

Overview for teachers

Resistance and the Holocaust

A series of lessons for Key Stage 3 students

Rationale:

This resource is designed for self-study as part of a KS3 History. It is based on the free CPD *Telling the story of 'resistance'* Twilight course, provided by the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education. Teachers familiar with that course will recognise certain similarities, but they will also discover differences. In most cases, these differences reflect how the original material and activities have been calibrated for self-guided study.

Resistance and the Holocaust helps students to deepen their knowledge and understanding of how some Jewish people responded to events around them. It encourages students to explore their own existing understandings of resistance as a term and a concept; helps them consider how our expectations of people during the Holocaust measure against the realities they faced; presents compelling evidence of remarkable stories of people – quite literally – ‘fighting back’ in the most extreme circumstances; and guides them towards developing a more rounded approach to thinking about ‘resistance’ by providing them with insights into a number of human stories. The resource is not prescriptive in telling students that their existing ideas of resistance are wrong or misguided; instead, the material asks them to explore their thinking in relation to the historical record before they decide whether they wish to shift their understandings.

The need for students to extend what they know and understand about Jewish resistance during the Holocaust is aligned to trying to improve students’ awareness of Jewish agency across this period. It is also an exercise in enriching students’ contextual understanding – especially in terms of thinking more deeply about the interplay between perpetrator and victim actions. This is especially salient for students’ comprehension of how ‘ordinary’ people reacted and responded to the extraordinary circumstances they found themselves in. If this resource helps students to be more informed about how some Jewish people reacted and responded in ‘positive’ ways, this is in no way to condemn or denigrate those who did not decide to ‘resist’. On the contrary, an underlying message of this resource is that we need to exercise great caution in passing judgement on the millions who found themselves in impossible situations, faced with what has been described as ‘choiceless choices’.

For students to get the most out of these lessons, a decent level of historical knowledge of the Holocaust is required. Accordingly, it would not be appropriate for this material to appear at the beginning of a Scheme of Work; instead, it would be better served appearing after students have secure substantive knowledge and chronological understanding.

Resource structure:

- This resource consists of three short 'lessons': Introduction, 'Fighting back' and What is resistance?
- The material for each lesson is presented on PowerPoint slides.
- It is anticipated that each lesson would be completed in 20-30 minutes.
- The lessons are intended to be worked through sequentially: this is so that students can progress in their learning from initially formulating a conception of 'resistance' towards thinking about contextual factors and then exploring individual case studies. That being said, teachers may decide to deliver one or two of these lessons as stand-alone exercises. Lesson 1, for instance, could be used on its own to examine the idea of resistance and highlight the need for thinking about context; Lessons 2 and 3 could be paired together as they centre more upon examples of what people did. The ideal, however, is that all three are used together.
- Within the lessons, students are asked to undertake particular tasks and/or answer questions. These can be completed on paper or on a Word document, which could then be submitted to the teacher.
- For further ease of use, students could be encouraged – or instructed – to print off certain elements of each lesson. Lesson 1, for example asks students to study a photograph; Lesson 2 asks students to begin using a table to record their ideas; and both Lesson 2 and Lesson 3 contain case studies which for some students may be more accessible if printed off for close reading or annotation.
- There is an Welcome slide at the beginning of each lesson, which students need to read first. This reminds students of their prior learning and outlines the direction that the lesson will take.
- Most slides have icons to help students identify what it is they are expected to 'do.' These are explained for them in the introduction.
- The activities and questions within the Lessons are all low-risk and low-stakes, having been designed for the teacher (and students) to formatively assess learning. There are no right or wrong answers: students should therefore be encouraged to provide detail and explanation where possible to enable teachers to evaluate deeper shifts in thinking and understanding.
- There are various opportunities for teachers to link this resource to other materials produced by the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education. This includes: 'What was the Holocaust? An interactive timeline', 'Being Human?', 'Jewish life in Warsaw before the Holocaust', 'The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: Exploring history, meaning and significance', and 'Heroic actions of the Holocaust'.