and Jack could eat them. |
| Warren, Andrea.  *Surviving Hitler* | pp. 94 “Jack could feel…” to 97 (end of last full paragraph) “…that was why.”   * Jack and his friend were assigned to peel potatoes for the guards’ soup. They were able to make some peels extra thick and slip them into their pockets to eat later. * When the cook gets sick, Jack and his friend are assigned to cook for the camp. They were able to steal food to keep themselves and their friends alive. |
| Wiesel, Elie.  *Night* | pp. 70 last line to 73 at break.   * The block leader gives men advice about how to increase their chances of survival before a selection. * Elie’s father cares for him, bringing him bread and a piece of rubber for repairing a shoe. |