



Resistance and the Holocaust: Introduction

A series of lessons for secondary school students

Welcome



Hello, my name is Andy. I work at UCL and I've put together this series of online lessons for you.

The lessons explore how some Jewish people reacted to the Holocaust. It will help you think about how we understand 'resistance' during the Holocaust.

There are three lessons altogether. Each lesson lasts around 20-30 minutes. You can work through the lessons on your own. You will not necessarily need a teacher to help you.

As you work through the lessons, record your answers to the activities on some plain paper or on a Word document .

Welcome

The three lessons are contained within three PowerPoints. As you move through the slides for each lesson, you will find icons to help show you what you are expected to do. All of the icons, and their meanings, are shown below.



Help for you



Think about



Approximate time activity lasts



Do an activity



Read



Answer questions

Describing 'resistance'



I am sure that you have heard terms like 'resist' and 'resistance' before. But have you ever tried to describe these to somebody else?

The next slide has a number of different words that you could use to describe resistance during the Holocaust. Some words are about what people did. Others are about how we think or feel about these people.

Read through these words. Make a list of all the ones you would use if you were describing resistance during the Holocaust to someone.

You might decide to add some other words of your own to your list.

Describing 'resistance'



3-5min



Describing 'resistance'



We often use words assuming that people understand those words in the same way that we do. But this isn't always the case. That means we need to be clear about what we are talking about.

Using the words you have chosen, **write a few sentences describing what 'resistance' during the Holocaust means to you.**

You might want to include the sorts of things you think people did, and how you feel about these actions.

If you need some help, use or adapt the following sentence starters:

'I think resistance during the Holocaust refers to _____.

'I believe the people who did things like _____ were _____. I think this because _____'

Thinking about context



It is easy for us to look at the past and make judgements about what people should or should not have done. We are able to do this, because we have the benefit of hindsight: we know what would eventually happen.

But, like us, people in the past could not know what would happen in the future.

Just as we do today, people in the past made decisions based on their particular circumstances. Like us, they had things in their lives that were important to them, they had opinions and beliefs, and they had responsibilities.

All of these factors influenced the decisions people made.



By learning more about people in the past we get a sense of the dilemmas they faced. A good place to start is to think some more about just who we are talking about – typically, who were the people that we are looking to have resisted?

**Look at the photograph on the next slide.
Then answer the questions that follow.**

Who are we talking about?



Who are we talking about?



5min+

Here's a Jewish family with their friends. They are in Poland, in the 1930s, before the Second World War. We do not know what happened to them.

- How would you describe these people?
- What do you think was important to them?
- Do you think everyone in this image *wanted* to 'resist'?
- Would some have found it easier to resist than others?
- If they wanted to 'fight back', what challenges do you think these people might have faced?



'Ordinary' people



How did you answer those questions?

I think it is a great photograph to help us better appreciate the decisions people made and the choices they faced. This is because it makes us realise some important things.

1. The people in this photograph appear to be very 'ordinary'. They don't look like highly trained soldiers. Would they know how or be able to fight?
2. The men, women, and children are all sons and daughters of someone. They might be mums and dads, brothers and sisters. It is possible they depend on someone, or someone depends on them. What might happen to their loved ones if they 'resisted'?
3. When this photo was taken, some Jewish people in Poland experienced antisemitism. But they were not living in fear of their lives. If someone does not feel in real danger, will they think there's a need to 'resist'?



The ordinary and the extraordinary



The photograph of the Jewish family and friends reminds us that during the Holocaust, millions of ordinary people found themselves in very extraordinary situations. This raises a question: what is fair and reasonable to expect of these people?



Hundreds of thousands of people were forced into ghettos. These were areas of a village, town or city where Jewish people lived separately from non-Jews. Ghettos were meant to be temporary, whilst the authorities decided what would happen in the long-term. Conditions in the ghettos were usually awful. There was overcrowding, a lack of food and medical supplies, and very poor public hygiene. Many people died of disease or starvation.

Other extraordinary events took place all across Europe. In the East, from the summer of 1941, small groups of Nazis, members of the German army and local collaborators began to murder Jewish people. In towns and villages, Jews would be rounded up, stripped of their belongings, marched to nearby woods or clearings and shot into mass graves.

In the West, from the spring of 1942, Jewish people began to be deported: placed on trains and transported to ghettos and death camps. Travelling for days on end without food or water, they often had little idea where they were going or what would happen to them.

Reflecting on resistance



5min+



We've come to the end of this first lesson, and we have covered a lot of ground. We've thought about how we might describe resistance, considered some of the factors that effected the decisions people made and choices they took, and we've started to think about the extraordinary situations that people found themselves in.

Before we finish, I'd like you to do two things. **Write your responses to the following questions on your paper or Word document:**

1. Revisit your description of resistance. Do you want to change this in any way, having done the activities in this lesson? You don't have to, but you can if you wish.
2. How is the word 'resistance' helpful to us?
3. In what ways – if at all – might the word 'resistance' be unhelpful? Explain your answer as much as you can.

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