



LESSON PLAN: Spiritual and Cultural Resistance

- 1** Begin this lesson by writing the word “resistance” on the board. Have students brainstorm the meaning of the word and suggest situations when an individual or group of people might decide that resistance is appropriate or necessary. Record students’ responses on the board or on chart paper.
- 2** Introduce students to **Roman Kent (bio)** and show his clip of testimony. Discuss the following questions:
 - What are the specific examples of resistance Roman Kent shares in his testimony?
 - In his testimony, Roman says, “sometimes the easiest resistance is with a gun and a bullet.” What do you think he means by this statement? Do you agree with him? Explain your thinking.
 - Roman wants people to understand that contrary to what some may think, Jews did resist the Nazis during the Holocaust in a variety of ways. Why do you think he feels it is important for people to understand this?
- 3** Ask students to think about the term “resistance” in the context of the Holocaust. Have them consider and respond to the question, “What were Jews resisting during the Holocaust?”
- 4** Explain to students that there were many examples of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust even though the risks of opposing the Nazi regime were grave². Using the board or chart paper, record students’ thoughts on possible reasons why most people could not resist (e.g., hunger, sickness, isolation, lack of weapons, care for children, parents, or other family members).
- 5** In addition to the term “resistance,” have students think about the term “survival.” Take a few minutes to discuss how these terms are similar and how they are different. Ask for volunteers to look the words up in dictionaries and compare the dictionary definitions.

¹ While an immediate response to this question might be the Nazis, students should also understand that Jews were resisting things like isolation, dehumanization, starvation, and the “Final Solution”—death.

² Additional information about life in the ghettos and camps is available in The Ghettos and The “Final Solution” units.

6 On the board or on chart paper, write the heading, “Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust” and below write the subheadings “Cultural/Spiritual Resistance³” and “Active/Armed Resistance⁴.” While providing students with the definitions and examples from the corresponding **Note**, have a volunteer(s) write key ideas for each form of resistance under the appropriate heading.

7 Explain that spiritual resistance can often be seen as an attempt to maintain one’s previous way of life and his or her unique identity. The terrible reality in which Jews lived was expressed by the teacher, Chaim Kaplan who lived in the Warsaw ghetto: “Everything is forbidden to us, but we do everything.” Have students consider the meaning of this statement.

8 After introducing students to **Helen Fagin (bio)** and **Ruth Brand (bio)**, show their clips of testimony and discuss the following questions:

- How would you characterize the activities Helen Fagin initiated in the ghetto?
- What purpose does the *Gone with the Wind* story serve for the students in Helen’s “clandestine school”?
- What reason does Ruth Brand give for fasting on Yom Kippur, despite the danger of doing so?
- How were Ruth and the other girls punished for this act of resistance?
- What does the word “brave” mean to you? Based on your definition, would you describe Helen and Ruth as brave?

³ Cultural/spiritual resistance during the Holocaust was acts of opposition that originated or found their expression in culture, traditions, and the human spirit to undermine Nazi power and inspire hope among the persecuted Jews. For most Jews, acts of cultural and spiritual resistance were the only possible means to oppose Nazi tyranny. Examples of cultural resistance included creating schools in the ghettos; maintaining religious customs; writing poems and songs or performing concerts or plays; drawing, painting, or secretly photographing observed events; and keeping records of ghetto or camp life and hiding them in the hope that they would be discovered after the war. Acts of cultural/spiritual resistance could be intentional and conscious, or only understood to have been resistance in retrospect.

⁴ Active/armed resistance during the Holocaust was acts of opposition, defiance, or the sabotage of Nazi plans using weapons or including typical battles and attacks. Examples of armed resistance are the bombing of a bunker, camp, office, or train, or an uprising or revolt using weapons and arms. Unarmed active resistance could include many things, such as preparing bunkers, forging and using false papers, smuggling food and other items, etc. It should be understood that in a sense, cultural/spiritual resistance was active since it too involved action. Sometimes Jews simply refused to cooperate or follow a command, and this could be seen as classic passive resistance.

9 Distribute the **Cultural and Spiritual Resistance** handout. Have students read the excerpts that were compiled from a variety of documents and then divide the class into small groups. Instruct each group to use the excerpts and clips of visual history testimony that they watched to discuss the following questions:

- Which of the excerpts on the handout would you identify as examples of resistance and why?
- How does the information in the excerpts illustrate the need Jews felt to maintain the traditions that had been in place prior to the war? Provide specific examples from the text.
- What role do traditions, customs, and culture play in people's lives?
- Why do you think it was so important for Jews to remain connected to the traditions, customs, and culture that were part of their lives even when this connection placed them in immediate jeopardy?
- Jews in the ghettos tried to maintain their customs from before the war, but at the same time were confronted with a totally different reality. How are these two themes reflected in the excerpts and testimony clips?
- What were the dilemmas in maintaining traditions and customs during the Holocaust?

10 End this lesson with a whole-group discussion whereby students respond to the following question: How, if at all, has your understanding of resistance, especially as it pertains to the Holocaust, changed over the course of this lesson?

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 60-90 MINUTES