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Lesson Plan (45 minutes)

Battalion 101: When ordinary men chose evil

A note for educators: *The video (about 17 minutes) describes mass shootings in detail. This lesson includes a suggested clip to show in class. Preview it first, tell students what to expect, and let them step out if needed.*

Step 1: Lesson Goals

Affective – Students will feel the weight of the choice the men of Battalion 101 faced and connect with the victims of Józefów as real people.

Behavioral – Students will identify the pressures and excuses that led ordinary men to take part in mass murder, and practice recognizing similar pressures in their own lives.

Cognitive –Students will explain how Reserve Police Battalion 101 went from being offered a way out at Józefów to murdering 83,000 Jews, and evaluate who was responsible.

Essential Questions / Big Ideas:

1. What makes some ordinary people take part in terrible acts, and what makes others refuse?
2. If saying no isn't dangerous, but simply uncomfortable, why is it still so hard to do?
3. Who is responsible when a crime is carried out by a group: the people who give the orders, the people who follow them, or both?

1. In July 1942, the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 were given the option of refusing to participate in the murder ofJews, but only about a dozen out of the 500 took it. The Holocaust was carried out not only by fanatics but by ordinary people who chose to cooperate.
2. Hatred, peer pressure, fear of embarrassment, ambition, and excuses can silence a person's conscience, even when refusing carries no real danger.

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3. Remembering victims as real people, and rejecting claims of "I had no choice", are part of how we honor them and help prevent such atrocities from happening again.

Step 2: Learning Plan

Hook: Step out of line (5 minutes)

Without telling students the topic, read this scenario aloud: "Your coach tells the team to do something you think is unfair to a teammate. Then the coach says, 'If anyone doesn't want to, step forward now.' The whole team is watching."

1. Ask students to vote in the following way: Students stand on the left side of the room if they would step forward, the right side if they would stay put, or the middle if they're not sure.
2. Ask a few students on each side: What would make it easy to step forward? What would make it hard?
3. Now ask: Would your answer change if the first person who stepped forward got yelled at in front of everyone?
4. Transition: "Today we're going to learn about 500 men who faced a choice like this, but with other people's lives at stake."

Learning Activity (30 minutes)

Part 1: Watch video with a choice tracker (0:57-8:00). Give each student this simple tracker with three columns: "A moment someone had a choice," "What they chose," and "Why they say they chose it." Students fill it in while watching the video.

Part 2: Pressure map (13 minutes). In groups of three or four, students get a large sheet of paper with a stick figure labeled "A man in Battalion 101" in the center.

1. Around the figure, groups write every pressure that pushed the men to keep shooting, using their trackers: fear of looking weak, the first man getting yelled at, ambition, antisemitism, drinking, SS officers' threats, excuses.
2. Groups circle the three pressures they think were strongest.
3. On the edge of the paper, groups write one thing that could have helped a man step out of line.
4. Each group posts its map. Students do a quick two-minute silent walk to read the other maps.

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Part 3: Spectrum debate (10 minutes). Make a line across the room. One end is "The situation made them do it." The other end is "Each man chose, and each man is responsible."

1. Students stand at the point on the line that represents their view.
2. Call on some students to explain their position using evidence from the video, such as the offer at Józefów, the men who found other tasks, or "I had no choice."
3. Allow students to move if they hear something convincing, and ask movers to explain what changed their mind.

Reflection: (5 minutes)

Students respond in writing to one of the following prompts, then share with a partner if they're comfortable:

- The men of Battalion 101 weren't in danger if they refused to participate, only embarrassed. Why is embarrassment so powerful?
- Some Jews of Józefów asked their killers if they had children. Why do you think the video includes that detail, and how did it make you feel?
- Describe a time you, or someone you know, stepped out of line to do the right thing. What made it possible?

Step 3: Assessment

Checking for Understanding: (5 minutes)

Exit ticket: Students answer on an index card before leaving:

1. Name the choice the men of Battalion 101 had, and what most of them did with it.
2. Name one pressure or excuse that kept them going.
3. In one sentence: Do you agree with the men who later said, "I had no choice"? Why or why not?

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