



Resistance and the Holocaust: What is resistance?

A series of lessons for secondary school students

Welcome



Hi there. Welcome back. In our previous lesson we:

- Deepened our knowledge of how some Jewish people responded to the Holocaust
- Learnt more about events in the Warsaw Ghetto and Auschwitz-Birkenau
- Encountered evidence of people 'fighting back'
- Starting thinking about whether 'fighting back' is a helpful way of understanding resistance

In this final lesson, we are going to examine other ways Jewish men, women and children responded to the Holocaust. In the process, we are going to think more about why these people did what they did, whether their actions made a difference, and how we can best describe and talk about these behaviours.

Welcome

As you move through the slides for this 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

Exploring responses



15min+

In the last lesson you started working with a table that looks like the one below. The focus of this lesson is to complete this table.



NAME	WHAT DID THEY DO?	WHAT WERE THEY TRYING TO ACHIEVE?	DID IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Over the next few slides you will find the stories of a number of people. **Read through all of these stories carefully. Then, choose three stories that you think are important or interesting. Add notes about these people to your table.**

Jack Kagan

Jack was 14 years old when in September 1943 he found himself in a labour camp in Nowogrodek, Poland. Jack decided to join a group of Jews who planned to escape from the camp through a dug-out tunnel and meet up with local resistance fighters. On the day of the escape Jack was one of 200 who fled the camp, but as he crossed a frozen river the ice broke and his boots were drenched with frozen water. Although he was eventually able to get out, he missed his rendezvous with the resistance fighters.

Jack came across a small farm house, but the lady living there was too frightened to give him shelter. With options running out Jack made his way back Nowogrodek and sneaked into the camp on a horse-drawn cart. There he found that his toes had become black with frost bite, so a dentist amputated his toes with a scalpel.

As Jack lay recovering, those remaining in the camp began digging a new tunnel through which to escape. Once the tunnel was completed Jack was one of the last to get out before the tunnel was discovered. This time he did manage to meet with the resistance fighters. Jack survived the war as one of the 30,000 Jews who fought the Nazis in the forests of Eastern Europe.



Jack and a fellow fighter after the war





Georges Livichitz

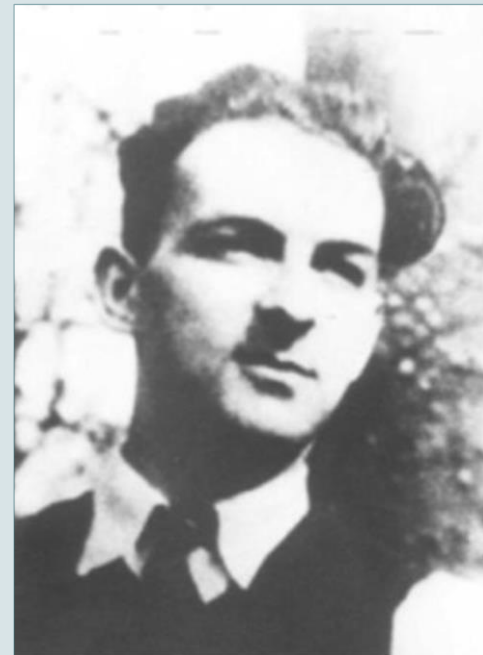
Georges was a young doctor who was a member of a resistance group working in occupied Belgium. Jews were particularly active in the Belgian resistance.

In the spring of 1943 Georges' group decided to try and stop a train of deportees heading for Auschwitz. There were 1,600 people on board. On the evening of 19 April 1943, Georges and two of his comrades forced the train to stop by standing on the tracks and waving a red lantern. When the train came to a halt, Georges threatened the driver with a pistol whilst his colleagues opened the doors to the wagons. The German guards opened fire on the resisters and 17 prisoners as they escaped, before the train continued its journey. By the end of the night 231 Jews had managed to escape from the train.

After being captured and escaping, Georges was arrested in the summer of 1943. He was executed in February 1944.

“He was the leader of a band of terrorists and participated in the attack of 19 April 1943 against the Jewish deportation train. The accused admits that after his flight he shot at the soldiers who pursued him. He was arrested for the first time on 14 May 1943 but succeeded in seizing the revolver of a guard in the cellar of a local police office. He grievously wounded the guard and managed to escape. On his subsequent arrest he was sent to Breedonck [a concentration camp in Belgium].”

Report of Georges' trial, 2 June 1943





Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira

Kalonymus was known as someone staunchly committed to young people and their education. He came from a lineage of significant religious figures and while his intellect brought him rapid academic achievements, his skill with people also allowed him to emerge as a religious leader.

Kalonymus had strong religious beliefs. This, together with his passion for learning, led him to establish a prestigious yeshivot – religious school – which became the largest in inter-war Warsaw. For Kalonymus, students had to be active in their own learning and have a vision of their “potential greatness”.

The Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939 brought tragedy to the Rabbi as his wife, son and close family were all killed in a bombing raid.

Kalonymus was given opportunities to flee Warsaw, but he instead chose to stay and was interned in the ghetto. There, he worked tirelessly to maintain Jewish cultural life and act as a spiritual leader. He upheld various social customs, created a secret synagogue, and delivered sermons to a small congregation.

In early January 1943 Kalonymus buried his writings. A couple of months later he was deported from the ghetto. He passed through various camps before being murdered in November 1943.



“Who knows how long this will go on? Who knows if we’ll be able to endure it...The person is overwhelmed with terror, the body is weakened, one’s resolve flags. Therefore the most basic task is to strengthen one’s faith, to banish probing questions and thoughts, trusting in God that He will be good to us, saving us and delivering us.”



Zdenka Fantlova



“This ring was for me a symbol of love and hope. And I was determined to survive so we could meet again and live together forever.”

Zdenka was born in Czechoslovakia in 1922. On 16th January 1942, Zdenka was forced to say goodbye to her boyfriend Arno. He was being deported to an unknown destination. Then four days later Zdenka and her remaining family were sent to Theresienstadt, a transit camp. Remarkably, she discovered Arno there, who had arrived a few days earlier.

The couple lived in separate barracks so it was both difficult and dangerous for them to see each other. In June, Arno was told he was being taken to ‘the East’. In their final meeting, Arno gave Zdenka a ring made of tin, which he said was for their engagement.

The ring was engraved with the words: “Arno. 13.6.1942”. For the rest of the war the ring became very important to Zdenka. In October 1944 she was deported from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where on arrival her transport was told to undress and remove all jewellery. Zdenka decided to hide the ring by slipping it under her tongue. Fortunately when her turn came for further inspection, the SS guard hurried her along.

Zdenka was eventually liberated in April 1945 at Bergen-Belsen. Although Arno did not survive, his tin ring did.



Sonderkommando Photographs

In 1944, the killing at Auschwitz-Birkenau reached its peak. Despite working at their full capacity, the gas chambers and crematoria struggled to keep up with numbers of Jews being murdered. With the ovens unable to burn bodies quick enough, open pits were dug so that the dead could be “disposed” of more quickly.

Around the autumn of 1944 some members of the *Sonderkommando* – Jewish prisoners working in the gas chambers and crematoria – came to acquire a camera. Whilst we don’t know precisely when or how, what we do know is that this camera was then used by one or two of the *Sonderkommando* to take secret pictures. The film was then smuggled out of the camp, developed, and eventually four photographs reached the Polish underground resistance in Krakow. They were accompanied by a note, the text of which is provided below:

Urgent. Send two iron reels of film (2 1/2 x 3 1/2 in.) as soon as possible. It is possible to take pictures. We send you photographs from Birkenau – people who have been gassed. The photograph shows a heap of bodies piled outdoors. Bodies were burned outdoors when the crematorium could not keep pace with the number of bodies to be burned. In the foreground are bodies ready to be thrown on the heap. Another photograph shows one of the places in the forest where people were told to undress, allegedly for a bath, but in fact before being driven to the gas chambers. Send a reel as soon as possible



State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau

Reflection



Your table is now a rich record of how some Jewish people responded to the Holocaust. You have noted what these people did, considered the purpose of their actions, and thought about whether these people made a difference.

We need to remember that all of the people you have encountered were 'ordinary' people, who found themselves in extraordinary situations. We also need to be cautious in passing judgements about those people who did not do some of these remarkable things.

Some people may have wanted to 'resist' but did not know how; some may have been scared of the repercussions; some might have been too sick to 'fight back'; and some were deceived by the lies and the promises of their murderers. Everyone had their reasons. And if we can say that – technically – most people had a choice about what to do, the nature of these choices often meant there was really no choice at all.

What is resistance?



10min



Well, we've reached the end of our series of lessons. Well done!!

Thank you for your time – I hope you have enjoyed learning more about this subject. Before you go, **answer the questions below on some paper or in your Word document.**

Looking over the table you have completed in this lesson:

1. What, if anything, do these responses have in common?
2. Are there differences between these responses? If so, what are these?
3. Did people always achieve what they were trying to do? Does it matter if they didn't?
4. Do you think all of these responses should be described as 'resistance?' Are there other words we could, or should, use? Explain your thinking
5. What have you learnt over the last 3 lessons?

UCL CENTRE FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATION



Resistance and the Holocaust: What is resistance?



Centre for
Holocaust Education

University College London, Gower Street, London, WC1H 0AL

tel: +44(0)20 7612 6437 fax: +44(0)20 7612 6126 email: holocaust@ucl.ac.uk web: ucl.ac.uk/holocaust-education

The UCL Centre for Holocaust Education is jointly funded by Pears Foundation and the Department for Education