



Educator's Guide

Jewish Resistance and the Holocaust

By the 1930s, Jewish life had existed in Europe for over 2,000 years. Despite facing expulsion, persecution and antisemitic rhetoric, Jews survived, sometimes through bribery for security or relocation to “safer” parts of Europe.

While this survival tactic served them for centuries, the Nazi rise to power was swift and calculated. Though historians who study this time period can theorize about where and how the tragic death of six million Jews could have occurred, hindsight is 20/20.

What the Jews of Europe endured was beyond their control. The reality is that there was nowhere to go, and escape was nearly impossible. With surrounding countries and borders closed to Jews, the pre-World War II European Jewish community of approximately nine million had only a tiny number of survivors to carry on Jewish tradition and continuity into the next generation.

Special thanks to the **Lustman family** for supporting this project in honor of **Jacob and Anna Lustman**.

[Link to video](#)

Big Ideas

1. There are different ways in which Jews resisted the Nazis (physical, spiritual, educational, cultural)
2. History can be interpreted differently based on different vantage points
3. The Nazis employed bloodless euphemisms to cloak their intentions and used collective punishment to prevent Jews from physically resisting.



Essential Questions

1. To what degree is it accurate to say that Jewish people passively allowed themselves to be killed by the Nazis and their collaborators?
2. Why didn't Jews flee the Nazis before the actual Holocaust began?
3. What are the various ways in which Jews resisted during and after the Holocaust?

Discussion Questions

1. Modern acts of resistance

The film gives three examples of modern acts of resistance post-Holocaust: the establishment of the State of Israel, the rebuilding and relocation of the famed Mir Yeshiva to Brooklyn and Jerusalem and the relocating of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement to America.

- How are these examples of resistance if they took place after the Holocaust was over?
- What do these events teach us about the power of Jewish identity?
- Why is the creation of a Jewish state the biggest possible act of resistance?

2. Different forms of resistance

The Warsaw Ghetto, an armed uprising, is the most well-known example of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. See [this article](#) for a list of examples of resistance.

- How is each form of resistance powerful in its own way?
- Why is it important to focus on different forms of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust in addition to armed resistance?
- Why is it significant that during the Holocaust many Jews maintained their faith, built orphanages, libraries, theaters, synagogues and schools while being targeted by the Nazis?



3. Birth rate in DP camps

Between 1946 and 1948, the [birth rate](#) amongst Jews in the displaced persons camps after the war was the highest on the planet.

- How do you think so many survivors found the strength to go on and start a new life?
- How was each Jewish marriage and child born after the Holocaust an act of resistance in itself?

4. Israeli Air Force flying over Auschwitz to send a message

Watch this [video](#) of Israeli Air Force fighter jets flying over Auschwitz. You can read more about the event [here](#).

- What message do you think the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) was trying to send with this fly-over?
- What is your reaction to seeing the image of Israeli fighter jets soaring above Auschwitz?
- What do you think should be Israel's role when it comes to protecting Jews around the world today?

5. Where was G-d during the Holocaust?

Watch this powerful [video](#) from Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks about this powerful question that many Jews faced during the Holocaust. He explains that in Auschwitz there were Jews who lost their faith, those who kept their faith and there were even those who found their faith. Listen to this [audio clip](#) (from 33:10-33:45) of Holocaust survivor Annie Lustman talking about her experience with faith during the Holocaust (see more in the further learning section).

- Why do you think different Jews responded so differently to the Holocaust when it came to their experience with faith and G-d?
- Rabbi Sacks explains that G-d gives humanity freedom and never takes it back and that this applies to the Nazis' atrocities during the Holocaust as well. Do you agree that G-d gives us freedom and tells us how to use that freedom or do you think that G-d has more of a hands-on approach to humanity's actions?

- What is your response to the question “Where was G-d during the Holocaust”?

Learning Activities

1. Lesson Plan - Click [HERE](#)

2. Family research

Read this incredible Holocaust survival [story](#) from Jewish Unpacked about the Lustman family. After reading the article, ask your students to do their own research on a family member or community member who survived the Holocaust. If they don't know anybody who survived the Holocaust, they can do research on somebody who went through the Holocaust, using one of the sites below. Students should present the story of their survivor and the most powerful lesson they learned from them to their fellow students:

- [Survivor Testimonies - Yad Vashem](#)
- [Survivor Reflections and Testimonies – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#)
- [Survivor Testimonies - Melbourne Holocaust Museum](#)

3. Resistance research

Choose one of the following famous Jews (featured in the video) who resisted the Nazis during the Holocaust:

- Mordechai Anielewicz
- Abba Kovner
- The Bielski brothers

Students should create a slideshow which should showcase the following elements:

- A short bio of their historical figure
- The story of how they resisted during the Holocaust
- Their legacy on the Jewish people today

4. Survivor Testimonials

Ask your students to choose a Holocaust survivor testimonial from the [Yad Vashem YouTube page](#) or from the [USC Shoah Foundation](#). While watching their testimonial, they should respond to the following questions:



- What is one thing you learned about the Holocaust?
- What is one lesson you learned from this survivor?
- What question would you ask this survivor?

Your students can then share a lesson they learned with the larger group in a sharing circle.

5. Faith after the Holocaust

Read the following quote from Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits concerning faith after the Holocaust. Ask your students to reflect on the quote. Students should share their thoughts on the quote, how they interpret it and how it relates to the Holocaust:

"We conclude then: he who demands justice of God must give up man: he who asks for God's love and mercy beyond justice must accept suffering... If man is to be, God himself must respect his freedom of decision. If man is to act on his own responsibility, without being continually overawed by divine supremacy, God must absent himself from history. But man left to his freedom is capable of greatness in both - in creative goodness and destructive evil."

6. KWL chart activity

Students should complete a [K-W-L chart](#) about resistance during the Holocaust by first filling out what they know about resistance and what they want to know. They should then read [this article](#) about different types of resistance and complete the column of what they learned.

Reflection Questions

1. What is your initial reaction upon hearing the accusation that Jews went like sleep to the slaughter during the Holocaust? How does it make you feel? What's your emotional and instinctive response?

2. Quotes about resilience

Read the following quotes below about resilience and give your students the opportunity to reflect upon them. Ask your students to answer any of the following questions:

- Which quote speaks to you most and why?
- Do these quotes relate to the subject of the Holocaust? Why or why not?
- How do these quotes relate to your own life? (choose one)



- i. “Resilience isn’t about immunity to pain. It’s about finding the strength to withstand strain.” - Adam Grant
- ii. “The first step in learning how to develop resilience is developing hope.” - Brené Brown
- iii. “Our painful experiences aren’t a liability—they’re a gift. They give us perspective and meaning, an opportunity to find our unique purpose and our strength.” - Edith Eger

3. Free write exercise

Give your students 5 minutes to “[free write](#)” their response to the following quote from the film: “In a world that wants you dead, every breath is an act of resistance, every whispered prayer, every scribbled poem, every stolen moment of joy is a refusal to give in”.

4. Creative journaling exercise

Put yourself in the shoes of a Holocaust survivor after the end of the war. You’ve lost your family and friends, lost your community and in many ways you’ve lost your connection to your very identity. Give your students the opportunity to write a journal entry as if they were in this situation.

- What is going through your mind?
- What is your plan now?
- How has your experience impacted your identity?

5. What actions can you take in your own life that are a form of resistance against the horrors and impact of the Holocaust?

6. Koolulam video analysis

Watch this [video](#) from Koolulam, an Israeli social-musical initiative aimed at strengthening the fabric of society, centering around mass-singing events. After watching the video, write a short reflection. In the reflection, you can answer any or all of the following questions:

- What thoughts went through your mind while viewing it?
- How did it make you feel?
- What questions did it leave you with?
- What do you think was the message of the organizers?
- How does this video speak to the theme of resistance?



Further Learning

1. Unpacked for Educators
 - [Faces of the Holocaust - The Victim](#)
 - [World War 2 & the Holocaust](#)
 - [Antisemitism Explained](#)
2. Jewish Unpacked, [The Lustmans: They survived despite the odds and became “the richest” people in the world](#)
3. [Holocaust survivor Annie Lustman’s Audio Testimonial](#)
4. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks - [Where was God during the Holocaust](#) (video)
5. Examples of Jewish resistance
 - [Life in the ghetto](#)
 - [Holocaust Survivor Testimonies: Daily Life in the Lodz Ghetto](#)
 - [Daily Life in the Vilna Ghetto: Holocaust Survivor Testimonies](#)
 - [Warsaw Ghetto](#)
 - [“Let The World Read And Know” The Oneg Shabbat Archives | Yad Vashem](#)
 - [The Bielski Brothers partisan camp site](#)
6. Jewish Virtual Library
 - [Mordecai Anielewicz](#)
 - [Abba Kovner](#)
 - [Not Like Sheep to the Slaughter: Jewish Resistance in the Holocaust](#)
 - [Birthrate in DP Camps is the Highest in the World](#)