



Educator's Guide

The Escape Artist of Auschwitz

Amidst the horrors of Auschwitz, Walter Rosenberg, a young Jewish prisoner, accomplished the unthinkable. Escaping the Nazis' most notorious death camp with vital evidence in hand, Rosenberg revealed the atrocities of the camp to the world. From his harrowing journey of beatings and near-death experiences, to his meticulous documentation of Auschwitz, Walter's story is one of unimaginable courage.

Later known as Rudolf Vrba, his detailed report revealed the grim reality of the Holocaust, saving lives and aiding in the pursuit of justice against Nazi war criminals.

Link to video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GedrA02RL2M>

Essential Questions/Big Ideas:

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| 1. What makes someone a hero? | 1. Heroes take risks to help others |
| 2. What is a "healthy" dose of skepticism? | 2. Doubt can lead to inaction in times of need |
| 3. Why is it important to make sure the Holocaust is remembered accurately? | 3. Remembering the Holocaust honors its victims and helps prevent history from repeating itself |



Review Questions

1. After trying to escape from a labor camp in Slovakia, Walter Rosenberg was sent to:
 - a. The home of a Nazi commander
 - b. A concentration camp**
 - c. The Soviet gulag
 - d. A hospital
2. Auschwitz had fenced in areas: the inner area where prisoners slept, and the outer area where they:
 - a. Ate and showered
 - b. Studied
 - c. Did slave labor**
 - d. Exercised
3. The day that Walter and Alfred escaped from Auschwitz coincided with the first night of which Jewish holiday?
 - a. Passover**
 - b. Yom Kippur
 - c. Hanukkah
 - d. Purim
4. The phrase “Hungarian salami” was important to Walter because it meant:
 - a. They would have decent food for dinner
 - b. The Nazis would target Hungarian Jews next



- c. Hungarians had to work harder than anyone else
 - d. The war was almost over
- 5.** What did Rosenberg and Wetzler take with them when they escaped?
- a. A label from a Zyklon B canister
 - b. Data from a central registry
 - c. A change of clothes and bread
 - d. All of the above**
- 6.** After the Slovak Jewish Council heard their report, they:
- a. Immediately warned the Jews not to follow the relocation orders
 - b. Said they would respond in a few days**
 - c. Published the report in three languages
 - d. Put Rosenberg and Wetzler in jail
- 7.** Walter Rosenberg took on a new identity, calling himself _____ Vrba:
- a. Rudolf**
 - b. Hans
 - c. Gerald
 - d. Josef
- 8.** How many Jews were saved by the head of the Hungarian Jewish community?
- a. 1,600**
 - b. 16,000
 - c. 1,600,000



d. 160,000

Discussion Questions

- 1. Saving the world** The Talmud ([Sanhedrin 37a](#)) states that whoever saves a person's life it is as if he has saved a whole world. Walter Rosenberg's daring escape from Auschwitz and his detailed report of the atrocities going on there saved the lives of thousands of Jews.
 - a.** What do you think the Talmud's statement means? In what ways might it apply to Walter Rosenberg?
 - b.** Do you think that someone who has the opportunity to save a life must do so? What happens when that opportunity comes at personal risk, as it did for Walter Rosenberg?
 - c.** What questions might someone ask himself to help determine whether or not to take on a personal risk to help others?
- 2. Healthy dose of skepticism?** Skepticism is [defined](#) as "an attitude of doubt or a disposition to incredulity either in general or toward a particular object". The phrase "healthy dose of skepticism" implies that some doubt or disbelief can be beneficial.

When Walter and Alfred finally managed to get themselves in front of the Slovak Jewish Council, their report was met with disbelief. Even the evidence that they had managed to smuggle out from Auschwitz was not enough to convince them to act immediately to try and save the remaining Slovakian and Hungarian Jews. [You can learn more about Rudolf Kasztner and the Hungarian Council's reaction [here](#).]

- a.** In what ways can skepticism be beneficial? In what ways can it be harmful?



- b.** What role might skepticism have played in the Slovak Jewish Council's delayed response? What other factors may have contributed to its reaction?
 - c.** How can we differentiate between healthy skepticism and damaging skepticism? When faced with concerning information, what can we do to resolve doubt without resorting to panic, on the one hand, or negligence, on the other?
- 3. What makes a hero?** Walter Rosenberg took incredible personal risks when he daringly escaped from Auschwitz and reported his findings to the Jewish councils in Slovakia and Hungary. As a result of his efforts, thousands of lives were saved, and the people of Europe gained vital information that paved the way for war criminals to be brought to justice.
- a.** What makes someone a hero? Are there any characteristics that all heroes have in common? Are there any characteristics that heroes do not possess?
 - b.** Must someone be successful in order to be a hero? Why or why not?
 - c.** Do you think that Walter Rosenberg qualifies as a hero? What were his most heroic qualities?

Learning Activities

- 1.** [Lesson plan](#)
- 2. Interview:** You are a reporter for a newspaper who has been tasked with writing a human interest story about Walter Rosenberg. You have been granted an interview with Rosenberg to gather information about his life, his accomplishments, and his legacy. Make a list of 4-6 interview questions that will help you accomplish your goals. While drafting your questions, consider the following:



- a. What made Walter Rosenberg unique?
- b. What impact did his actions have?
- c. What do you want people to remember about Walter Rosenberg?

3. Artistic exhibit: You have been hired by the Israeli Holocaust museum [Yad Vashem](#) to design an artistic exhibit honoring Walter Rosenberg/Rudolf Vrba. Design a model of your exhibit, and write a paragraph that explains your art and its connection to Rosenberg/Vrba and his efforts to save thousands of Jews during the Holocaust.

4. Eyewitness account: Rosenberg and Wetzler's report (Vrba Wetzler Report) became part of the Auschwitz Protocols, which included two other eyewitness reports. You can read more about this document [here](#) and [here](#). The English translation of these reports is housed in the Records of the War Refugee Board in the FDR Presidential Library.

Write an introduction to the report that describes what it is, who wrote it, and why it was written.

After completing the projects, discuss the following with your classmates: What impact can eyewitness reports have on our understanding of the Holocaust? Why are they important?

5. Give your students our [Kahoot](#) on The Escape Artist of Auschwitz!

Reflection Questions

- 1. Impossible decisions?** As the video describes, Walter Rosenberg's efforts saved the lives of thousands of Jews, and greatly impacted our understanding of the horrors of the Holocaust. However, his efforts came at great personal risk.
 - a. Putting yourself in Rosenberg's shoes, do you think you would have made the same efforts that he made? Why or why not?



- b. What character traits does a person need in order to make such a challenging choice?
 - c. Think of a time where you had to make a difficult decision. What helped you decide what to do?
- 2. Unsung hero:** Despite Walter Rosenberg's heroic actions, his name is not widely known. Think of a time that you made an impact on something or someone. Were your actions recognized? If so, in what ways? How did this recognition, or lack of recognition, make you feel? Do you think it is important to receive credit for one's actions? Why or why not?
- 3. Gratitude:** Imagine that a member of your family was saved as a result of Walter Rosenberg's actions. How might you express your gratitude towards Rosenberg (or his descendants)?
- 4. Remembering the Holocaust:** Despite the vast amount of information that has surfaced about the Holocaust, there are still people who deny that the Holocaust ever happened. What can you and your classmates do to help honor the legacy of Walter Rosenberg and other Holocaust survivors so that the world will always remember what happened?

Further Learning

Unpacked for Educators:

[Rudolf Kastner: Hero or Traitor?](#) (video)

[World War II and the Holocaust](#) (video)

[Where does the Holocaust belong in Israel education?](#) (article)

[The Chinese Diplomat who saved Jews](#) (video)



Vrba-Wetzler Report

[The Vrba-Wetzler Report](#), Jewish Virtual Library (article)

[Vrba-Wetzler Report](#), FDR Library (article)

[Escape From Hell: The True Story of the Auschwitz Protocol](#), Alfred Wetzler (book)

Walter Rosenberg/Rudolf Vrba

[The first Jew to escape Auschwitz helped save 200,000 lives but few know his name](#), Times of Israel (article)

[I Escaped from Auschwitz](#), Rudolf Vrba. (Autobiography)

[I Cannot Forgive](#), Rudolf Vrba, Alan Bestic, J.S. Conway. (Book)